

Ayutthaya

by John Walsh

"There is no city in the East where is seen more different nations than in the capital city of Siam, and where so many different tongues are spoken. It is two leagues round, and half a league broad, well peopled, although so much under water that it resembles rather an island. There are none but the Moors, Chinese, the French and the English who dwell in the town, all the other nations being lodged around about it in camps."

--de Chaumont and de Choisy (1685)

Introduction

Ayutthaya (sometimes spelled Ayudhya) is one of the great cities in the history of Southeast Asia. Supplanting Sukothai as the capital of Siam, it acted as a center of trade and diplomacy in the kingdom that saw contingents of Arabs, Indians, Japanese, Chinese, Portuguese, and Dutch traders and representatives locked in struggles with each other for preference -- and to avoid giving offense to the king; many an unfortunate merchant who said or did the wrong thing ended up in a large pot, being slowly boiled alive!

At the center of the court was the king, together with his advisors and mandarins, attended to by numerous slaves, servants, wives, little wives, priests, and soldiers. He would mount an elephant for state occasions and lead processions of gorgeous finery and pomp. Religious ceremonies might require the whole court to process to the Mekong River for ritual bathing. At other times, the king might like to travel the Chao Phraya River by boat or organize an elephant hunting expedition. Whatever he decided to do, he could be sure that a large group of merchants and their representatives would be willing him to listen to their petitions and grant their requests.

History

The Tai people only started to emigrate to Thailand (then called Siam) about one thousand years ago, mostly from southern China. Initially, they came as mercenary soldiers for the powerful Nanchao kingdom or as slaves, with only a few able to move voluntarily to seek freedom. However, by about the 13th century there were enough Tais in Thailand for them to start to establish large-scale cities and city-states. Earlier cities and states in the region were either built by earlier inhabitants, such as the Haripunjaya kingdom of the Mons, or else were small-scale cities such as Yonok that devoted most of their energies to survival.

By the 13th century, important Tai centers such as Sukothai and Lan Na (now known as Chiang Mai) had emerged, often based on existing towns that had been conquered. Sukothai was the creation of the famous warrior king Ramkhamhaeng and his sons and grandsons could not maintain their independence from Ayutthaya, who conquered it in 1279. Ayutthaya then became the capital of southern and central Siam. To the north, Lan Na remained a powerful and independent Tai state and, in the east, Lan Sang (occupying what is now Laos) was another important Tai state. Generally, there were few heavily occupied areas between major cities and so it was very difficult to establish a permanent, large territory because there were not enough people to resist an invading army of even a small size and not enough people to provide food for a military outpost. Consequently, the purpose of war was to try to capture a rival city and enslave its people to build up the strength and size of a state. Most of the time, to avoid war where possible, one city would voluntarily recognize the superiority of another city and send tribute to it. This meant that the smaller city would be technically part of the territory of the larger one but in practice meant that they faced no real compromise to their independence.

Ayutthaya was the capital of Siam until the 18th century when, as a result of being sacked by the Burmese, leadership passed to the City of Angels -- Krungthep, known in English as [Bangkok](#). It continues to be an important historical area but much of its commercial importance has disappeared as a result of changing climatic and environmental conditions that made it less feasible to ship goods so far up the Chao Phraya River.

Religion and Beliefs

The King and the majority of the Thai people of Ayutthaya were devout Buddhists. That meant they respected the three treasures of the Lord Buddha, His teachings, and the monkhood that lived in poverty. Some Buddhists take oaths to abstain from alcohol, meat, or sexual activities for a certain length of time or permanently. However, such oaths are voluntary, as is the stricture not to kill any living creatures. Most men will enter the monkhood for some period of time during their lives, from three weeks as a minimum until a permanent or at least open-ended entry. Monks must certainly abstain from alcohol and sexual activity and must eat only before noon. Most of their time is spent meditating and performing religious ceremonies. Early every morning, they would take their bowls and set forth in small rowing boats so that people could make merit by donating food or other items.

However, the belief in Buddhism did not rule out simultaneous acceptance of other, traditional beliefs. Different people had different beliefs, depending on which tribe or area they came from but most traditional beliefs were based on spirit worship. It was common, for example, to believe that every aspect of nature possessed its own protective spirit: rivers, trees, houses, and so on. These should periodically be propitiated with offerings of incense and chants, as well as the sacrifice of animals (pigs and chickens most commonly) and various types of dance. Spirits of larger areas such as whole forests should also receive offerings before cutting down any of the trees, while important activities such as rice growing also had gods or goddesses of their own. Since people had so many different types of belief and so many different spirits were possible, the GM is quite justified in improvising new rituals or ceremonies as needed. People not directly participating in a ceremony would mostly just ignore it and, since there were so many going on every day, then it would be a common occurrence to witness one.

The belief in spirits also extended to ghosts and demons. Restless spirits were similar to Chinese style ghosts in that they returned from the dead to harm the living in various ways and so should be offered food or other items to persuade them to stay away. If the presence of ghosts was suspected, monks might lead an exorcism ritual in which many people would try to flush out the ghosts with bamboo staves or other weapons and then seek to drive them off or kill them.

The Kings of Ayutthaya, as well as most of the people for most of the time, were quite tolerant of other religions, insofar as they understood them. Christians and Muslims were allowed to worship freely in their own quarters. Indeed, it was quite possible to convert some of the local people, although there would be at least a possibility that such people would just be adding another god to a list of beings to whom to show reverence and have little interest in adhering to a strict monotheistic creed.

Social Structure

Ayutthayan society was quite strictly ordered accorded to rank and social class. While it was not impossible to move up in rank, it was unusual or difficult, and the dangers of falling downwards were at least as great. At the top of society was the King, followed by his immediate male relatives. Since Kings could maintain not just an official queen but numerous little wives and concubines, and because of the dangers of disease and natural hazards that made early death a common phenomenon, complex protocols were established to determine the potential order of succession. Added to this complexity was the quite common possibility that the King might abdicate to become a monk or recluse and the numerous plots surrounding unfaithful queens, conspiratorial uncles, and rebellious second sons and the like, and there were frequently occasions of confusion and civil war.

Below the King would be his advisors and relatives; these two groups overlapped, often to a high degree. The King would appoint individuals to official positions in a governmental bureaucracy that grew more complex over time. For example, the Ministry of Trade was eventually divided between Trade with India and Trade with China, and then with Trade with Europe as well. Just as in the case with the Angkor kingdom of the Khmers (based in what is now Cambodia), women could occupy some of these high positions, although they would also have been of high social status to be eligible. It was also the case that some positions were reserved -- or at least regularly occupied -- by foreigners. Indeed, until the current day there are many examples of Siamese officials and Kings taking foreigners

from a range of countries as special advisors with some special wisdom or experience to offer -- or who just happened to be in the right place at the right time.

Below the high officials would be the lesser officials and recognized virtuous servants of the king, such as professional soldiers, monks, and Brahmans (Hindu priests). Most of the armed forces consisted of ordinary people who were obliged to provide unpaid service to the state every year (called *corvée* labor). They would be quite lightly armed and armored, and would probably need to provide at least equipment themselves. A smaller number of people would have enough wealth to become full-time soldiers. Some might have one or more of the small horses that the Tais brought with them from southern China to Thailand. Others might own elephants or else be paid elephant-handlers. While full-scale military campaigns did not happen often enough to keep soldiers permanently occupied, smaller scale raids on outlying villages and towns or bands of bandits were more common. These, of course, were more frequent in border areas or where different peoples lived quite close together. During raids, small and valuable items might be carried away and animals also driven off, although the main motivation would again be to try to secure slaves for the home state's labor force.

The comparative lack of people -- and therefore of the labor pool in general -- was an important motivating source inspiring kings, princes and nobles throughout the region. Slavery could occur in various styles and with various levels of service required. It was possible, for example, for a person to sell himself or his children into service to someone else in exchange for an up-front payment of cash or goods. Depending on the nature of the agreement, the enslaved person might or might not be able to redeem himself after a certain number of years. This form of voluntary enslavement was considered perfectly acceptable and an important right of people to dispose of themselves or their children and there was great popular resentment at the attempt to outlaw it in the early twentieth century.

Between the slaves and the lowest levels of officials were artisans, farmers and other working people. This was the largest group of people in Ayutthayan times and was known as the *phrai* -- the masters or upper classes were the *nai*. It included silk-weavers and silkworm tenders, farmers and fishermen, dancers and artisans. *Phrai* were subject to *corvée* labor requirements that meant they had to spend six months of the year working on public projects without pay. They were divided into the *phrai som* who were assigned to royal officials and mandarins, and *phrai luang* who served the king directly who would in turn assign them to individual projects or activities.

There were also a sizeable number of prostitutes. Prostitution was a widely recognized activity in Siam (and, indeed throughout Southeast Asia), partly stimulated by the *corvée* labor system that took men away from their families for often extended periods of time. Those engaged in providing services were mostly tolerated, but could of course it could be the subject of resentment, jealousy, or worse if it were felt that they had contributed to marital or familial problems.

Other people in Ayutthaya are foreigners from many different lands. The status of foreigners depends not just on their wealth and ability to adapt to Ayutthayan society but also to their country of origin. People from a known and powerful state such as China can be sure to receive some respect, although this is often compromised when bands of Haws (Chinese migrants) are involved with bandit activities in Siam. Europeans and Arabs would also be accorded respect, largely because they come from so far away. Those from closer to Siam, especially if they are considered to be a less civilized people from within the vicinity of Siam, would receive much more suspicion, even if the politeness of Siamese culture commonly prevented any seriously disrespectful acts being shown towards them.

For a fantasy campaign, anyone looking unfamiliarly inhuman will be treated with considerable fear and suspicion as a spirit from the forest or a ghost. Considering the few clothes that people wore, they would be few opportunities to disguise someone's true appearance.

When Europeans reached Southeast Asia in this period, they left records of their impressions, frequently noting how healthy the local people were; this was as a result, partly, of the abundance of food and of knowledge of useful healing methods based on local herbs and Chinese remedies. Regular bathing in clean water was also helpful. The local people were as tall as the Europeans of the era were. However, disease did strike; leprosy was a common problem and a major epidemic of small pox struck the kingdom in 1454 and later had devastating consequences in Indonesia. A plague of giant rats caused famine throughout lower Burma in 1596 and, despite the general abundance of food,

famine was not unknown on the event of flooding, unseasonable drought, or disease.

Since few Europeans spoke Siamese, translators from among the local population were usually hired to help with negotiations (these were often known to Europeans as mestizos). When foreign traders took up residence for an extended period in Ayutthaya, it was common for them to look for a wife from the local population, often from the ethnic minority Mon people. When they were ready to leave, they were free to divorce their wives; so long as they left a suitable amount of money or goods to support the wife and family, this was considered a good bargain for the woman who would become valued as a potential future wife for a local man. Any children born of the marriage would be well-placed to become intermediaries, such as mestizos.

The different foreigner groups spent a lot of time conspiring against each other and generally gossiping about each other's intentions. Concerns about who was able to convert more of the local people were commonly considered to be of great importance, especially among the devout and militant Spanish Catholics. From 1606, the Japanese became increasingly important in Ayutthaya after the Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu ordered some muskets made in Siam. This led to the presence of Japanese in Ayutthaya and, despite the suppression of a rebellion incited by Japanese traders in 1610, King Sontham, who succeeded Ekathotsarat in that year, developed a personal Japanese bodyguard that remained with the monarch for the rest of Ayutthayan history.

Food, Clothing, and Recreation

Ayutthaya is at the center of a hot and humid climate with three main seasons, two of which are hot and one is hot and rainy. People tended not to wear too many clothes. Most people would wear a sarong or similar skirt like object, a short blouse for women or a cotton vest or jacket for men. Most went barefoot. Skin colors vary to some extent depending on area of birth and the tribe or people from which they came. People of different classes were subject to sumptuary laws, which strongly controlled what they were allowed to wear and, particularly, how much jewelry or other items of value they could show. Basically, the higher the social class, the more that people were allowed to wear. Anyone considered to be laying claim to a higher status than merited by wearing nicer clothes or jewelry would be subject to immediate punishment, which might include imprisonment or corporal or even capital punishment, depending on the circumstances.

Canals linked everywhere throughout the city, allowing people to travel wherever they liked by rowing boat. The canals would be filled with vendors and people traveling from place to place. The size of their boats and of their entourage would also depend upon social class. Anyone meeting a person of higher class would have to be careful to show appropriate deference. In the case of the King, the safest thing to do would be to keep out of his line of sight altogether. A number of European merchants were sentenced to death because they did not recognize at a distance the King on one of his boats and therefore did not make sufficient efforts to show respect to him.

Thai houses such as those found in Ayutthaya are traditionally wooden and based on stilts, so as to keep them clear of water and wild animals. Houses would be large enough for extended families to live together with each other. As food was so plentiful and cooking possibly dangerous in a wooden house, most people bought food from passing boat vendors or else from the floating markets. Prior to the arrival of the chilli from the Americas, the main spice was pepper, although many other herbs and spices grew abundantly. Meals were based on rice, freshwater fish that lived in rice paddy fields or in rivers, fresh seasonal vegetables (eggplants, kale, morning glory, mushrooms), and fruit (bananas, mangoes, papayas), together with frogs and some insects, chickens and their eggs, and occasionally a slaughtered pig or buffalo. While many people lived according to a subsistence regime, nevertheless food was quite freely available, either because it grew well on cultivable ground or else wild in the forests. Rice was used to create various kinds of rice wine, although most people customarily drank water or, alternatively, tea from China.

Entertainment was provided by troupes of musicians, actors, and acrobats. These may have been full-time entertainers or just amateurs joining in periodically. Musicians played instruments such as long drums, wooden xylophone type instruments, and flutes. Occasionally, larger fairs were organized in the grounds of wats (temples), which conveniently provided areas of ground that could be used. Wrestling and contests of martial arts were also popular on such occasions. People tended to rise and retire early, following the natural rhythm of the sun which, in a country quite close the equator, rose and fell at fairly constant hours throughout the year.

Astrology was an important activity in Ayutthaya and many people sought to earn a living by telling the future. The King maintained an official royal astrologer. Foreigners claiming some special knowledge of or ability to influence the future might attract considerable attention.

Adventure Seeds and Plot Hooks

The Diplomatic Mission

Players involved with characters in campaigns set in Japan or China or further afield might be despatched to conduct a diplomatic or commercial mission in Ayutthaya. They would be required to find their way to Siam, possibly being menaced by pirates or storms at sea or other perils, then seek audience with the king and his officials and seek to put forward a petition with suitable gifts and attention to protocol. Almost certainly, they would be required to wait upon the king's pleasure, often for extended periods of time and this would give them plenty of opportunities to interact with local people, fall in love, contract enemies, squabble with delegations from other countries and so forth. A journey into the countryside might provide opportunities to learn new skills and knowledge from village shamans or holy recluses.

A Murder Investigation

A minor princess has been found dead -- apparently murdered -- and all foreigners are under suspicion. The king has appointed the Prince of Louvo (an important ally) to conduct an investigation and punish any wrongdoers. The Prince's methods are strict and he will not hesitate to use torture -- for example, being slowly boiled alive in a large metal pot or placed in a sack and beaten with bamboo sticks. Suspicion will fall upon the characters and incriminating evidence is found in the possession of a trusted aide. Under the shadow of imminent arrest and interrogation and the pressure of time, can they discover which of their rivals is seeking to have them eliminated?

War

Warfare was a very popular activity for most of Southeast Asia's kings throughout this period. The main enemies of Ayutthaya were the Burmese -- who sacked the city twice -- but wars were also fought against Lanna, Lan Xang, the Chams of Vietnam, and the Khmers of Angkor. There were also incidents with Haws (Chinese) and with the pirates of the south China seas, mostly conducted with mercenaries because the Thais had little in the way of navigational skills or in traveling by sea. Here, the characters are offered the opportunity to take part in a military campaign, perhaps as an official observer or volunteer. Exposed to the dangers of travel in unfriendly areas (bamboo pit traps, tigers and crocodiles, disease and hunger, not to mention being shot at by enemy archers and spearmen), the party might have opportunities to hunt for elephants and fight on elephant back, as well as witness significant fighting and its perhaps terrible aftermath.

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Fatal Flaws and Heroic Weaknesses

Drawbacks for the *d20 System*

by Owen K.C. Stephens

Though many game systems have rules for character flaws, the core *d20 System* only gives rules for making characters better. While this is fine as far as it goes, it leaves a number of classic character ideas -- the struggling coward, the scholarly weakling -- to being handled simply through low ability or skill scores and roleplaying. To handle these concepts more smoothly, this article presents a number of *d20 System* hindrances.

Hindrances all have game-mechanical effects, to prevent GMs and players from having to agree how character flaws and physical infirmities should be roleplayed. A character who takes the Coward hindrance may wish to be brave and bold, taking risks to prove himself, but when faced with true adversity his game-mechanical limitations kick in regardless of player or character intentions. They are more focused than low ability scores as well, allowing a poorly-educated wizard to still have the mystic power a higher Int brings.

If used as part of a [Cludge](#) game, each hindrance earns the character 5 additional character points. If used in a traditional *d20 System* game, a character may take a hindrance at 1st level in order to gain an additional bonus feat. A GM may also want to use hindrances for certain NPCs (either to make them more interesting, or to weaken powerful NPCs foes PCs could not otherwise handle). In games allowing races with ECL shifts, a character can take two hindrances to negate one level of ECL.

Obviously a character shouldn't be able to take a hindrance that doesn't particularly hinder him. A GM should feel free to disallow hindrances that aren't relevant in a particular campaign. Additionally, some hindrances have requirements a character must meet to take them. In many cases these are maximum allowable ability scores, to prevent a high Dex character from being described as a klutz, which seems counterintuitive at the least.

Buying off a hindrance is more expensive than the bonuses gained from it. First, whatever was gained (either character points or a free feat) must be given up (or repaid). Second, the character must take a 105 experience penalty for one level worth of exp (1,000 exp × the level when the character starts to pay off the hindrance). Once the exp penalty has been maintained for a level, the character has suffered the efforts needed (physical training or mental struggles) to overcome the hindrance.

A GM might also allow a character who underwent a major trauma to trade one hindrance for another, if an appropriate trade is suggested by the player. For example, a character who is a Coward -- but manages to make his Will saves against an army of undead and fight nearly to death -- might give up the Coward hindrance, replacing it with Weakling because of his disabling wounds.

Braggart

You love to hear the sound of your own voice, and can't help but talk about your accomplishments. In fact you love hearing the sound of your own voice so much, you rarely listen to what anyone else has to say.

Drawback: You take a -2 penalty to all Bluff, Diplomacy, Disguise, Gather Information, and Sense Motive checks, and automatically fail such checks on a natural "1" or "2" on the d20 roll. Any Bardic Lore or Gather Information checks made to get information about you gains a +4 circumstance bonus.

Brash

You always want to leap into the thick of the excitement, even when it's not a good idea.

Drawback: Any time action has started (defined as circumstances where character may not take 10 and/or when initiative rolls have been made) you take a -2 moral penalty to all d20 checks any time you don't take a full-round action, and you may never hold your action (though you may Ready).

Clueless

You simply aren't good at putting things together, noticing the world around you, or realizing when things are about to get complicated. When your friends and allies are gearing up for battle, you're wondering if you locked your front door.

Drawback: You take a -2 penalty to all Listen, Search and Spot checks, and a -4 penalty to all Initiative checks.

Coward

You are not brave, and suffer the thousand deaths of fear, dread, and anxiety.

Drawback: You take a -4 penalty to all saves vs Fear effects. When under an effect that would normally make you immune to fear effects, you simply don't take this penalty. When you suffer a morale penalty, you must double its value.

Fool

You are easily tricked, rarely insightful, and no one ever looks to you for advise. It's not that you lack knowledge; it's that you seem to live in a world all your own, and don't understand how things work in the real world.

Requirements: Wis 14 or less

Drawback: You take a -2 penalty to all Will saves. You also automatically fail any Wis-based skill check or Will save if you roll a natural "1" or "2" on the d20 roll.

Frail

You are a lightweight, susceptible to disease, poison, and exhaustion.

Requirements: Con 14 or less

Drawback: You take a -2 penalty to all Fort saves, Con checks and Con-based skills. You also automatically fail any Con-based skill check or Fort save if you roll a natural "1" or "2" on the d20 roll.

Green

You have no combat experience at all, and are more likely to get yourself killed than learn martial arts when exposed to danger.

Drawback: You have no starting weapon proficiencies (though you may buy them normally with feats after 1st level). Additionally, you provoke an attack of opportunity whenever you concentrate (such as to maintain a spell) or draw anything, including weapons.

Hedonist

You live to enjoy life, and don't deal well with "roughing it."

Drawback: You suffer a -5 penalty to any opposed check to resist an offer to engage in enjoyable activities.,

Additionally, you suffer a -4 penalty to all rolls for forced marching, avoiding damage from environmental conditions, and enduring any harsh or sleepless conditions. You require 12.5% more sleep (or meditation) than is normal for your species.

Ill-Educated

Requirements: Character would normally be literate.

You are poorly educated, and may even have a learning disability. You can't read. Letters swim before your eyes, and facts are difficult to keep clear in your head.

Drawback: You suffer a -2 to all Int checks and Int-based skill checks, and automatically fail such checks on a natural roll of "1" or "2" on the d20. Additionally, you can't read. You cannot buy literacy in any language without buying off this hindrance, and even then you must buy the ability to read each language you know separately.

Klutz

You are clumsy, awkward, and physically inept.

Requirements: Dex 14 or less

Drawback: You take a -2 penalty to all Reflex saves. You also automatically fail any Dex-based skill check or Reflex save if you roll a natural "1" or "2" on the d20 roll.

Lame

Either from a malformation or an old wound, one of your legs doesn't work properly. This condition is long past healing, even from magical sources, and makes it difficult for you to get around.

Drawback: All your innate move rates are halved. Additionally, you take a -5 penalty to all Balance, Climb, Swim and Tumble checks.

Toad

You are ugly, unpleasant, and generally unlikable. While it's true that Charisma represents multiple factors, you lack in all of them.

Requirements: Cha 12 or less.

Drawback: You suffer a -2 to all Cha checks and Cha-based skill checks, and automatically fail such checks on a natural roll of "1" or "2" on the d20. Any time a foe has a choice of targets, he chooses you. Additionally, you are treated as being 4 levels lower for purposes of the Leadership feat, familiars, animal companions and special mounts. All summoning spells you cast have a 25% chance of going wrong, with the summoned creature attacking the nearest target and ignoring your commands.

Unlucky

Things simply go badly for you, for no good reason.

Requirements: No ability to re-roll d20 rolls.

Drawback: Twice per game session, the GM may require you to re-roll a successful d20 check. You use all the same modifiers as the original check, and must live with the second result (even if it is better, you use it).

Weakling

Requirements: Str 12 or less.

Drawback: You suffer a -2 penalty to all Str checks and St-based skill checks, and automatically fail such checks on a natural roll of "1" or "2" on the d20. Your light and medium carrying capacities are ½ normal for your Str.

Wimp

You can't take the damage others seem to absorb without difficulty. You bleed easily, pass out quickly, and are likely to bleed out if not helped.

Requirements: Con 12 or less.

Drawback: In a game using hit points, you have 3 fewer hit points than your normal total. When disabled you begin bleeding if you take any action, even those that are not strenuous, and when dying you have only a 5% chance to stabilize. In a game with wounds, you simply have 3 fewer wounds than your normal total.

Pyramid Review

Gamma World Player's Handbook (for d20 Modern)

Published by [Swords & Sorcery](#)

Written by Bruce Baugh, Ian Eller, Geoff Skellams, Lizard, & Mikko Rautalahti

Illustrated by Ed Bourelle, Mike Chaney, Jeff Holt, Jeff Laubenstein, Brian LeBlanc, James Stowe & Tim Truman

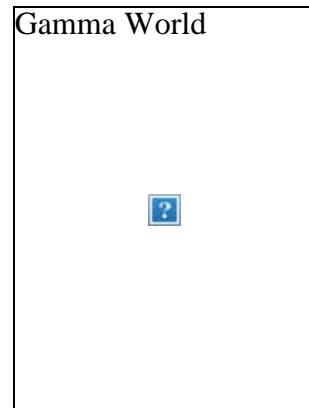
248-page b&W hardcover; \$34.95

The roleplaying hobby has reached an age when many of its first releases -- some classics, others not -- have cause to celebrate their Silver Anniversary. For *Dungeons & Dragons*, that came in 1999, while 2001 saw the silver anniversary of TSR's science fantasy RPG *Metamorphosis Alpha*. Its original author, James M. Ward, celebrated the event by releasing [Metamorphosis Alpha Universe RPG](#) published by Fast Forward Entertainment, a rewrite of the original concept that combined an interesting campaign premise with a set of ill-judged and woefully archaic mechanics. If an anniversary rewrite of a classic like *Metamorphosis Alpha* could fail, what then of its offspring? For if *Metamorphosis Alpha* is the granddaddy of all post-apocalyptic games then *Gamma World* is their father, and it is *Gamma World* that celebrates its own Silver Anniversary in 2003. Since the release of that original in 1978, the *Gamma World* game and concept have gone through at least six editions, only really deviating with the last few versions. The first of these was for TSR's *Alternity* game system that stripped out many of *Gamma World's* core elements, and the second was a return to the *Metamorphosis Alpha* concept with *From Metamorphosis Alpha to Omega* for TSR's surprisingly different, but pleasing *Amazing Engine* series of RPGs.

For the 25th anniversary of *Gamma World*, it is no surprise that its return is powered by something different to the earlier editions. The seventh edition of *Gamma World* is a *d20 System* RPG, which in a sense brings the game back to the fourth edition, as several of that softcover's rules would later appear in *Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition* and the *d20 System*. Indeed, this interpretation is neither published by Wizards of the Coast nor powered by *Dungeons & Dragons 3rd Edition*, instead being published by White Wolf Studios, Inc. under their Swords & Sorcery imprint and employing the [d20 Modern RPG](#) rules to provide its underlying mechanical concepts. So with that in mind, and that this iteration has been developed by Bruce Baugh, the Origins-Award-winning co-developer of the RPG *Adventure!*, the fans should expect something a little different.

Physically, the *Gamma World Player's Handbook* is a sturdy hardback with an eye-catching and appropriately fluorescent green cover, behind which lies a very gray-looking tome. A spiral-bound-book motif is used throughout with the borders given a number of different metallic designs to look as if every page has been laid onto a metal plate. The artwork is uniformly good, but the book is let down by a lack of one last read through. There are relatively few spelling mistakes, but the appearance of the much-dreaded "page XX" does much to give the reader a poor impression. Another problem the text suffers from is the effect of the gray mottling on the page underneath it. In places where this mottling is particularly dark, it intrudes into the text, forcing the reader to wonder whether the mottling is actually punctuation or part of the underlying image.

The setting for *Gamma World* is at least a century from now. In that time, genetic engineering has become a child's plaything, artificial intelligence so common place that everyday tools talk, and this combination of both became known as "Soultech." Even though a cleaner, more environmentally friendly world was created using the new advances in



science, the problem of human jealousy had not been left behind . . . A simple argument tipped over into an exchange of destructive firepower, before escalating into hundreds of such exchanges, many between A.I. computer systems that could react faster than their human masters. Three generations have passed since the Final Wars that destroyed so much. There are few survivors who remember the time before the apocalypse, such that the new generations are not looking back to the Old World, but forward to building a new one.

The first and most important factor to note about this interpretation of the *Gamma World* setting is that it is not the *Gamma World* of 25 years ago or even 10 years ago. The nature of this version's apocalypse is not wholly nuclear, or indeed nuclear, biological, and chemical. Yes, it does involve the last three, but adds a fourth destructive agent to the usual trio of apocalyptic technologies: nanotechnology. This the science and technology of very, very small machines tasked to build, dismantle, enhance, repair, or destroy according to their programming and all at an incredibly efficient molecular level. Of course, such nanotech agents, left to their own devices or directed at the whim of their unsupervised A.I. masters, are a very real danger in the world of the post apocalypse, such that nanotech has become an ambient part of the environment.

Based upon the *d20 Modern* model, players create 3rd-level characters, but because of the nature of the *Gamma World* setting, the process is a little more complex. As part of their character's pre-campaign development, a player selects a genotype (Stock Human, Pure Strain Human, Mutant, or Synthetic), a basic class from the *d20 Modern* core book (Strong, Fast, Tough, Smart, Dedicated, or Charismatic), and an Occupation. All this represents the character at 1st level -- what they were -- while their 2nd level is what they became, and the 3rd what they are now. PCs' class for the 2nd and 3rd levels can be continued from their basic class or be selected from one of the new advanced classes given in the *Gamma World Player's Handbook*.

The four genotypes are akin to other setting's races. The Stock Human is the most common type found in the world after the Final Wars, and the same given in *d20 Modern*. Pure Strain Humans are those that survived in isolation and thus have not suffered from the effects of the Final Wars. Healthier and more energetic than Stock Humans, they are better educated and have greater familiarity with technology but are not as adaptable, nor as capable of dealing with people. Mutants can be engineered (or uplifted); animals; engineered humans, designed for a particular purpose; new men, who have been affected by the mutations, and are able to pass their mutations on to their children; and true mutants, of which no two are alike. Mutants begin the game with three minor and one major positive mutation, along with a minor negative one. They also suffer from an inherent genetic instability that makes them susceptible to further mutation. Synthetics can be androids, cyborgs, or robots, designed by the player to be as near human as they like, or not. They have the benefits of being a construct, as well as damage reduction, self-repair, and the ability to upgrade hardware and software to increase their capabilities. Unfortunately they possess a narrow focus in terms of skills, are limited in terms of feats chosen after character generation, and always have an allegiance hard wired in.

The six basic classes from *d20 Modern* remain mostly unaltered, but an example of each suggests how they can be modified for the setting, providing class skills, bonus feats, and a new talent tree for each. The 16 occupations add a few more class skills, bonus feats, and an increase to the wealth statistic. The six advanced classes are relatively self-explanatory. They consist of the Cyborgologist, able to understand the secrets of the synthetic mind; the Leader, skilled at commanding and directing a community; the Nanosmith, who possesses an intuitive grasp of how nanotech works and can control it to their advantage; the Survivor, able to live and thrive in environments that others could not; and the War Chief, capable commanders of security or military forces.

The creation process is solidly supported with an appropriate range of skills and feats that fit the game's setting. Where it suffers is in certain aspects of the FX (as the *Player's Handbook* terms the setting's mutations and biotechnology, implants and grafts, and psionics). At just 12 each of positive and minor mutations, both major and minor, for a total of 48 mutations, there are just not enough options to choose from. What this means is that there will not be enough variety between one mutant and the next. Further, there are limitations when it comes to playing the Mutant class. Players with memories of the previous version of *Gamma World* will decry the omission of the mutated plant as an option, and the lack of guidance for creating mutant animals. What is suggested is that players adapt one of the several anthropomorphized animals brought in from previous versions of *Gamma World*. These include the badger-like Badder, the canine Ark, and the leptoid Hoop, plus the several anthropomorphized animals or "Moreaus" given in *d20 Modern*. Yet they feel very much as an afterthought in what is a very human-centric game.

Yet despite the shortcomings in the breadth of the FX, there is no little depth to the information. Each of the various types is thoroughly discussed and in most cases cleverly applied to the game. Never more so than for nanotechnology, which is in some ways the conceptual high point for this book. The most personal type of nanotech will actually choose the host with which it bonds. Given the inherent user-friendly nature of nanotech, the host needs little in the way of training to actually use. Once bonded, a host possesses resources measured in "nanounits," which can be depleted to achieve a range of interesting effects. These can be designed by the user, or they can grab one of the examples listed, which include Flight, Force Field, Induce Mutation, Plasma Blast, Tissue Repair, Water Purification, and Topographical Imaging (sending out a nanotech swarm to map out the local surroundings).

Instead of using the Psionics system from *d20 Modern, Gamma World* gives a new rules system for psionic FX. Psionic characters can become quite powerful, growing as a character gains levels, but every time they need to make a psionic skill check, there is the danger of feedback. This occurs when a roll of "1" is made on the die roll, and results in the user suffering some adverse effect as created by the GM. This could easily be as bad as the character's head exploding, adding a danger that is not present in the other FX, even though it does harken back to the wacky elements of old.

The focus of *Gamma World* in terms of a campaign is twofold: environment and community. The various climates are examined and given rules, along with maps of the North American continent, the world, and the Mississippi Basin. These are clearly well-done maps, but since they are presented in grayscale, they show a very limited amount of information. Had they been in color, they could have shown more topographical details, especially the various environments already discussed. The book discusses the transition from the world before the Final Wars to the one that came after it, examining the widespread use of nanotechnology, clean power, and the prevalence of A.I. computers and Soultech . . . and how it was all destroyed. These ideas are meant to be applied to a GM's own campaign setting, perhaps even their every own neighborhood after they have projected it forward a century or so. The players are encouraged to participate in both this process and in the creation of a Community.

A Community is designed as if they were a *d20 System* character, with attribute scores, skills, and feats serving to define the Community's abilities, resources, and so on. Again the rules are supported by a number of examples that showcase what can be created using them, ranging from nomadic train robbers in Australia and tribal warfare in shattered "Nau Yorg" to prospecting for pre-war tech buried in Silicon Valley and anti-technology survivors in France. Each of these can be used as given, or as models for the GM's own campaign. Once a Community has been defined, how it operates is modeled through the Community Behavior Map. This is a diagram or flow chart that helps a GM keep track of how a Community reacts to influences from within and without. Though these rules complement those for Community creation, they do not feel as fully developed, nor are they given any working examples.

Fans of previous editions of *Gamma World* expecting a full bestiary are likely to be disappointed. Some old standbys are included, such as the dragonfly-like Arn, the intelligent equine Brutorz, the dumb leptoid riding beasts known as Hoppers, and the underground dwelling shark-like predator called the Sep. They are in turn joined by creations in keeping with the setting's update, such as Cleansing Slime, which seeks out particular substances and literally breaks them down using chemicals and nanosymbiotes, plus several well-designed and described robots. These range from the common household appliances and mobile medical robots to the Security Robot and the Death Machine. They can come in a variety of different models, but all are akin to the Ogre cybernetic tank of the game of the same name, and all sent quite, *quite* mad by the limits of their program minders.

What types of game can be played using the *Gamma World* rules is covered in a discussion on campaign styles. Suggestions include the light-hearted explore/kill/loot/repeat style best typified by *Dungeons & Dragons*, the reconstruction or construction of society anew, and pure exploration. There is solid advice on handling differing technology levels and their game effects, as well as setting player goals. Much of it is obvious stuff when you consider it, but having it spelled out is nevertheless useful. Also good is the examination of what it is that makes *Gamma World* different and what it is -- essentially Wonder, Survival, and Hope. Rules are provided to handle the investigation of both technology and cultures, these designed around the *d20 System's* skill and difficulty check mechanics. Although perfectly workable, it is very much a shame that the diagram that handled the investigation of technology seen in previous editions of *Gamma World* and also in the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons First Edition* adventure, *S3, Expedition to the Barrier Peaks*, could not have been retained and modified. Finally covered are *Gamma World's*

Cryptic Alliances, the many organizations that espouse and pursue various goals, beliefs, and agendas, some peaceful, some not. Unfortunately, and much like the bestiary, only a few are covered in any kind of detail.

One pleasing conclusion is an appendix that brings *Gamma World* back to its roots by providing a means to play in this apocalypse using *Dungeons & Dragons 3.5*, rather than *d20 Modern*. This introduces and updates the four classes first presented in the fourth edition of *Gamma World*: the Enforcer, Esper, Examiner, and Scout. The intent is to have one of these classes with the one of the occupations given earlier in the book to create a character, and together these four make up the core classes for what is an alternative approach to playing beyond the Final Wars. Notes also adapt from *Gamma World d20* its Wealth system to the gold pieces of *Dungeons & Dragons*, as well as its skills and feats, and the Action Point system of *d20 Modern*.

Of course, this reinterpretation and update of a venerable classic comes to the gaming shelf weighed down by the baggage of its long published history. Gone is the wackiness that dominated all of those previous editions up until the fourth edition. Certainly those elements that could have supported that tone -- the mutations, the mutated animals, the cryptic alliances, and the technology -- are all present in the *Gamma World Player's Handbook*, but in a very reduced presence. These omissions -- and that of the mutated plant -- are to be very, *very* much missed. Hopefully, these missing elements will be rectified in future releases for the game line.

In their stead, there is no denying that this updating and reinterpretation of the *Gamma World* setting is nothing less than interesting. The introduction of nanotechnology and its application through the Nanosmith class is intelligently designed and thought out. As is much of the other FX, the Community Design rules and the discussion on applying the apocalypse to create the world after the Final Wars. It is a pity the Community Behavior Map rules feel underdeveloped, and perhaps they could have been left for a future supplement. Also, the feel and tone of this new *Gamma World* is more than ably captured in the color fiction that appears throughout the book.

Ultimately, the faults of the *Gamma World Player's Handbook* lie with what it omits rather than what it includes. The loss of wackiness and yahoo fun from earlier editions is something to be mourned. Yet a straight update of the setting to the *d20 System* -- without the re-interpretation, would be no more interesting than a word-for-word, shot-for-shot remake of *Psycho*, and who would welcome that? Indeed, such an exercise would probably not have interested either the developer or the authors. With an emphasis upon the rebuilding of the world much in the vein of Walter J. Miller Jr.'s *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, the result is a far more intelligent and restrained version of *Gamma World*, updated both in terms of its rules and its apocalypse.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

You Need Drew's Truck

Published by [Interactivities Ink, Limited](#)

Designed by Mike Young

Art by Lee Moyer and Art Today

Edited by Val Kilgallon

Rules sheet, full-color map sheet, mini-truck, sheet of magnets, 45 cards, in an envelope; 2-6 players; requires three counters per player and a marker to represent the truck on the map; \$10.95

Mom and dad may have kicked you out. Perhaps college is finished, and it's time to find your own apartment. You and your boyfriend may have had a spat, and this time it really is over. You're out. You're moving. You have to take all your worldly possessions and schlep them across town. *You Need Drew's Truck*.

Interactivities Ink comes up with yet another surprising way of bringing games to your dining room table. The object this time is to be the first person to get three of your items, scattered as they are across town, back to your house.

To do this, you'll need to pile them onto Drew's truck. Stuff cards drawn from the deck depict the items to be moved, and the picture shown -- an arrangement of blocks in various compositions -- matches a counter of the same size and layout. These counters are printed on a sheet of magnets, and Drew's truck is pasted on the back of a metal panel (clearly an electric plate from the hardware store). In addition to the Stuff cards, there are also Action cards that let you alter game play. You can get a free move of some sort, trade out your cargo, throw someone else's stuff into the street, or rearrange the things on the truck.

Anyone who's ever played the popular block-dropping computer game Tetris is in for some nasty flashbacks -- this game uses similar graphic techniques. Drew's only got so many blocks worth of room in his truck, and the weirder the shapes of his cargo, the harder it is to get it all to interlock. If no one's cooperating (and if they're playing right they won't be), you can get perhaps three items on the truck at once. But since you only get so many actions each turn, there may not be enough left to get your stuff home. You have to spend actions to draw extra cards, load something onto the truck, take something off, or move the truck around the board. Since everyone gets a chance to pilot the vehicle on his turn, and everyone is trying to get their goods to a different "home base" on the small map, the truck will make a lot of weird stops and reversals.

There are plenty of item cards in the deck, and when you get to the end of the game there will be fierce, even paranoid resistance to letting anyone get anything useful done, so you can discard sets of extra Stuff cards in order to get free actions. Sooner or later this will allow someone to pull off the win.

Certainly the most striking feature of the game is the innovative use of the magnets. It's a simple (and inexpensive) thing, but it's just the sort of fiddly, hands-on kind of gimmick gamers love so dearly. It's often a stretch to accept that a certain arrangement of blocks should represent your stereo system, but it's a good way to keep track of pieces and a stable way to monitor progress. The magnets have to be cut out by the buyer (a really sharp utility blade knife will help here), but they're bright, colorful pieces and they won't easily become shuffled up accidentally.

The board itself is small but colorful. It's a circle of distinctive locations, and it's all you need to keep track of the action. Players mark their items at different locations with one of three markers (players have to provide three of them for each player, and one to keep track of where the truck is), and though the sheet itself is a little on the flimsy side, the map has room enough for the playing pieces.

Since turns are short, a game flies by fairly quickly (about half an hour once you have the rhythm). The action all seems the same after a while, so it may not be ideal for repeat play. Adding the "trade Stuff cards for Actions" rule was a good idea, but while it makes an ending more likely, it's not a guarantee against a game that could run a bit long in the end game when everyone desperately seeks to -- if not drop off their last item -- at least keep their opponents from doing the same.

You Need Drew's Truck is a delightfully irresistible idea, and it has another of those Interactivities Ink. "right prices," which makes it an amusing exercise and worth it as the occasional diversion. Though it won't sustain night after night of extended play, it's a solid game with engaging mechanics.

--Andy Vetromile

Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



New Year's Fireworks and Crystal Balls

Last night I was at a friend-of-a-friend's house for a New Year's party. I had an okay time, although I had some slight problems even getting there because of a natural friction between one who is horrible at giving directions (my friend Chuck) and one who can get lost in a revolving door (myself).

Anyway, after finding the place and welcoming the beginning of my month-long "messing up of checks' date fields" celebration, we started to set off some fireworks. And over the course of an hour we proceeded to break *every* rule of responsible fireworks: holding fireworks and letting them launch from our hands; setting off as many fireworks as possible at once; using lit cigarettes and sparklers to help in setting them off . . . the works.

In fact, the only childhood fantasy that we *didn't* indulge was instead realized by the neighbor-of-a-friend-of-a-friend, who -- having grown bored with setting off fireworks one at a time -- proceeded to pack up all the fireworks back into their brown paper bag, and set the bag on fire. (The results, although fairly interesting, did not live up to the fantasy.)

There's almost no point to that tale, although if I were forced to tie this into gaming by gun-wielding maniacs who kicked down my door, I note that being an adult is very similar to most RPGs (and, very often, other games): You have the option to indulge in behavior that others would find socially unacceptable . . . or at least weird. And then I'd probably come up with some simile about fireworks relating to shooting Stormtroopers or becoming an unscrupulous real-estate tycoon.

But mostly I was looking for an easy column to write on this New Year's Day, especially since I seem to have burned my thumb (no doubt on some overly hot fondue last night).

Speaking of easy and New Year's (how's that for a segue, huh? Betcha can't tell who's got the Creative Writing degree *now!*), one of the most common columns of this time of year is the Prediction column, where one makes up answers that seem like they'll make sense. One of the nice things about doing prediction columns is that, really, they are pretty easy to write. (Being right, on the other hand, is not so easy.) And, presuming the writer is going to be around long enough to worry about *next* year, there's a ready-made sequel gestating for a full year. And if the writer is completely off-base . . . well, what're the odds that the readers will remember a full 365 days ago?

So without further ado, here are some fearless predictions for the coming year in the gaming biz. (I would like to take a moment to stress that these are completely my own thoughts, and are not based on any insider knowledge or other secret lore. So it would be a total coincidence if some of these predictions were too prescient . . . not a hidden message from the Neptune Overlord of Utah nor some cryptic Omaha mulberry.)

The Rise of Print-on-Demand. The technology already exists for people to print books in relatively small quantities (sometimes as few as one copy). However, for most gaming applications the profit mark-up and quality have both been too inadequate for many publishers to fully consider this possibility. I predict that this will change soon; advances in technology and competition among a number of services may resolve these problems for game manufacturers, and 2004 will see small-to-mid-sized publishers release older or lower-demand books using this "print on demand" technology. For the most part I don't see this as being a viable large-piece strategy for most publishers, since the profit margins for large-run books will always be greater. However, this will hopefully help ease many troubles that manufacturers have had with books that don't have *quite* enough demand to justify another full printing.

Revenge of Print-on-Demand. Although I don't see Print-on-Demand replacing traditional publishing, I predict that at least one company will do something innovative and creative with this method. Since print-on-demand uses electronic files for all its publishing, these files have the potential to be fairly dynamic before actual publication. What this innovation will be, I can't say. Some ideas that spring to mind:

- Inclusion of buyer-submitted artwork into a printed book. ("Hey! The king in this sourcebook looks like a charcoal-filter Photoshopping of *my* picture!")

- Modification of an adventure to include names, locations, and descriptions or details supplied by the buyer. ("Legends of the land of [Pyramue](#) tell of the heroic [Arr Kainjel](#) and [Krakazlar](#), who teamed up to thwart the sinister [Smar'sh](#) . . .")
- Heck, there's not much to prevent a "real" addition to a sourcebook. (Envision a Supers supplement detailing a city of metahumans. What if page 112 was left intentionally blank, allowing a buyer to submit his *own* character -- with illustration -- directly into the book?)

I don't see any of these innovations taking the world by storm, but I see them being another means for at least one smaller publisher to differentiate itself from the Big Guys.

Ashes To Ashes . . . Speaking of which, I predict that one of the Moderately Big Guys will have a major restructuring, involving a departure from the traditional games they had been creating, or getting out of that biz altogether. (I hope I'm wrong, but it seems like too long since the Etch-a-Sketch has been shaken.)

How Much for 96 Pages??? I see the gulf between the efforts of the Big Guys and smaller publishers getting wider, at least in the short term. Consumers will get to choose between big, fat full-color hardcovers that cost roughly the same as skinny, smaller-run works. I predict that these smaller books which offer something truly compelling or different will do okay, but those which do not may have real problems.

Downloads 'R' Us. I see electronic publishing continuing to grow. I predict that there will be at least one game line that exists exclusively in an electronic format (except, maybe, the "print-on-demand" option above), which will be popular enough for people to take note. Curiously, despite the one breakout hit I predict, I also see the trend continuing with a general reluctance for electronic-format purchases. The amount of high-quality free material available will continue to make things difficult for those offering similar material at a price, although some publishers (such as [Malhavoc Press](#)) will continue using worthwhile free material to funnel readers to more profitable options.

Coming Soo-aw, Crud. Given the cyclical nature of the game world, I predict at least three games will be released that all have a very similar theme, genre, or world idea, despite their having been developed independently and without knowledge of the other.

Abort, Retry, Fail. The computer will still fail to add significantly to the "traditional" gaming experience, despite at least one high-profile attempt to show otherwise. However, online MMORPGs will continue to be very popular and profitable.

Braaaiiiiiinns! At least two presumed-dead game lines will come back after a long absence, published by companies other than the one that originated them (probably by new companies formed by the investor[s] who were also fans of the original).

Old & New, Battered & Blue. I see the distribution picture for games continuing along as it has been, although I predict that smaller publishers will try more and more innovative techniques to get their products to consumers, especially older books (since so many retailers seem to focus on "new" releases). I also see the format innovated by White Wolf's *Orpheus* game -- the limited run "miniseries" format -- having at least one or two more trials by other companies. (I don't know if these two elements will tie together, but they're more similar than dissimilar, and I had too many small paragraphs back-to-back anyway.)

Fnord. And I have one more prediction, but it merits its own column, and ties into another column I wrote before . . . (It is also, I assure you, nowhere near as interesting as the mystery I'm building up around it.)

3rd, 4th, and 5th Dimensions??? And, finally, I predict that this will be the year where I *finally* am able to sit down and comprehend the first edition gold-box *Immortals* set from the original *Dungeons & Dragons* game.

Of course, I also predict that at least one of these predictions will be horribly, horribly off-base.

--Steven Marsh

Star Witness

A *GURPS Space* Adventure

by Stephen Dedman

For this adventure, the GM will need the *GURPS Basic Set*, *GURPS Compendium I* and *II*, *GURPS Space Third Edition*, *GURPS Ultra-Tech*, and *GURPS Robots*. *GURPS Ultra-Tech 2*, *GURPS Biotech*, and *GURPS Vehicles* may be useful, but are not essential. The adventure is designed for 100-point characters and set in the TL10 universe described in *GURPS Space* (p. S132), but can easily be adapted to any Space campaign, including the *GURPS Traveller* universe.

The PCs should, between them, have the skills needed to crew a small starship, including Pilot, Astrogation, Engineering, Mechanic, and Gunner. Other useful skills include Free Fall, Vacc Suit, Tactics, Fast-Talk, Survival, and, of course, combat and medical skills.

Payload

The adventure begins with the player characters temporarily delayed on an industrial world with a high CR. They may be waiting for payment for their cargo, for repairs to their ship, or something similar . . . when suddenly, one of them is approached by Patrol Lieutenant Stein. If the PCs have their own ship with at least one free berth, she will offer to charter it for a month (the duration of a flight to Wilde, the sector capital); if not, she will ask if they are interested in hiring on as crew on a starship in exchange for pay and passage offworld.

Any Streetwise PC (or player) will realize the value of doing a favor for the Patrol -- and the possible risks if they refuse. If they ask what the job entails, Stein will say simply that they urgently need to ship two passengers to a nearby planet -- secretly and securely. She will not reveal anything more unless the PCs accept the job: if they refuse it, they may find they receive a -1 Reputation among Patrol officers and other law enforcement professionals throughout the sector.

If the PCs agree, Stein will explain that one of the passengers is a witness in an important trial on Wilde, and the other is a court-appointed bodyguard. Stein will even agree to the witness being shipped in a freeze tube if there is a qualified medic on board ship. The PCs will need to leave within 24 hours; Stein will make sure there are no further delays.

The witness is the rather jittery Joshi Xu. The bodyguard is a Cerberus Security and Patrol robot, Patrol Sergeant DRN-88 ("Call me Darwin").

If the PCs want more information about Xu or the trial, they can ask Xu, Darwin, or Stein: use the NPC reaction roll, at -1 for each successive question. None of them want to reveal much, though Xu enjoys lying and may try to string them along. A character who rolls Streetwise -5 or Area Knowledge (Sector) -8 will learn that the only trial on Wilde likely to justify this sort of security is the conspiracy trial of Paul Valdez. More information about Valdez will require more questions: Criminology, Research, or Streetwise may all be useful.

Valdez is said to be the second-in-command of one of the sector's most ruthless crime bosses: the elusive Sherika Cano. Sher Cano started as a mercenary and gunrunner some 90 years ago, and is now said to control all smuggling throughout the sector and enforce her will with a small but well-equipped army. Xu was one of their most skilled computer programmers, and knows more about Cano's financial network than anyone else alive. He's the star witness at Valdez's trial, and it's hoped that his evidence can secure a conviction: if so, the Patrol hopes that Valdez might reveal Cano's whereabouts, or that she may attempt a rescue.

High Explosives

Shortly after leaving the orbital starport, but before they reach the jump point, the PCs will receive an urgent message from the planet's police. One of their informants has told them that a bomb has been placed on the heroes' ship, and set to explode once it leaves normal space. Unfortunately, the only other information they have is that the bomb is probably a mininuke (p. UT76), weighing a few pounds and easily concealed or disguised.

Everyone aboard the ship should make a Fright Check at -4; while they are panicking, the cop will promise to try to get more information. In the meantime, though, the PCs are politely requested not to return to the starport or come within 100 miles of any manned installations in the system. If they decide to evacuate the ship, the Patrol will rescue them as soon as it can.

Searching the interior of the ship takes 1d minutes and one Vision roll (or Electronic Operations (Sensors) roll if the PCs are using a radscanner) per space -- though there's nothing to find. If the ship has any security systems, they may help establish that no unauthorized people have entered the ship. Searching the hull will take two minutes per ksf, and will also require Free Fall and Vacc Suit rolls. The mininuke -- a large limpet mine -- is attached to the hull near the bridge, and is -4 to detect with normal vision and -2 to detect with a radscanner.

Once the bomb has been found, it can be described to the local cops, who will warn them not to touch it. The more precise the description the PCs give, the sooner the cops will be able to identify it.

The mine is a ZOM-76 .00001 kiloton mininuke, probably large enough to destroy the ship completely. It can be timer activated, remotely detonated by laser or radio, or triggered by anything opening the case or breaking the seal between the mine and the hull of the ship (if the PCs have already tried to do this, they're probably dead). Without the proper code signal to deactivate it, the cops have no way to render it harmless except by vaporizing it instantly. They advise the heroes to evacuate the ship; they won't risk any of their own bomb disposal experts by sending them up to defuse it, especially as they have no way of knowing whether the timer has been set, but will radio instructions if any of the PCs want to try.

If the heroes want to save their ship, the police will tell them that they should be able to remove the section of hull the mine is attached to, then send the mine away from the ship and target it with their weapons. If the ship has cDR0, removing the hull plate can be done with a laser torch or similar tool; if it has cDR1+, they will need a heavy plasma torch. It will also require Free Fall, Vacc Suit, and a Mechanic (Starship) roll. An ordinary failure will cause the bridge to lose air pressure and damage to some bridge system (see pp. S121-122) if the ship has cDR1 or less; if it has more, ignore this except on a critical failure. A critical failure may either destroy the bridge, or breach the mine casing, damaging the bomb components so that the PCs are exposed to a burst of radiation but minimal blast. Alternatively, it may destroy the trigger's radio receiver, which will start the timer.

The bomb's remote control is tuned to the beacon on the orbital starport: if anything blocks the signal (such as a ship jumping into hyperspace), the timer starts, and the bomb detonates 30 seconds later. The cops informant may discover this and relay the information just in time to save the PCs (e.g., just before they try activating a radio jammer), at the GM's option.

If the PCs manage to save their ship -- or enough of it that it can be repaired quickly rather than replaced -- they can proceed to Wilde as soon as repairs are finished (note that the charter agreement includes insurance for replacement cost): go to Trial Run. If the repairs will take three days or more, go to Sex Machine.

Sex Machine

Stein will keep Xu in a safe-house until a ship is ready, and will not reveal the location to the PCs.

If any of the PCs venture into Startown while the ship is being repaired, they may encounter the seductively-dressed Amber (or Anton, the male equivalent, if appropriate). If an opportunity presents itself, Amber will approach the PC

who seems most interested and make a Sex-Appeal roll. If the PC fails his Will roll to resist seduction (characters with the Lecherousness disadvantage roll at -5), Amber will follow him back to his hotel room for the night. The next morning, she will announce that she needs passage to Wilde to start her studies in theater arts: she has very little money, but is willing to work her way there -- and she's always wanted to try zero-gravity sex. If the PC seems reluctant, and has not become addicted to her neural stimulator, she will inject him with Crediline (pp. UT43-44) and try Fast-Talk or Hypnotism.

Amber is a "Lemon Angel" (p. RO119) with her empty spaces filled with weapons, including a drug injector (p. RO20) filled with Crediline in her left arm; a self-destruct device (p. RO30) and 2 lbs of explosive in her left leg; and a cyberswarm in her torso. If Amber manages to board the ship, she will attempt to release the swarm -- Flyer Terminator microbots with Non-Rechargeable AA cells -- into the ventilation system to target Xu.

Amber's instructions are to kill Xu, destroy his brain so that it cannot be read into a clone, then stand as close to his body as she can and self-destruct. She will not attack anyone else, including the PCs, unless they get in her way.

If Xu is killed, Stein will reveal that she's been expecting trouble, and that Darwin has several copies of Xu's braintape. She also suspects that Cano has allowed for that, and is hoping to either delay Xu's arrival on Wilde until after the trial has ended, or frighten Xu out of testifying, if she doesn't succeed in killing him. She warns the PCs that keeping Xu safe isn't enough: they have to keep him feeling safe, even if it means lying to him.

Trial Run

Q-ships from Cano's pirate fleet will be waiting near likely jump points on the route to Wilde, hoping that the PCs ship will emerge from hyperspace for an astrogation roll (see p. S132) close enough for them to attack. Fortunately, this is statistically very unlikely.

Every time the PCs emerge from hyperspace to "look around," make a reaction roll. On a neutral or better result, there are no pirate ships within sensor range. On a poor result, 1d-3 pirate ships are within sensor range, but both are too far away to pose a threat unless the PCs decide to attack, or something else prevents them making another jump (such as a failed Piloting or Engineer roll).

On a bad or worse result, the PCs have emerged from hyperspace near enough to at least one pirate ship for it to close to short range. If the PCs decide to run, it should be 1d+1 combat turns before they can recharge the Energy Bank for another jump.

The pirates will try to disable the heroes' ship and board it rather than destroying it outright; not only do they want to be sure that Xu is aboard, they'll also want a chance to loot the vessel of anything else valuable. For this reason, they'll keep the nukes in reserve, using the kinetic warheads and X-ray lasers instead.

Xu will become increasingly nervous with every encounter. If he learns that pirate ships have been spotted, he will make future fright checks at a further -1 penalty, with a further -1 penalty for every attack that damages the PCs ship.

Wilde

When the PCs arrive in Wilde's system, they will be given clearance to land at the surface starport (an orbital starport is in construction, but not yet ready for use). There are no more pirate ships in ambush, just a patrol cutter in orbit ready to escort them down.

A few miles out from the Class IV starport, while flying across the desert that surrounds Windermere, the sensors officer should make a roll on Electronics Operation (Sensors) to detect a low-powered laser -- a passive designator (p. UT56) -- being aimed at the ship. If this succeeds, the pilots of both ships will have a moment's warning of an incoming attack -- just enough time for Evasive Action. One brilliant missile (p. UT55) will hit the cutter's main maneuver drive engine, sending the cutter into a tailspin; the other, if not evaded, will hit the PCs' ship for 6dx10(10)

damage. Another missile will be fired at the PCs' ship a second later.

The designators are being aimed by two small, cheap robot drones (-2 to hit); the missiles are being fired by two of Cano's mercenaries with M-LAWS (p. UT55). If both drones are destroyed, the mercenaries will run rather than use the clip-on passive designators.

If a second missile hits the PCs' ship and penetrates its force screens and armor (if any), it will damage the ship's main power conduit, temporarily knocking out all computers, sensors, communicators, and turrets. The ship will be flying blind, leaving the pilot with three choices: bail out; attempt an emergency landing in the desert (at -5), endangering the lives of the crew and passengers but no one else; or continue flying towards the starport and risk crashing in a built-up and populated area. If the pilot has Overconfidence, he will have to make a Will roll not to attempt to fly towards the city. If he fails this Will roll, Darwin may try to overpower him and hand command over to a copilot.

If the pilot lands the ship at the starport and Xu survives, go to Hard Target. If the pilot lands in the desert, go to Sandstorm. An ordinary failure means that the hull takes 1d(5) its cHP in cDAM for every point by which the roll was missed: if this happens near the starport, it also does major damage to surrounding buildings and 5d damage to 1d people per point by which the roll was missed. A critical failure means that the hull is destroyed (see p. S140).

Sandstorm

If the PCs crash-land in the desert outside Windermere, they will be at least 500 miles from the city -- outside the normal range of short-range communicators (pp. UT31-32). Xu has a medium-range communicator with uplink and neutrino receiver built into his vacc suit, but Darwin is unaware of this and Xu will not reveal it unless he decides to give himself up to the Patrol instead of Cano. Instead (if conscious and alive), he will don the armored suit and tap into Cano's encrypted communications network, but he will not share any information he picks up until he's sure he can trust the PCs. If the heroes have a medium-range or better communicator and make an Electronics Operation (Communications) roll at -5, they will also be able to listen in on Cano's network, but cracking the code will require Cryptanalysis at -10 (one hour per attempt): Xu, who wrote the earlier version of their Cryptography software, has only a -1 modifier and needs 10 minutes per attempt.

Cano has mercenaries and robots within 100 miles of the crash site, and three minutes after the forced landing, Lucy will start broadcasting the following message: "To Joshi Xu and the crew of the starship (name and registration): do you require assistance? Please respond. Our medics can reach you much more quickly than the Patrol's."

Cano's mercenaries are monitoring communications frequencies, especially the Patrol and starport frequencies, to see if they can track them back to the ship. Any time the PCs attempt to communicate with the Patrol or Windermere, they will roll on Electronics Operation (Communications); every success will enable them to reduce the area they have to search to find the crash site (-5 for signals of less than 5 seconds).

PCs with the Gullibility disadvantage will have to roll against IQ not to respond, but others can ignore it. If Xu or the PCs do not respond to Lucy's message within 10 minutes, her tone will change to Intimidation: "To Joshi Xu and the crew of the starship (name and registration): we are very close to finding you. We have nuclear missiles that can destroy your ship or any vehicle that may be coming to rescue you. If you wish to surrender, please respond. None of you will be harmed."

Darwin will not allow Xu or any of the PCs to surrender, or to respond to this message, and will attempt to stun them if it's the only way he can prevent this. This message will repeat for five minutes, then Lucy will try Fast-Talk: "To the crew of the starship (name and registration): we will pay one million interstellar credits if you hand over the defector Joshi Xu and any braintapes that he may have made. This payment may take any of the following forms: untraceable credit deposited into a bank account of your choosing, bullion or gems, drugs, rare wines, military equipment, robots, bioroids, beautiful slaves, clones, software, art objects, or anything else we can provide."

Any PC making an IQ roll will realize that Lucy is offering to pander to the most common vices (Mental Disadvantages): a contest of her Fast-Talk skill against the Will of any PC with the Greed, Lecherousness, Addiction,

or Alcoholism disadvantage. Again, Darwin will tell the PCs that Cano cannot be trusted to deliver, and will try to stop the PCs responding, even if it means stunning everyone and hoping that help arrives before Cano's pirates. If the PCs try to haggle, Lucy will slowly raise the offer to two million while the mercenaries home in on the ship.

If the PCs give away their location, a Vulture (p. RO116) will be in firing range of the ship before they've had time to make any repairs. Lucy will give the PCs one minute to leave the ship, with Xu, or the Vulture will fire a mininuke. If they offer no resistance, four mercenaries and two Murasama 7 robots (p. RO115) will arrive in three jeeps an hour later, and take them back to their base for interrogation. Go to Traitor's Gate.

If the PCs don't give away their location, they will have one hour to make temporary repairs and perform first aid before Cano's spybots (p. RO111) find them. If the hull has been destroyed, the ship cannot be made to fly again, but it may be possible to repair one or more of the turrets, communicators, computers, etc. and connect them to a power supply.

Repairing the main power conduit requires an hour and a successful roll on either Electronics, Engineer, Mechanic or Shipbuilding (Starship); -2 if the PC is at half their HT or less; normal modifiers for tools (Major repairs). If the hull has not been destroyed, this will enable the ship to fly slowly at a low altitude and land safely at the starport (at -4). Another roll on the appropriate Electronics specialization will be needed for each of the Bridge systems (Communications, Computer, Sensors), and a roll on the appropriate Armory specialization is needed for each turret or weapon if the PCs want the ship to be able to fight.

An unarmed spybot will fly over the ship at the end of the hour; even if the PCs destroy the spybot, the Vulture (p. RO116) will be sent to the location to investigate, and will be in missile range (close range for the ship's weapons) 2d+1 minutes later. If the ship is not flying, Lucy will give the PCs one minute to leave the ship, as above; if the ship is flying, the Vulture will launch all its nukes without warning.

If the PCs defeat the Vulture, they will have another hour to attempt repairs before the jeeps arrive -- during which time they will receive a short-range communication from the Patrol, telling them that their satellites have located them, and a rescue team will be there as soon as possible. The mercenaries and Murasamas will arrive first: the PCs can either fight them or try to hide until the Patrol sends backup. Go to Hard Target.

Hard Target

If/when the PCs arrive at Windermere starport with Xu, whether in their own ship or with the Patrol rescue team, the Patrol captain will ask any who are uninjured if they could perform one last service. While every precaution is being taken to get Xu to the courthouse safely in time to testify, they want to make sure that copies of the braintape (taken before he left for Wilde) arrive. Each PC who accepts will be given one disc and a destination: the courthouse, the hospital, and the offices and homes of some of the prosecutors. Payment is a free license to carry a concealed weapon of LR 2+ on Wilde, good for a year, and an invitation to a drunken dinner with the SWAT team.

As the PC sent to the courthouse walks past the group of journalists waiting outside the court, on his way in, roll a contest of IQ (or Mind Shield, if he has one up) vs. a Telereceive skill of 14. If the PC wins, he will be able to warn the Patrol that there is a telepath present, though he will not be able to identify her unless he is himself telepathic or makes a critical success on IQ. If the telepath wins, she will discover where the other PCs are taking the other braintapes, and will arrange for them to be ambushed en route if possible. The ambushers will be a pair of thieves, who will shadow the PC for 10 minutes before attempting to pick his pocket -- but they're armed, and will fight if necessary. If arrested, they can reveal little about Cano's plans, except that she's prepared to "wipe Xu out at any cost," and that their orders are to try to prevent the braintapes being used.

Cano's plan is for the journalist to use Telesend to threaten the already edgy Xu, and if that fails, use Mindwipe to permanently delete all of his memories. If the Patrol knows that one of the journalists is a telepath, they will take appropriate precautions (psi shields, trying the case in camera, or letting Xu testify by communicator from a safe distance), even at the risk of a bad reaction from the judge or jury.

Traitor's Gate

If the PCs hand Xu over to Cano's mercenaries, they will be searched, disarmed, blindfolded, and taken to a pirate base. They will be kept in cells while Lucy and the mercenaries interrogate them. If Lucy is convinced that the PCs aren't trying to double-cross them, the PCs will wake up a day later in a cheap hotel Windermere startown. If possible, the mercenaries will leave their share of the reward (a credit transactor, a pleasure robot, a nuclear warhead, or whatever was agreed upon) at the foot of their bed. They will receive the insurance money to repair or replace the ship, but also a -2 Reputation with the Patrol and other law enforcement types, which will have to be bought off with good deeds (leading them back to the pirate base will reduce it to -1).

If Lucy is not convinced that the PCs have been bought, she'll keep her word not to harm them -- but the mercenaries will drop them in the middle of the desert naked, 200 miles from any water or shelter, with no communicators or survival equipment.

Wilde (Victoria V)

Planet type: Terrestrial

Diameter 11,200 mi.

Density: 3.9

Gravity: 1

Composition: Low-Iron

Axial tilt 12°

Seasonal variation: Minor

Length of Day: 25.1 hours

Length of Year: 14.29 Earth years (4867.7 local days).

Atmosphere: Pressure standard (1.09)

Type and Composition: 75% Nitrogen, 23% Oxygen.

Climate: Tropical

Temperatures at 30° Latitude: Low 81°; Average 103°; High 125°

Surface Water: 42%

Humidity: 44%

Primary Terrain: Desert/barren

Mineral Resources: Gems/Crystals scarce

Rare Minerals scarce

Radioactives scarce

Heavy Metals scarce

Industrial Metals scarce

Light Metals plentiful

Organics ample

Moons: 2 small moons, Dorian and Algernon

Biosphere: Dominant life form: marine animals, shore and water plants, extensive coral reefs. Other significant life forms; imported crops, humans, domestic animals.

Civilization: Population 18,000,000 (PR 7)

Tech Level: 10

Control Rating: 2/3

Society: Socialist Athenian Democracy.

Starports: Class IV (ground) at Windermere.

Installations: Patrol and Survey bases; Nature preserve; Special Justice Group office; Private Research center; University.

Economic/Production: Sector Capital; University.

Star Name: Victoria

Type: A2V (Bright White Main Sequence Star)

Biozone: 3.1 -- 4.7

Inner Limit: 0.0

Number of Planets: 5

Planet	Orbit	Distance	Type	Diameter	Density	Gravity	Atmosphere	Notes
Asteroid Belt	1	.3						
Asteroid Belt	2	.7						
Rock	3	1.1	Hot Rockball	2,700	7	0.43	none	
(Empty orbit)	4	1.9						
Wilde	5	3.5	Detailed above					
(Empty orbit)	6	6.7						
Whale	7	13.1	Gas giant	116,000	2.3	6.1	Hydrogen	14 moons, 6 moonlets
Ernest	8	25.9	Gas giant	60,000	1.8	2.47	Hydrogen	10 moons, 8 moonlets, faint ring
Saint Quentin	9	51.5	Gas giant	80,000	2.1	3.85	Hydrogen	8 moons, 10 moonlets

Cast

Joshi Xu

Age 39. Pale complexion, brown hair in pony-tail, blue eyes; 5'8", 120 lbs. Native gravity .9.

ST 9, DX 11, IQ 14, HT 9. Move 5.

Advantages: Bionic Ear (+2 Hearing, ultrafrequency); Eidetic Memory [30]; Mathematical Ability; Neural-interface Implant; Versatile.

Disadvantages: Combat Paralysis; Edgy; Extremely Curious; Low Pain Threshold; Unfit; Weak Will/2.

Quirks: Attentive; Imaginative; Overconfident about his mental skills; Prefers Dreamgames to real sex; Untidy, but fussy about cleanliness.

Skills: Accounting-16; Artist-13; Beam Weapons/TL10 (Sonic)-12; Chess-15; Computer Hacking/TL10-16; Computer Operation/TL10-14; Computer Programming/TL10-17; Cryptanalysis/TL10-16; Cryptography/TL10-16; Cryptology-11; Electronics/TL10 (Computers)-14; Electronics Operation/TL10 (Security Systems)-15; Fast-Talk-13; Forgery/TL10-14; Gambling-16; Mathematics/TL10-16; Merchant-13; Research-14; Streetwise-13.

Equipment: TL10 MCA vacc suit, with helmet light, improved communicator (medium-range with uplink and neutrino receiver), rebreather, reflective coating, and magnetized boot-soles; two-hour tank; Distort belt; Pocket Pack; Nightshades; Skinsuit; Genius small computer (Complexity 5) with Text scanner, printer, and Accounting, Datalink, Defense, assorted Dreamgames, Electronics Repair, News Daemon, Optical Recognition, Security, Word Processing, and Worm software.

Joshi was one of Valdez's chief computer wizards, an expert at cracking codes and laundering credit, which he does more for the challenge than the money (most of which he spends on computer upgrades). He fled after Valdez was arrested on Wilde, but was soon arrested by the Patrol. He has never knowingly met Cano.

Joshi is relatively harmless, though any compulsive gamblers in the crew may end the voyage poorer than they began (he likes to play for high stakes).

Lieutenant Ana Stein

Age 33. Tanned complexion, strawberry-blond hair, blue eyes; 5'8", 125 lbs. Native gravity 1.02.

ST 11, DX 12, IQ 12, HT 12. Move 6.

Advantages: Charisma/1; Combat Reflexes; G-Experience; High Pain Threshold; Interface Jack; Legal Enforcement Powers.

Disadvantages: Duty; Sense of Duty (her command).

Skills: Administration-12; Beam Weapons/TL10 (Laser)-16; Brawling-12; Criminology/TL10-12; Detect Lies-13; Diplomacy-12; Electronics Operation/TL10 (Sensors)-12; Fast-Draw (Pistol)-13; First Aid/TL10-12; Free-Fall-13; Gunner/TL10 (Laser)-15; Judo-13; Law (Alliance)-13; Leadership-12; Savoir-Faire-12; Streetwise-11; Tactics-13; Vacc Suit/TL10-13.

Equipment: Variable Heavy Laser pistol with selector switch (RoF 8); TL10 LCA vacc suit, with HUD, helmet light, rebreather, reflective coating, and magnetized boot-soles; two-hour tank; multiscanner.

Stein, the commander of the base on Galt, is a career Patrol officer with little interest in politics. Her chief loyalties are

to the patrollers under her command and to the Alliance, not to Galt's managers. She will give the refugees as much help as she can without endangering her own people or breaking her orders to defend the planet.

Patrol boarding party

ST 12, DX 11, IQ 11, HT 11. Move 5.

Advantages: Combat Reflexes; G-Experience; Legal Enforcement Powers.

Skills: Administration-10; Beam Weapons/TL10 (Laser)-15; Brawling-12; Criminology/TL10-12; Detect Lies-11; Electronics Operation/TL10 (Sensors)-12; Fast-Draw (Pistol)-12; First-Aid/TL10-12; Free-Fall-12; Gunner/TL10 (Laser)-13; Judo-12; Law (Alliance)-12; Streetwise-11; Tactics-10; Vacc Suit/TL10-12.

Equipment: Variable Heavy Laser pistol with selector switch (RoF 8); TL10 LCA vacc suit, with HUD, helmet light, rebreather, reflective coating, and magnetized boot-soles; two-hour tank; multiscanner. Cutter also carries Military X-ray laser rifles and Military Dinosaur lasers for use against heavily armored opponents.

One of the party also has Mechanic (Power Plant)-15, another has Physician-12.

Mercenary/Pirate

ST 11, DX 11, IQ 11, HT 11. Move 5.

Advantages: Combat Reflexes; G-Experience; High Pain Threshold; Patron (Cano, appears on or less).

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Pirate's); Duty; and any two of the following: Bad Temper; Bloodlust; Bully; Greed; Lecherousness; Sadist.

Skills: Battlesuit/TL10-13; Beam Weapons/TL10 (Laser)-14; Brawling-13; Detect Lies-11; Driving (ATV)-12; Electronics Operation/TL10 (Sensors)-12; First-Aid/TL10-10; Free-Fall-12; Gunner/TL10 (Laser, Missile Launcher)-13; Judo-12; Streetwise-12; Tactics-10; Thrown Weapon (Grenade)-13; Vacc Suit/TL10-12.

Equipment: "Streethawk" Urban Battlesuit (p. RO113); 3 rip saw grenades. Jeep contains vapor filter and other desert survival gear.

Merc/pirate crews will also have specialists (Pilots, Medics, Engineers, Mechanics, Communications and Sensors officers, etc.) with IQ or DX 12 and ST 10; appropriate shipboard skill-14, other skills the same.

Thief

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

Disadvantages: Duty; Greed.

Skills: Acting-10; Area Knowledge (Windermere)-12; Beam Weapons/TL10 (Lasers)-14; Brawling-12; Detect Lies-10; Disguise-10; Fast-Talk-11; Garrote-13; Holdout-12; Knife-13; Pickpocket-13; Running-10; Savoir-Faire-10; Shadowing-11; Stealth-12; Streetwise-12.

Equipment: Scrambler; Monowire garrote; Small non-metallic balisong knife; Nightshades; Varicloth suit.

Lucy

"Lucy" is a computer-generated voice and idealized face: the PCs will never meet her in the flesh, assuming she has any.

IQ 14

Advantages: Eidetic Memory [60]; Very Beautiful; Voice.

Skills: Detect Lies-16; Fast-Talk-16; Interrogation-16; Intimidation-15; Sex-Appeal-15; Streetwise-14.

DRN-88

DRN-88 ("Darwin") is a Cerberus Security and Patrol Robot, with 10-point Legal Enforcement Powers and the following software:

Advantages: Combat Reflexes; Full Co-ordination.

Disadvantages: Duty.

Skills: Administration-14; Beam Weapons/TL10 (Laser, Sonic)-13; Brawling-13; Criminology-15; Cryptanalysis/TL10-16; Detect Lies-16; Drive (Car)-12; Electronics Operation (Security Systems)-14; First Aid/TL10-16; Forensics/TL10-14; Interrogation-14; Intimidation-15; Judo-11; Law-15; Mechanic/TL10 (Robot)-15; Stealth-11; Tracking-13.

Other: Cargo Handling; Datalink; Encryption; Voiceprint Recognition.

Amber

Amber is a "Lemon Angel" (p. RO119) with her empty spaces filled with weapons: a drug injector (p. RO20) filled with Crediline in her left arm; a holdout blaster (p. RO23) in her right arm; a spray-gun filled with nanoburn (p. RO70) in her head; a self-destruct device (p. RO30) and 2 lbs of explosive in her left leg; and a cyberswarm hive (p. RO68), in her body. Her eyes also have the Retinaprinter and Hypno-Eye options.

Advantages: Combat Reflexes; Very Beautiful; Voice.

Skills: Acting-14; Beam Weapons/TL10 (Blaster)-14; Brawling-14; Dancing-13; Detect Lies-15; Disguise-14; Electronics Operation (Security Systems)-14; Erotic Art-12; Fast-Talk-14; Garrote-14; Holdout-14; Hypnotism-18; Interrogation-14; Judo-12; Sex-Appeal-15; Shadowing-12; Stealth-12.

Other: Datalink; Voiceprint Recognition.

Equipment: Clothing belt; Distort belt; Monowire garrote (disguised in jewelry).

Murasama 7 Commando (p. RO115)

Software:

Advantages: Combat Reflexes.

Disadvantages: Duty.

Skills: Beam Weapons/TL10 (Laser)-16; Climbing-12; Detect Lies-16; Drive (ATV)-12; Gunner (Laser)-15; Guns (GL)-15; Intimidation-15; Karate-12; Stealth-15; Tactics-15; Throwing-12.

Other: Datalink; Encryption.

Equipment: Military Dinosaur Laser; 3 ripsaw grenades.

Vulture

Cano's Vulture is identical to the model on p. RO116 except that two of the rockets have mininuke warheads. Software: Gunner/TL10 (Laser)-13, (Rocket Launcher)-13; Navigation-15; Encryption.

Ki-Rin class Patrol Cutter (TL10)

Ki-Rins are small patrol boats, slightly modified from a military shuttle used as an interplanetary troop carrier and medevac. A Ki-Rin has cDR3, two light lasers (4500 shots), and a missile bay with 40 light missiles, passenger seating for 150 people and bunks for 10, and 300 man-days full life support. Usual crew for patrol duty is 10, all troopers, including 1 command, 1 pilot, 1 engineer, 1 mechanic, 1 medic, and 1 gunner.

Hull: 50,000 cf SL Hull, 80 spaces, cDR 3. Size Mod +8.

Systems (Spaces): Medium Bridge/10 (2), Enhanced Sensors/10 (1), Super Thrusters/10 (40), Fusion Power/10 (21), Fusion Core (0.5), Passenger seats/10 (10), Bunk Room/10 (2); 2 Light Laser/10 in Double Small turret (2); Energy Bank/10 (0.5); Missile Bay (1); Automed bay (0.5); Entry module, small (0.5); Cargo Hold (1).

Statistics: EMass 698.25 tons. LMass 699.25 tons. Total cost \$M31.993. Scan 37/36/32. cHP 150. Hull Size Modifier +8. cSM -2.

Performance: sAccel 1.14 G. Air speed 3,873 mph.

Cano's Q-ships

Cano's pirate ships are modified Tanstaaf-class star freighters: one turret has replaced the four Lt. Lasers with Lt. X-ray Lasers, and a missile bay, loaded with heavy reaction drive missiles (14 kinetic, 2 nuclear) takes up one space of the cargo bay.

Welcome to the Boneyard

Anti-Fascist Espionage in the Firestorm-Effect 1950s

by Brian Rogers

Forensic Analysis

The Ossuary are an unknown. An enigma. A rumor even in the world of Cold War espionage. Armed with advanced technology, incredibly well-trained and hiding like a virus among the world's intelligence communities, they fight the remnants of the Nazi cause. Since in the fervently anti-Communist world of the 1950s they can't possibly exist, the best minds in intelligence must assume that they do. The questions are how? And why?

Their origins are known only to themselves. During the Second World War, as agents of the United States Office of Strategic Services (OSS) saw the end of the war become less theoretical, factions formed among the OSS. Some were already looking toward the next war against Stalin and the Red Menace, while others wanted to stay the course and erase the Nazi threat once and for all. When it became obvious that they would be shouted down, these anti-Fascist OSS agents quietly dropped their more strident views.

That was the beginning, but the Ossuary officially formed as an act of defiance against Project Paperclip. When the anti-Fascist OSS remnants saw the USA recruiting the scientists that empowered the Nazi war machine while doing little to stop Otto Skorzeny and his ODESSA organization's decamping to South America they knew they needed to act. In a street café in Versailles a core group of OSS agents dedicated themselves to doing what needed to be done, regardless of the death of their careers. Ironically dubbing their new brotherhood the "Very Wary OSS," it quickly became the Ossuary and their central command the Skeleton Crew. Some members accepted positions in the newly formed CIG (which would become the CIA) while others vanished with impressive amounts of unvouchered OSS funds and technology. The ghost war against the Fourth Reich had begun.

By the 1950s the Skeleton Crew has built their sparse crew of agents into an international presence. The scars of the recent war left key spies willing to consider dual allegiance if it meant making sure Nazi Fascism never again took root. To keep these agents on board, the Ossuary developed a simple, two point mandate and adhered to it religiously.

1. Monitor identified Fascists for signs of renewed Fascist activities.
2. Eliminate any attempts at resurrecting the cause of Fascism.

Obviously point two overlaps with point one, but the division lets the Ossuary keep the loyalty agents who are willing to observe but not execute attacks. More than 85% of their membership are these Point One agents; the remainder are Point Two agents, nicknamed Bonemen.

Point One agents exist throughout the world as members of various espionage services. In most cases, Point One agents are analysts and technicians, but the Skeleton Crew realizes the advantages of Human Intelligence and will recruit promising field agents. While the Ossuary has a precious few dedicated locations (called Joints), their ability to infiltrate other agencies gives them unprecedented access to intelligence and technology.

This parasitic relationship makes Bonemen very well informed and outfitted. Unlike Point Ones, most Point Two agents operate independent from other intelligence agencies, with cover identities that excuse worldwide travel (explorers, industrialists and even entertainers or sports figures). They are also beneficiaries of the early *Bluebird* and *Artichoke* projects: the Ossuary's parallels to those early CIA mind control experiments focused on hypnotism in project *Monument* rather than relying on the chemical and environment-based modification that became MK-ULTRA. This combination makes Bonemen pinnacles of humanity; often a single Point Two agent can handle even the worst of situations.

This is good, because the Ossuary faces an incredible challenge in the form of *die Spinne*: the international Nazi conspiracy, of which ODESSA is just a single leg. Skorzeny, seeing the war's end and accurately predicting Allied actions, spun his web well. Project Paperclip and its Soviet counterparts played directly into his hands, placing his agents throughout both the USA and USSR even as the public denazification of Germany eliminated those whom he did not need or trust. Counting on the Allies barely suppressed hatred of one another, *die Spinne* made trap doors within its enemies and waited for the day it could emerge. Once that occurred, it stretched its legs in the slow process of once again conquering the world. *Die Spinne* can't afford to be discovered by the general public, but to date the only agency that knows of its existence is similarly stymied: if the Ossuary were revealed in the era of premature-anti-Fascism it too would cease to exist. So the ghost war continues . . .

Even without *die Spinne* the Ossuary can serve several ends in an Atomic Horror campaign. In a world of constant paranoia against the Red Menace, the Ossuary reminds players that there are older, perhaps greater threats. They are also a moderately real-world agency dealing with a moderately real-world threat, showing that the Atomic Horror setting need not be all aliens and proton monsters when the ruthless science of the Nazis provides evil enough. Any character with an intelligence background could secretly be a Point One Ossuary agent, and *anyone* of the larger-than-life Atomic Horror heroes could be a Boneman or even a *die Spinne* operative. The Ossuary could work for or against [THEM](#) depending on their mission, and could provide secret support or conflict to the Theoretical Science Foundation from *GURPS Atomic Horror* if their goals ever overlap.

Inside the Skull

Bonemen are the elite Point Two field agents of the Ossuary, and represent the best informed and most dedicated spies on the planet. This still wouldn't be enough were it not for two factors: their technological edge and their *Monument* training.

Point One agents integrate the world's technological advances through a single house. Bonemen are armed with lots of advanced gadgets, ranging from the cigarette lighter cameras, garrote watches and other espionage gear that actually existed in the 1950s to advanced espionage technology made possible by an Atomic Horror setting, such as gauss needlers and micro-computer driven vehicles. *Die Spinne* uses similar equipment, but both groups design their gear with a tendency to explode if mishandled (standard Ossuary firearms, for instance, detonate if the wrong hands pull the trigger more than three times in a minute -- a feature that has saved more than one Boneman from being shot with his own gun).

More important than the gear is *Monument*: All agents get this hypnotic training. It focuses on self-hypnotism to improve memory, perception, reflexes, strength, stamina, and even healing speed. Ossuary agents are giving rapid-but-extensive training under hypnosis, allowing them to call up skills that they hardly remember they knew in a crisis. Given a few moments to prepare and enter their memory monument, an Ossuary agent could suddenly become a competent pilot or remember how to disarm a nuclear weapon. A fortunate side effect of *Monument* lets Ossuary agents compartmentalize their memories, hiding information while observed by lie detection devices, interrogators, and even telepathy!

Not all of the training is in *self*-hypnosis: Ossuary agents can use *Monument* to augment interrogation or seduction attempts, or perform memory alteration on hypnotized subjects. It is this ability that lets the Ossuary select appropriate agents and keep their existence a secret from their various shelter agencies.

The THEM Bone's Connected to the . . .

If you do decide to link the Ossuary to a campaign already containing the Trilateral Headquarters on Energy Management, here are some things to consider.

1. THEM does not know about the Ossuary, and wouldn't be happy if they did. Since the Trilateral Headquarters are concerned with making sure that technological advances stay out of the hands of the Reds, an organization that steals western engineering secrets to outfit its possibly-Soviet agents is not going to meet with their approval.
2. The technological supremacy THEM safeguards is partially built on the work of Project Paperclip scientists whom the sees as guilty parties (if not *die Spinne* agents). While

Die Spinne agents, in contrast, go for a more physical perfection (as befits the Nazi ideal). Their operations leg, the Werewolf, produces men and women whose physical prowess matches the mental power of *Monument*, and often these agents are of high intellect as well. Bred from eugenically perfect stock, trained from an early age and likewise well outfitted, Werewolves are another aspect of human perfection. The Skeleton Crew rightly fears *Monument* techniques falling into *die Spinne's* hands -- Ossuary agents have the self-hypnotic capacity to kill themselves before they allow that to happen.

Bare Bones: Building an Ossuary Agent

Here are some samples of how to build Ossuary Agents in *Silver Age Sentinels* (Or other *Tri-Stat* systems), which should be easily translatable into other systems.

Statistics

All Ossuary Agents should have a human max to superhuman Mind score, with above average Body and Soul scores. In *d10 Tri Stat*, a Mind of 12-15 and a Body & Soul of 6-10 are acceptable.

Characteristic Attributes

Organizational Ties are essential, with the cost based on how powerful the Ossuary is going to be in the setting. If it is just a subplot to the campaign then the cost should be 1 point per level. If the campaign focuses on the activities of Ossuary agents, then it costs 2 points per level. It is the GM's decision on whether points spent in Organizational Ties: The Ossuary carry over to the cover identities of Point One agents or if they have to be purchased separately. As a Global organization, Organization Ties to the Ossuary function 2 levels lower than normal.

Bonemen have several levels of the Gadgets advantage, and be outfitted with whatever spy-tech the player and GM think will be important for that mission. All of the Ossuary's gadgets are designed to be easily concealed and easily destroyed.

Likewise, Bonemen will probably have one or more Items of Power. Their specialized pistols are Personal Use Items of Power costing 6 points with various primary special attacks (Concealable, Hand Held and 20-40 damage with some combination of advantages and disabilities) and a secondary special attack with the Self Destruct disability (usually doing 80-100 points to the holder).

Finally, Point Two agents should have attributes to back their cover identity, such as Wealth, Henchmen or other Organizational Ties.

Power Attributes

All Ossuary agents have Power Flux: Self Hypnosis (10 points/level) at varying levels, letting them model their advanced training and hypnotic abilities. Point One agents will likely have one rank of this with a duration PMV of 5, letting them shift their self hypnosis once an hour. Bonemen will have 3 or even 4 levels of this, with a PMV of 8, so

THEM might help a Boneman deal with ODESSA plots, their ability to draw a line between "our" Nazis and "their" Nazis prevents a meeting of the minds.

3. Ossuary agents followed [James Forrestal](#) in the months leading to his death. If THEM ever discovers this connection, expect all bets between the agencies to be off. The Old Man takes Forrestal's death very seriously.
4. While Ossuary agents are highly trained, they are still human. The risk of a Firestorm Effect becoming an uncontrolled force is enough to keep the Skeleton Crew from ever trusting such a figure with their secret. Thus, most FEs in an Ossuary game will be either random hazards or unwitting agents of *die Spinne*.
5. Finally, the Ossuary operates on an entirely different level of international secrecy than the Trilateral Headquarters. THEM's concerns are too mundane (impossible as that may seem) for the Ossuary and perhaps vice versa.

the powers can be shifted around every minute if need be. A Duration PMV of 8 is the limit, because the power is saddled with the -2 point Defect that it takes 1 minute of concentration to change the Self-Hypnotic state. The Flux Points granted by Self Hypnosis let the Ossuary agent pick up virtually any characteristic attribute that he can justify to the GM, as well as the power attribute of Mind Control with appropriate Defects to model Hypnosis. It is the GM's discretion as to whether this includes the Highly Skilled or Enhanced Statistic characteristics, but some combination of those is recommended to indicate the Ossuary agent's vast hypnotically-induced expertise.

Skills

If you're using skill groups, all Ossuary agents should have at least 1 level in Military, Adventuring and Detective. Using skill groups makes modeling *Monument* easier, as you can spend the flux points directly into skill groups without the math of Highly Skilled or Enhanced Characteristics.

If you're using the regular skill list, several levels of Highly Skilled buy agents a broad spectrum of skills at level 1. Ossuary agents rely on their high Mind score and ability to enhance either their stats or their skills via self-hypnosis over highly focused training. The only skills that should be ranked 2+ are those directly relating to espionage or their cover career.

Defects

Conditional Ownership is a must for all of the Boneman's equipment. Given the secrecy under which they operate, this is the 2 point level, imposing strict conditions on the equipment's use.

Nemesis: *die Spinne* is another common defect. Since Skorzeny's agents would like to see nothing more than to see the Ossuary destroyed, this should be at the 2 or 3 point levels.

Finally, Skeleton in the Closet: Ossuary Agent is assumed. Since the chance of discovery is low but the consequences are severe this is a 2 point defect. Ossuary agents are more willing to let themselves be falsely revealed as Communist spies than risk being more accurately identified.

Making the Skeletons Dance

Just as the Trilateral Headquarters is an attempt to fit the Supers concepts into Atomic Horror, The Ossuary is an attempt to fit the super-spy adventures of James Bond and Nick Fury into the same setting. In the Ossuary you have an ultra-top-secret espionage agency with virtual super-agents fighting a foe as intractable and elusive as Tarot or Hydra. Unlike THEM, there's nothing here that requires Atomic Horror, but the Ossuary is very much a product of that genre's home decade, with its belief in human ability, love/fear relationship with science, and fervent ideological stances. Here are various anatomies of Ossuary games.

The Ossuary could be less internally cohesive than it claims, as it exists on the same anti-Nazi principles that barely kept the Allies together. The ghost war can be another arena for Capitalist & Communist agents to seek minor edges over each other while still fighting a greater enemy. American anti-Communists may be correct in their fears, but much as UNCLE's Napoleon and Illya had to put their personal differences behind them, Ossuary agents have to have faith that their behind-the-curtain allies are really beyond political loyalties. Will a group of Bonemen have a falling out in Argentina when deciding which of them gets to bring home plans for a Nazi V-Wing?

Or, it could be more cohesive, which is a good solution for contemporary players who can't wrap their mind around the social mores of the 1950s. The Ossuary can have a very post Cold War feel, with people of all ideologies, genders and religions team up to punch out reliably evil Nazis. The players can look at the society of the 1950s while knowing that their PCs are comfortably beyond it. Doing so makes the 1950s more chrome than substance, but if you're already at the level of putting the bad guys in green jumpsuits with spider designs on the chest you may as well embrace the unreality of it and barrel forward.

Running an all-Ossuary game runs into the classic ultra-hero problem: what can challenge a group of people this skilled? Just as a 00 should be able to handle nearly any situation, Bonemen are so versatile, capable, and rare that they seldom need to work together. If your PCs are comfortable with a Prime Hero and Sidekick situation this works fine -- the other PCs are Point One agents helping the Boneman out. If everyone wants to play Bonemen, ramp up the difficulty of the challenges accordingly. Such a game should sideline other Atomic Horror threats in favor of the ghost war, but discovering that one of *die Spinne*'s arms are [Antarctic Space Nazis](#) could keep such a game vital for a long time.

Using a classic Atomic Horror setting takes some tweaking; it is likely that only one player character is an agent. This means making use of cover identities, but fortunately Bonemen are exactly the sort of people who star in Atomic Horror films. For the other players play balance could again be a problem. If you're willing to branch out you could have a Boneman working alongside a THEM FE Agent/Minder and an [athletic teenage polymath](#). The early adventures in such a game should revolve around Fascist threats, but the mysteries could grow deeper . . . perhaps *die Spinne* is an unwitting tool for aliens?

This new layer of intelligence opens things for an onionskin Atomic Horror game -- one that begins with a single FE incident, with the survivors becoming Trilateral Headquarters agents. These agents then learn about the Ossuary's ghost war, and perhaps discover that *die Spinne* is just a catspaw (for an *Illuminati* game) or that the Ossuary isn't the only surviving OSS splinter group (leading into *GURPS Warehouse 23*). Secrets within deceptions within lies, and not even the Skeleton Crew knows for sure . . .

Pyramid Review

Dork20 (an accessory for *d20 System*)

Published by [Atlas Games](#)

Written by Noah Sax & Michelle A. B. Nephew

Illustrated by John Kovalic

56-card deck; \$12.95

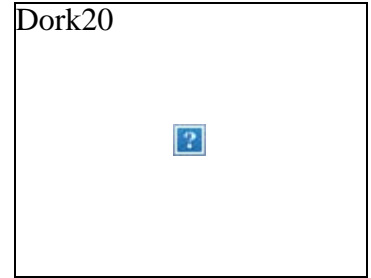
How do you out-munchkin a munchkin? Especially a munchkin roll-playing a munchkin character in that most potentially munchkinly of munchkinish games, *Dungeons & Dragons*? One option is, of course, to cheat; another is the use of loaded dice. But either is most definitely unsportsman-like and unfair. Then again, when *was* the science and art of being a munchkin ever about fairness? Actually, and thankfully, there is *now* a "fair" option available to anyone who abides by the munchkin creed.

Dork20 is a deck of 56 cards, designed to modify the *d20 System* during play on a temporary or one-time basis. As the name suggests, the cards have all been inspired by the roll-playing and roleplaying adventures and style of the cast of John Kovalic's award winning comic strip, *Dork Tower*. Not only that, but all of the cards have been done in full color by John Kovalic, so they are likely to appeal to the *Dork Tower* devotee as much as they are to the *d20 System* gamer. Both will understand the humor inherent in the little cartoons that illustrate the front of each card -- the fans from their knowledge of the strip, the gamer from how the game mechanic modifiers are illustrated. Of course, if the *Dork Tower* fan happens to game, or the gamer likes *Dork Tower*, then double the laughs!

Each card is very clearly done. Below the title, John Kovalic's illustration nicely depicts or alludes to the rules below it. The card backs have the *Dork20* logo on them, over a background that echoes that of the cover for the *Player's Handbook* for *Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition*, and also for the *Munchkin d20* RPG from Steve Jackson Games. Indeed, an alternative use for these cards would be for the *Munchkin d20* game -- literally upping the Munchkin ante!

An appropriate character from the cartoon strip suitably illustrates the effect of each modifier. Invariably, an illustration reflects both the in-game persona and the actually personality of said character. Some favorites included . . .

- "Eye of the Beholder," which forces an opposed Bluff or Diplomacy skill check against the Sense Motive skill between two characters. Should the Bluff or Diplomacy skill succeed, the second character is smitten with the first and is then subject to the effects of the *Charm Monster* spell for an hour. It is illustrated by a love-struck Matt mooning after Gilly, and the quote, "Put the romance back into necromancy!"
- "Insight" grants the character knowledge of something that they had missed earlier, whether from a failed roll or roleplaying opportunity gone awry. The illustration depicts Ken hiding behind a hedge with Igor and asking, "This rabbit . . . it's an avatar of Nyarlathotep, right?"
- "Save It For Later" lets a DM or player save a natural 20 rolled during a game and keep it for use later on. The illustration, accompanied by the quote, "All your dice belong to us!" shows an armored Kayleigh just having locked her PO Box.
- "Seller's Market" makes one possession owned by a player be of extreme value to an NPC such that they will pay double its actual worth to own it. The illustration shows Carson offering up a card marked "Black Lotus" to a desperate and hapless punter. The quote is of course, "It must be mine!"
- "First Strike" provides a bonus to an initiative roll and shows Igor charging into the fray with a cry of, "Sir Talbot leaps in first!"



All right, so the cards are fun and funny, but how do you use them in the game? This is explained on one side of the 8½ by 14-inch rule sheet (the other being taken up by the credits, advertising, and Open Gaming License) in a fairly large-faced font. Quite simply, each player begins a game session with four randomly dealt cards that can be used throughout the game to affect their character and those of the other players. They can also effect NPCs, monsters, and just about everything in the game bar the limitations placed by the DM or given on the card. Anytime during a game when a player has less than four cards, they can gain more by expending experience points, or the DM can hand them out as a reward. The latter method is the only way in which a player's hand can be increased above the limit of four. Two other options are also suggested, one increasing the effective level of the party when determining Encounter Levels and experience point awards, as the *Dork20* cards make the characters much tougher. The other allows the DM to draw cards and use them against the party!

Ultimately, *Dork20* is not an item for the serious game or gamer. Indeed, it would probably send an existing campaign spiraling in a very silly direction, and it would be inadvisable to introduce them without considering the repercussions. Yet if silliness is something that you want, whether to add to an existing game or to increase the munchkinness of an already silly game, then *Dork20* is the perfect addition that is sure to please the Munchkin and the *Dork Tower* fan in all of us.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Review

The Ark of the Covenant

Published by [Inspiration Games](#)

Designed by Klaus-Jürgen Wrede

Art and design by Alvin Madden

English rules development by Jeremy Young, Matt Molen, Guido Teuber, Rick Thornquist, & Greg Aleknevicus

Full-color boxed set with 72 tiles, 45 wooden playing pieces, Ark counter/plastic stand, scoring track, & rules; \$24.95

Up to this point, the [Carcassonne](#) series has been relegated to the old city in France. Inspiration Games, a company dedicated to wholesome family fun, has started producing licensed versions of family games, adding a religious theme. They did this with *Settlers of Catan* (*Settlers of Zarahemla*), and now they've altered *Carcassonne* to fit in *The Ark of the Covenant*.

The object of the game is to score the most points by occupying roads, cities, fields, and temples in the newly occupied Promised Land.

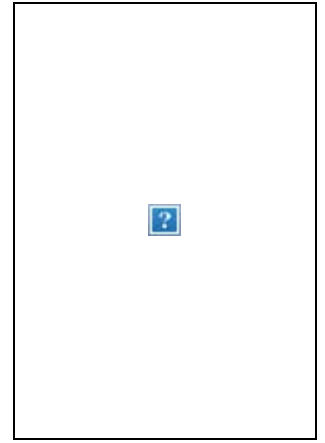
Little has changed in this version from the iterations the fans know and love. As with standard *Carcassonne*, *Hunters and Gatherers*, et al, there are thematic changes. City sections are worth more when they sport a scroll, roads are peppered with valuable oases, and the livestock are now sheep of the fields, threatened by wolves. But basic game play remains the same.

As you lay the game's tiles, you decide on which of these you will tie up your resources. You only have so many pawns in your pool, and must choose which will be placed, temporarily or permanently, in which locations. This much is common to all the *Carcassonne* games.

In addition to the other places of interest, scattered throughout this land of milk and honey are temples (a bit like cloisters, for fans in the know). Claiming control of them allows you to ask repentance for your people -- i.e., you score hefty points. Players must populate the temple tile and the four surrounding orthogonal positions (in, of course, a "cross" pattern) with their followers. This is tricky since completing the cross means filling in a number of road spaces -- unless you're willing to permanently commit your followers to the fields, you'll probably have to pull many of your nearby pawns off the board for scoring purposes, and they won't count toward control of the temple.

The biggest change is the game's namesake: After the first city is completed, the Ark of the Covenant -- a counter that stands upright in its own little plastic stand -- is brought into play. If you forego placing a follower after laying the tile for your turn, you may instead take the artifact out among the people to encourage their faith. You may move the Ark up to five tiles, and every follower it passes scores the owning player a point. It can't backtrack, however, so moving it through your people could leave it close to a grouping of another players' followers.

A new pawn is used as well: the prophet, which looks like the other pieces but is slightly larger. It is used like any other follower for purposes of laying claim to land, paths, or cities. The two key differences are it may only be used



once (it is returned to the box once it has scored, not your pool), and if used in a city it will double the points gained from a completed city. Oddly, the prophet has no added effect around temples.

Although *Ark of the Covenant* is put out by another company, Inspiration Games maintains the same high level of quality in its game components and graphics as Rio Grande/Hans im Glück. The pieces are every bit as sturdy and colorful as those of the originating company (insofar as the desert backgrounds can be colorful). There is one minor, irritating visual oversight. The rule booklet contains pictures of the various tiles, including the temples. They have only one picture of the temple tiles in the "what's in this box" section, but there are two styles of temple tile (the other sneaks into an example). Just telling players how many temples are in the tile mix would have cleared this up -- blink, and you'll miss the "clarification."

The prophet is a nice addition, introducing as it does a small, gentle layer of strategy to a game that's better off not getting bogged down by too many fussy "improvements." The one complaint with it is the pawn's unremarkable look -- it's exactly like all the other follower pieces, save for a slight increase in size. This increase is minimal (to the tune of maybe a couple of millimeters), and something more distinguishing -- a still greater size increase, a different shade, even a different texture -- would make it far easier to spot.

The Ark is similarly understated in its effect on the play of game; while it's a quick way to grab a few points if the tiles aren't falling your way, "control" of the item isn't a sure victory. Moving it can increase your score now, but the advantage can easily revert to an opponent on the following turn. The winner will be the player who knows when to play the game and when to make use of this off-handed opportunity. The Ark serves as a focus for the game's theme, giving it a separate identity without stealing the spotlight from "regular" play.

The added elements provide just enough variation to make *The Ark of the Covenant* enjoyable without it being a simple rehash of its parent game. Owners of the original may find the differences too close to call, but Inspiration Games lives up to its name, proving they have enough grasp of game design to properly tailor this *Carcassonne* clone. They remain true to their source while letting their muse have her say.

--Andy Vetromile

A Change of Heart

by Mike Tresca

Alignment is often the guiding moral or immortal force behind a player character's many decisions. Although alignment is not meant to be a straitjacket that rigidly forces a player character to act in a repeatedly predictable manner, it is an inherent part of the character's personality. Alignment may not be all of the person, but it's an important part of that person.

People change. Sometimes that change comes about gradually, such as the result of a romance between a lawful and chaotic character. But sometimes, a change in ethos can come about in drastic, awesome, terrifying ways -- ways that fundamentally change a character forever. This article examines just what might happen in your character's life to justify that dramatic change.

For Dungeon Masters

This article provides a wellspring of ideas for ways that villains and allies might turn over a new leaf . . . or turn it back. It also provides Will save mechanics for allowing a player character the opportunity to change his alignment at the appropriate time.

For Players

This article is a great way to provide the framework for an alignment change without the old insanity excuse. Too often, player characters change alignment for bizarre, often inexplicable reasons because the player got bored with the alignment of his character. This article provides plausible reasons for why a player character might change his perspective on life and maps out some means of roleplaying the experience.

Atonement Spell

The atonement spell is the most readily accessible means of changing a character's alignment. The spell brings a character back from the "dark side," so it has little effect on good characters becoming evil (although it can help reverse the process). At the Dungeon Master's option, this spell might require a Will save (DC 15) to determine if the player character is sufficiently repentant to change his ways. Ultimately, atonement requires the desire to atone, so PCs shouldn't be able to change their entire world outlook at the flip of a switch. Any one of the other events listed here might be the trigger for the alignment change; the atonement spell simply allows the alignment change to happen immediately.

Falling in Love

It's an old cliché, but a standard trope: villain falls in love, villain repents. But it doesn't always work that way, and can even work in reverse. There's a fine line between lust and love, companionship and obsession, and some characters' ethos may blur those lines even further.

- A succubus tricks a good-aligned warrior into courting her. After the deception is revealed, the warrior becomes bitter about ever making a commitment to any woman (good to neutral).
- A monstrous villain lashes out at the world because nobody was willing to look beyond his gruesome exterior. Upon finding love, he begins to see the value in all life (evil to good).
- A good-aligned bard falls in love with a handsome aristocrat, only to have the aristocrat begin making demands on her that increasingly require more and more selfish acts (neutral to chaotic).

Helm of Opposite Alignment

This cursed item is one of the few immediate, drastic forms of alignment change that does not give the player the choice of switching alignment -- it is mandatory. However, the change need not be obvious. A character that switches from lawful good to chaotic evil doesn't immediately start twirling his moustache and cackling to himself. The character shouldn't feel any different; after all, the individual wearing the helm "thoroughly enjoys his new outlook." At the Dungeon Master's option, any of the below situations might trigger the alignment change. The helm just makes the change mandatory.

Loved One Dies

Although relatives are often in the background, their loss can deeply impact a character. The death or harm of a loved one can bring about feelings of rage, powerlessness, and most importantly, cold vengeance. This kind of trauma can cause a paladin to stray from his noble path or a monk to lash out in rage with his fists. In his quest for vengeance, a player character might lose track of his ethos, doing whatever it takes to avenge his family. If the quest takes long enough, the player character may suddenly find himself without a cause -- and a sharply different alignment from when he started.

There are different levels of emotion tied to such an event. Seeing the loss of a child is likely much more traumatic than hearing about it months later. Similarly, the news of a loathed relative's death is not as gripping as a beloved mother's passing.

- A lawful-aligned character's faith in the law is shattered when his wife's murderer turns out to be a highly esteemed judge (lawful to chaotic).
- An evil bandit's family is murdered in retribution for his failure to repay a debt to another evil baron, causing him to reconsider his livelihood (evil to good).
- A neutral-aligned farmer swears allegiance only to the local lord. Tired of his unwillingness to commit to any cause, the farmer's son joins the military and dies in a suicide mission. The farmer promises to never serve another lord again (neutral to chaotic).

Mental Contact With Alien Being

There are some things that man was simply not meant to know. Thanks to arcane spells, divine invocations, and psionics, it's possible to find out just what the most alien abominations and wretched beasts are thinking and feeling. Being inside a creature's head can be a traumatic experience, so traumatic that it may give the character a new perspective on life.

Spells that might cause such a backlash include detect thoughts, contact other plane, commune, commune with nature, dream, or nightmare. If a particularly strange being (possibly an aberration or outsider) is contacted as the originator or target of a mental contact spell, a Will save (DC equal to 10 + HD of alien creature) might be required. Failure means the player character has the option of suffering the effects of the confusion spell as if cast by the alien being and then changes his alignment to something . . . different.

- A druid contacts a forest with commune with nature. While casting the spell, the forest is set fire by rampaging orcs. The druid is transformed from the experience and becomes a murderous killing machine, hell-bent on killing orcs everywhere (neutral to chaotic).
- A good cleric attempts to detect the thoughts of a person who turns out to be a demon in disguise. The cleric suffers from a form of possession (good to evil).
- A sorcerer casts a dream spell on a target that has gone mad. The sorcerer experiences the warped nightmares that inhabit the madman's subconscious, making him more callous (good to neutral).

Physical Transformation

There's a saying: "Before you criticize someone, walk a mile in his shoes." A physical transformation puts this allegory into literal practice -- it transforms the character into another body entirely. The transformation can range from the subtle (increasing one's attractiveness) to the extreme (spending a year as a slug). Whatever the cause, the transformation can cause a profound change in the victim's outlook on life.

There are several spells that can cause a character to change into another form, including polymorph other, polymorph self, and bestow curse (by cursing Charisma). Depending on how extreme the difference in transformation is, the player character might make a Will save (DC ranging from 10 to 30) or suffer a sudden change in ethos.

- A beautiful, good-aligned fighter spends a year as a hideously deformed hunchback and realizes that society isn't quite as benevolent as she once thought it was (lawful to chaotic).
- A cattle rancher is polymorphed into a cow by a vengeful sorcerer. Will he ever eat beef again? (neutral to good)
- A vengeful druid transforms a destructive fighter into a tree. Once restored, the player character refuses to ever harm another plant again (chaotic to neutral).

Saved by a Different Alignment

It happens all the time: in a life-and-death moment, a person is saved -- through luck, chance, divine intervention, or whatever. The person may be physically rescued from death or torture or alternately, may be spiritually nudged off a self-destructive path. Whatever the situation, the character was heading towards a bad end and someone else, someone of a different alignment, brings about change that ultimately saves the player character.

- A hero sacrifices himself to save an evil character from harm (evil to good).
- A chaotic character reveals a high degree of corruption in a spiritual or secular leader that would ultimately have led the follower to his death (lawful to chaotic).
- A neutral character is brought back from the brink of death by a cleric of a benevolent deity (neutral to good).

Torture

Torture has extreme physical as well as psychological effects. The results of torture can cause a victim to feel cynical about the rest of the world, especially when cases of mental torture are involved (death threats, deprivation, solitary confinement, etc.). Of course, this is often what the torturers want -- to break the spirit of the victim.

Resisting torture's psychological effects can be even harder than resisting physical damage. Player characters can make a Will save (DC equal to the torture's Intimidate check) to avoid suffering a rapid spiral into depression and angst.

- A good cleric prays fervently to his deity for salvation, but ultimately is forced to escape on his own terms. The cleric loses faith in his deity as well as his willingness to rely on others for help (good to neutral).
- An evil rogue is tortured to the point of death and during that time realizes he might never get to enjoy the little pleasures in life. As a result, he mellows (evil to neutral).
- An outgoing bard is no longer willing to take risks with the law after being severely beaten by the watch (chaotic to neutral).

An alignment change towards a particular axis (good/evil, lawful/chaotic) probably should first involve the character shifting towards a neutral stance and then slowly warming up to the more extreme alignment. For a more pulpy-feel, alignment changes might happen drastically. Just ask Darth Vader . . .

Does Wearing Rose-Colored Glasses Make You See Red?

Two months ago, in my report on [NecronomiCon](#), I reported a panel I was on with many industry luminaries, including a gent named Steve Jackson who, as I understand it, runs some game outfit in Austin.

In my column I noted that I disagreed with everyone, including the esteemed Mr. Jackson regarding one question. But, tease that I am, I neglected to say what that question was, nor my answer.

Since then the nervous anticipation that my secret might be revealed has caused great global change; no doubt the capture of Saddam Hussain, the successful touchdown of a Mars lander, and the most successful Christmas shopping season of the past few years can all be directly attributed to this looming revelation. The suspense is over, the secret reve . . . oh, heck with it. Here we go.

The final question posed to this panel was, "Where do you see the gaming industry headed?" The first person to answer -- and, curse me for a fool, I cannot remember who this was -- responded that he saw the biz getting worse before it got better. The advent of cretins (my words) scanning in game products and making them available seems to be a significant threat; so does the number of "garage" operations crowding the field and cluttering shelves with substandard product, threatening to overshadow the Good Stuff.

The same question was posed to most of the rest of the panel, and they pretty much universally agreed with the first speaker . . . so much so that the moderator didn't ask *me* my answer to the question, forcing me to leap from my chair and slide down the table John Woo-style, two hands of dice a-blazing. (Or maybe I just cleared my throat . . .)

Anyway, optimist that I am, I admitted that things might get bad for some companies, but I also saw things getting better on the whole. I expressed my belief that the industry has been in an incredibly creative mode in the past few years, with options and avenues branching out in all directions. In particular, I noted that many of the most successful companies of the past few years have had one thing in common: They created something that was interesting and fun, while not being easily (or affordably) replicated or "stolen."

- The original *Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition* books were less than 20 bucks apiece; the bulk of the system's text was made free legally online, and Wizards of the Coast allowed other companies to make their own supplements royalty-free.
- WizKids has had incredible and varied success with its click-base miniature games, creating games that can be enjoyed by miniature enthusiasts, wargamers, and collectors alike.
- Steve Jackson Games has seen a renaissance of card and board games, including the *Munchkin* series, *Strange Synergy*, and *Dork Tower*.
- Ryan Dancey's [OrganizedPlay](#) has tried to restructure the notion of roleplaying games as being a community, with a subscription-based organization bringing players and GMs together to enjoy scenarios in living settings.

Anyway, all of these companies have created products that are reasonably immune to a thieving moron with a scanner; even if someone *did* scan in the entire *Strange Synergy* game, it would be a royal pain to print it, cut it out, and assemble it. It's much easier - and fun - to simply buy the game honestly.

I agreed with my cohorts in that things *may* well get bad for companies who are trying to create the same old, same old; the hobby as it exists this year is vastly different from the one that existed in 1994, which is different from the one of 1984, and publishers who exist in a model that's a decade or two old may have problems competing. But what was exciting to me was the notion that there is some Next Big Thing out there; I don't know *what* it is, but it's going to be exciting, playable, and expand our ideas of what this hobby is.

Ten years ago the idea of a board game retailing for \$39.95 would have been suicide for most publishers; now the market can bear quality games at that price point. Ten years ago it was unfathomable that the most popular RPG would

give away the bulk of its core game-text for free; now it has become the most significant RPG event of the past decade. Ten years ago miniatures games were relegated to those with the patience and fortitude to paint their own pre-selected sets; now it's common for people to buy painted miniatures, *and* the buyer has the thrill of surprise and mystery added to his purchase. And the rise of the Internet and instantaneous communications has made the idea of community - already important to the gaming world - even more mandatory; at least one company has found a way to make that idea profitable.

And so I see the gaming world moving toward products that are innovative in a way that folks haven't thought of (including myself, since if I thought of it then I'd be doing it and rolling around naked in money), but that offer high utility and extensive enjoyment. (I, for one, would love to see the resurgence of the "boxed" set, replete with goodies and exciting tidbits. However, I suspect the economics of this are still unrealistic currently.) I see lots more fat, interesting hardcovers - many in full color - chock full of good material. I see the escalation of "RPG book as art," first approached gingerly by White Wolf (such as the beautiful limited edition slipcases) and perhaps exemplified recently by *Nobilis*. I see purchasing an RPG book leading to a greater investment in and membership of a community, either by exclusive downloads from a company website (as seen in Necromancer Games' offerings), ability to affect and modify the game world (such as *Torg's* Metaverse idea, only with an Information Age twist), or something else equally exciting.

The gaming world is an industry of innovation and imagination, both from within and without. Regardless of who else may disagree with me, I think the future is out there, waiting to surprise.

--*Steven Marsh*

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Furry Thoughts

A New Race for *GURPS*

by **Kimara Bernard**

The concept of a humanoid feline race is old; in fact, they are one of the common types of alien or fantastic creature around. A famous portrayal is Niven's Kzinti, which are utterly feline, and extrapolate on the differences between ape-like creatures (us) and felines, making the Kzinti both familiar and very alien. And there is the utterly popular anime catpeople, which seem to be all the craze these days.

Most uplifted or coincidental cat-type species in literature seem to focus on a particular type of cat, such as a lion or housecat. This article takes a different tack on that approach: What about all sorts of cats? What about a race based on the menagerie of cats that exist in the real world?

Therefore . . . meet the Sahj, a feline race whose society has different cats on the record. Initially designed for a space setting, the Sahj are appropriate as a counterpoint to humans, or as a race standing on their own, appropriate for fantasy or science fiction. In this background, they are an uplifted race, created millennia ago by a precursor race that is long-gone.

The Sahj assumes a world that has technology, magic, and psionics, although magic can be exorcised easily. The Sahj are written here as a psionic race, but in a more "hard science" campaign, the psionics can easily be dropped without losing the Sahj's sense of distinction. In a more fantastic game, their Taboo Trait limiting Magery can be weakened or removed, or their psionic abilities replaced with magic. An entire world covered in Sahj and Sahj alone can be as flexible a fantasy campaign as any; the various types of Sahj can easily replace the standard fantasy assortment of races.

The Sahj do not believe themselves to be an uplifted race, and would vehemently argue the point with anyone, but the hints do stand strongly. They are divided into five subraces or breeds: Sorah, Skakak, Kohj, Inkahjahj, and Linhj. Each of these will seem familiar, as they're loosely based on a particular species of Earth cat.

Sahj society is based on a strict caste system, based on the individual's breed. Their breeds are significantly different from each other, much more so than the different ethnic groups of humanity. However, they are similar enough that most (but not all) can interbreed, just like real-world cats. This physical quality defines much of the ability to change status.

Sahj Base Template

All Sahj have a basic template, which can also be used to build additional subraces or breeds; perhaps the Sahj themselves are unaware of other groups out there. (Perhaps there are other uplifts lost elsewhere in the galaxy?) All Sahj are coated with a layer of fur, although it varies greatly in thickness and, accordingly, cost. Sahj teeth also vary a great deal, and some breeds have very dangerous jaws while some have a bite no more dangerous than the average human's. All Sahj have tails, but they are merely for balance, no more useful than your terrestrial feline's tail.

Sahj breeds do not have to follow their racial templates strictly; they could lack fur, claws, or psionics, for instance. However, lack of distinct Advantages generally causes the Sahj in question to be thrown out of their caste, becoming part of the dredges of society: the outcasted (see below).

The Sahj also have a Code of Honor that is ingrained in their entire society: they defer to elders or higher ranks except in their own areas of expertise, and they do not use psionic powers without prior permission or against beings not threatening their lives. (There are also strict laws in Sahj society governing this.) A Sahj who violates the Code and is

caught is automatically Outcasted (-10 point Social Stigma), and is likely to lose Status, good Reputation, and Wealth as well, as the government system is very unforgiving against such crimes.

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

Advantages: Normal Teeth [0]; Fur [0]; Claws [15].

Disadvantages: Sahj Code of Honor [-5].

All Sahj (with the exception of the Inkahjahj) have the Taboo Trait: No Magery (0 points). They also have their native breed language at no cost, and 1 point in the Sorah language, Ahj.

The Caste System

The Caste System is a very ancient and rigid set system of duties defined by the breed into which a Sahj is born. In the descriptions for each group, their general caste is listed below their name; this is an overview of the full system.

The caste system of the Sahj can seem brutally rigid from the outside, but to the Sahj themselves this system seems natural in many ways; many of the different breeds really do have predisposition towards the duties of their caste. There are, of course, tragic exceptions, such as the Kohj who wants to be a merchant or artist. By far the most open groups are the Sorah and the Linhj, the former of which have always had the most social mobility and the latter of which vividly recalls prejudice and works against it.

As Sahj society progresses technologically, the outcasted and lower-casted find more ways to escape "the system." In a space-age campaign with other races, the Inkahjahj and Linhj often leave Sahj society to live in other societies. The Sahj who is thrown out of society can always leave home and try to get a job somewhere else. In other eras, they may be people on the outskirts of societies, living in the wilderness and hoping that no one kills them. They will never be welcome at home, and -- similarly to being a sex offender in much of the United States -- the Outcasted status will never be erased from their records. (Although it might be possible that saving someone very important or being a hero to the entire Sahj race might do it.)

Casual Psionics and the Sahj

As stated in the basic package information, the Sahj have strict laws and a Code of Honor against thought-reading. But in addition to this, a setting where the Sahj are common should have a "casual thought shield" society in effect. In other words, virtually all people, psionically trained or no, will instinctively defend themselves from casual psionics. In game effects, this means that any attempt to read minds or use other powers directly on an intelligent target will always require a roll, and there is always a chance the reader will be noticed. Either a race is psionically attuned and simply instinctively defends itself, or a race is completely psionically inert, and is therefore harder to read. Either way, this makes casual abuse harder to attempt.

Additionally, Sahj hate "screamers" (people with Anti-Psi). They are a constant headache and nuisance for them.

Sahj Language

Each breed has multiple languages in an ancient or medieval setting, based on their region. Despite the heavy societal overlap by the three primary breeds (Sorah, Skakak, and Kohj), these three also tend to keep a breed language intact. The mainstream Sahj languages, for trade and travel purposes, are Sorah-based. They're the bulk of the population, and, more important to the spread of language, the merchants.

Most Sahj language are Mental/Hard for non-Sahj, unless they are unusually good at noises such as hisses, strong aspirations (breathy speech), and purr-like noises. The heavy usage of h's in their names indicates the hissing, breathy sounds common in the language. Sharp and short hisses are common in swear words.

By a modern (TL6+) or space age campaign (TL8+), the Sahj have one unified language that is the common speech, Ahj. This is their trade tongue and their political tongue, and all Sahj learn it from youth. It is also the primary Sorah tongue. All other breeds learn at least one breed-specific language as well, which are used in the home. Military Sahj all learn Ak'ji even if they are not Kohj, and any technician, scientist, or engineering-oriented Sahj learn Kalinhj (Linhj breed language) despite breed as well, since these are the languages of those respective professions. The Inkahjahj breed language is Kahihj, but is unknown outside of the breed and linguists, while the Skakak breed language, Ubehij, is spoken by any noble. There are also the archaic forms of each breed language which are used for historical study and religious functions.

Sahj are notorious for "Sahjifying" words for example, the word ending "j" marks a creature as sapient, so the Sahj would call human or a human "hoomanj". This makes a good quirk for Sahj characters.

Sahj Religion

Modern and space-age Sahj religion is henotheistic; they follow one god, with acknowledgement that others can exist. Most Sahj are sticklers for tradition and refuse to give up anything that was in their past; hence, although they believe in a primary deity (translated as "The Guide"), they have lists of ancient gods in all their temples. It's a "just in case we forgot anything" and "don't want to offend history by leaving out the old religion" attitude.

They are also iconoclastic about the Guide; although ancient deities no longer actively worshipped can be portrayed as people (and often are), the Guide cannot be. It is viewed as the ultimate blasphemy in their religion to even attempt to draw a picture of what you think the Guide looks like, and such heresy can cause a person to be thrown into prison for life. Of course, there are multitudes of religious sub-groups under this main belief, as confusing as humanity's.

Of particular note are the major differences of the Kohj and the Inkahjahj. The Kohj are staunch ancestor-worshippers, keeping huge catalogs of their heritages to recite in prayer. The Inkahjahj are still very pantheistic, centered around nature worship; however, they, too are firmly against humanoid portrayals of any of their deities, instead using symbols to represent sites or things sacred to them or one of their particular deities.

In earlier eras, the other Sahj deities are important, and the Guide is more an abstract view of the universe or a powerful deity the society is truly pantheistic in belief. Ancestors are deified, not simply worshipped, especially in Kohj cultures. The iconoclastic concepts are late introductions, mostly from later philosophy, in all their religions. Even the Inkahjahj portray their deities in earlier periods.

Settings

This article gives generalities for setting the Sahj in various time periods, drawing a few examples from the real world. *GURPS Japan* is recommended reading to get a feel of the medieval Sahj; of particular note is the idea of an existing Emperor but warring nobles and clans. Japan's samurai clans become Skakak or Kohj nobles and their warriors. Their renaissance and industrial revolution is pushed forward by the Linhj desperation to become members of society rather than near-slaves on the periphery. They introduce firearms and other devices, obtaining the patronage of the Skakak nobles. During this time period, many Sorah rise up in caste by intermarriage (which is when it first becomes common) or by becoming artists and artisans. The industrial revolution is almost entirely driven by Linhj and Sorah, nearly leaving others in the dust; however, without the government and military provided by Skakak and Kohj, society would not have held up to change. The Inkahjahj cultures, spread across plains and other fertile areas, are driven to the most desolate places as cities and civilization spread. They are always outcasted and outcasts through this time.

The Sahj change drastically once introduced to either other races or space. Although loosely unified, the introduction of other threats or allies (or both) drives them to become truly unified, leaving only the Inkahjahj on the periphery. This latter breed, oppressed even through the most enlightened ages of Sahj culture, only gains a second chance as Sahj leave the home world.

Breeds

Sorah

The Sorah are based off the *felis concolor*, also known as the mountain lion, cougar, and puma. Panther and leopard stock, of the *panthera pardus* type, is also part of the Sorah makeup. The Sorah have the greatest variability in the color and pattern of their fur of any breed. They are thin-framed, averaging about six feet tall and 160 pounds, with long tails about two feet in length.

Sorah constitute the majority of the Sahj population, and are the Commoner Caste. In a pre-industrial (TL4-) society, Sorah are serfs, peasants, and common workers, as well as a fair portion of the skilled labor and merchants. During industrialization, the Sorah are the most common group to be made factory workers, but as they are also the merchant class, they reap the profits of change. Sorah average about 50 to 60 percent of the total Sahj populace.

Sorah are egalitarian, believing in the capability of females. In medieval or fantasy settings, this is because the life of a Sorah male can be brutally short, as they are often the conscripted suicide troops of armies. They therefore allow females to own goods and businesses, and daughters to inherit. However, when there is a male in the inheritance line, unless proven incompetent, ownership defaults to him. This only changes in the modern (TL6+) period.

After TL4 or so, the Sorah as a breed gain the most social flexibility of any group of Sahj. They are able to climb up to the Noble Caste, sometimes by intermarriage and sometimes by pure wealth. The Sorah can freely interbreed with the Skakak and Kohj breeds, although there is a good chance (50%) the child will be sterile. These interbred children tend to have Sorah traits. If the mixed-breed child goes on to have children with a purebred Sorah, Skakak, or Kohj, the children will have traits like the purebred parent.

Sorah follow the basic Sahj template, but in a campaign with psionics, they should purchase at least 5 points of psionic powers. Non-psionic Sorah tend to be looked down upon, and if they also lack ability in other areas, Outcasted (-10 point Disadvantage). It costs 26 points (including the 5 points of psionics) to play a Sahj Sorah, or 11 points to play an Outcasted Sorah.

Skakak

Skakak are the Noble Caste, and cousin to lions (*panthera leo*). They are the elite leaders and arbiters of Sahj society. They hold power, and traditionally this power is given to them willingly. Sometimes Skakak are amid the commoners, but even those reduced to the commoner caste are regarded quite highly. Skilled in psionics, excellent in leadership, the Skakak have a certain quality to them that makes the title of "Noble" fit.

Skakak males are quite tall, averaging about 6' 3" in height, while the females are only an inch or two shorter. Only males have head-fur, which is long and luxurious, and kept in fine shape. They have elongated, pointed ears which are high upon the head. All Skakak have a fine coat of sun-colored fur, which remains short. Skakak, although regarded highly by other breeds regardless of status, regard themselves as fallen if they do not have some sort of leadership or warrior position. Even the females are highly competitive.

In a pre-TL4 society, Skakak are every bit the good and bad of nobility, but generally a bit arrogant and conceited. They command their own elite Skakak "knights"; the Sahj homeworld has the kashka (a very horse-like mammal -- use horse statistics) and Kohj warriors. The nobles vary in the same way human nobles did, ranging from cruel and demanding despots to beneficent rulers. Their competitive streak makes them dangerous; although early in Sahj history the bulk of society become united under "the Emperor", this unity is not unlike the medieval European Holy Roman Empire or Japan's Warring States period. Most Skakak (male or female), especially of the pre-TL4 society, are experts with swords and lances; claws just don't have range!

In a more modern period -- after Sahj society managed to calm down, somewhat unify, and go through an industrial revolution -- the Skakak are still the ruling class, but not completely dominant. They simply do not have the command

of mercantile and technological ventures that the Sorah and the Linhj do. However, their positions are more than ceremonial; Sahj society believes in the Noble Caste. Most Skakak go through military training in their youth, taught both to fight and to lead troops, and are the supporting caste of the governmental bureaucracy and its military. Commoner Caste Skakak are often the victims of political sabotage and familial infighting; despite their noble qualities, they are as political as any.

Although not required, Skakak should have the skill Karate Art (M/H). This represents the ceremonial claw-fighting which Skakak do at many ceremonies and meetings. They also tend to have other ceremonial combative skills and social skills, which can be reflected with other skills.

Skakak have the standard Sahj package, plus the following: HT+1 [+10], Sharp Teeth [+5], Telepathy 1 [+5], Status +1 [+5], and minimum Sense of Duty (to friends and acquaintances) [-5]. They also have the Skills Telereceive, Telesend, and Mind Shield at IQ-2 [3]. Most Skakak have a higher Sense of Duty than that, and often a higher point value Code of Honor. It costs a total of 34 points to play a Skakak. A Commoner Caste Skakak would not have Status +1.

Kohj

Kohj are the Warrior Caste and descendant of tigers (*panthera tigris*). Their caste and standing are without doubt; they are the largest and toughest of the Sahj. Standing an average six-and-a-half feet tall, with larger claws than other Sahj, they are impressive and powerful. Their fur is striped, with black stripes on gold and orange fur. Their head-fur never gets long, but in general their fur is thicker than other Sahj. They have ears which are not quite as elongated as other breeds, and are somewhat rounded, but also are high on the head. There is some variance on the fur colors, with lighter and darker coloration being normal. The Kohj do have near- albino members, who are white furred and chocolate striped, always with blue eyes; there is one Irihkohj ("white Kohj") for about every 50,000 Kohj or so. In ancient times (TL4-) they are regarded as prophets or great warriors, but there are no significant differences other than fur color. (Irihkohj are not albinos, and do not have the Albinism disadvantage.)

In ancient times, the Kohj are an independent group, both a noble and warrior caste, and frequently clash with the Skakak and Sorah. However, although Kohj are great warriors, they are not as good at leading as the Skakak, and accordingly their status fell over time. By the Sahj's medieval period (TL3-4), most Kohj have sworn fealty to a Skakak and become devoted to simply being a warrior caste. In modern times (TL6+), they are the front- line troops, although since the Sorah outnumber them, they are certainly not all of the military. They have no qualms about modern weaponry, but still prefer to close to melee if possible. They know they have an advantage over most other creatures. Kohj warriors are pledged to branches of their local military rather than individual nobles, but the oaths are remarkably similar. Even during times of peace, they are pushed to train for the next potential battle.

Kohj males and females are taught to fight, in equally rigid programs. The females are generally taught more defensive tactics, to defend bases and homes, while males are taught more aggressive tactics. Ownership, money, etc., defaults to females in families, as males are assumed to be busy training or fighting. Unmarried males are allowed to be independent or ask a female family member to manage their worldly goods. In modern times, this gives Kohj females a great deal of power and freedom. They tend to have an easier time "breaking the mold" of being a simple warrior, and pursuing other interests. Kohj males tend to gravitate towards protection and other pseudomilitary jobs; they have been taught little else.

All Kohj have military duties, regardless of time period. Every last Kohj, male or female, is trained as warriors. Those who fail in their duties tend to take on near-suicide missions to redeem themselves to do otherwise is to fail their race. . . . This is the reason for their higher Code of Honor than the typical Sahj. They are considered psionically weak by many Sahj, but this is a misconception: they tend to focus on one or two powers rather than branch out.

All Kohj have a minimum of 10 points in Brawling, Karate Art (see Skakak, above), Guns (at least two types), Armory, and any other appropriate combat skills the player desires. In a pre-modern game, the required skills are instead Brawling, Karate Art, Broadsword or Two-handed Sword, Bow, Staff, or Armory. (They may take the Uneducated disadvantage to explain a lack of these skills). Kohj can interbreed freely with Sorah and Skakak, but

there is a 50% chance for the children to be sterile. For this reason and because of their militant bent, the Kohj highly dissuade marriage outside of caste and breed.

Kohj have the basic Sahj package plus the following: ST+2 [+20], HT+1 [+10], Combat Reflexes [+15], Sharp Claws [+10], Sharp Teeth [+5], and Fur [+4]. They have the Kohj Code of Honor [-10], Sense of Duty (all Sahj) [-15], and the Taboo Trait: Psionic Limitations [0] (see below). In a campaign with other alien races, Kohj have Intolerance toward one of them. It costs 75 points to play a Kohj, counting the 10 points of skills. Kohj are limited to Power 3 or less in all psionic Power groups other than Psychokinesis and ESP.

Inkahjahj

The Inkahjahj are the plains-dwellers of the Sahj, preferring a lower technology and a reticent life, heavy with strange traditions. They are based on the *acinonyx jubatus*, or cheetah, and have lost the fewest of their animal traits. They are relatively tall for Sahj, averaging about 6'-6'2" for both males and females. However, they are slightly hunched, making them appear a few inches shorter. They are also unique amid Sahj in that they have not lost their capability to run on all fours. An Inkahjahj is nearly impossible to tell from his non-sapient cousin when running. Inkahjahj fur varies a fair amount, some with black stripes and some with black spots, but all are brown-yellow with darker patterning. These patterns are distinct enough that many Inkahjahj clans can spot even distant relatives by fur pattern.

The Inkahjahj culture is not unlike the plains-dwelling Native Americans; they are wandering hunters and gatherers, preferring to move about their plains unimpeded. In ancient times, this is not an issue; they simply avoid the other Sahj, and are classified as "savages" by other breeds. As the other Sahj breeds spread, the life of an Inkahjahj becomes harsher. They refuse to incorporate into the Sahj caste system, and flee to more and more obscure parts of the world. Combined with their unique trait of being capable of magic, not just psionics, they are Outcasted in all time periods of Sahj history. Like many nomadic cultures of Earth, the Inkahjahj ways are slowly being blotted out. (If the ability to use magic is allowed to all Sahj, the Inkahjahj should be better at it than others, and this may improve their social situation.)

As technology marches on, and the industrial revolution gets into full swing, some Inkahjahj are forced into society as serf or slave labor. Most of these sad souls languish and ultimately die out, often because of disease or cramped quarters, which drive them mad. By the modern and space-faring eras, the Inkahjahj are a dying breed, down to less than half a million members in a species of billions. They simply do not cope well with modern technology and cities; for instance, every last Inkahjahj is claustrophobic, and it can take a lifetime for them to fight this off. They have never been fond of technology, viewing as an unnecessary crutch, and their systems reject cybernetic implants and other medical technologies, making them even more wary. (Many have technophobia.)

Inkahjahj are proud to remain outcasted. Although they regard some aspects of Sahj society as good in particular, deference to elders and casual thought reading remain disliked in their society they are in general disgusted with their cousins. Most do not regard themselves as anything more than nominally Sahj. This is confirmed in their eyes and others by the fact that they cannot easily interbreed with other Sahj. The only interbreeding that results in any children are with Sorah, and the child is always sterile. This further drives them from Sahj society. In a campaign focusing on discovering history and precursors, it can be posited that the Inkahjahj are an incomplete uplift project, a point founded on the above facts.

Although they dislike technology and are unlikely to like using it, they often have technological skills related to survival-useful items. They hate heavy armor, space suits, and anything else that completely covers them, a problem related to their claustrophobia.

Inkahjahj have the following in addition to the Sahj basic package: additional DX+2 [+30], HT+1 [+10], Perfect Balance [+15], Enhanced Move 2 (Running) [+20], Claustrophobia (Severe) [-30], Social Stigma 2 (Outcasted) [-10], Cyber-Rejection [-10], and the Taboo Trait: Magery 1 only (0 points). They have the Skills Survival (Plains) at IQ-1, Spear at DX-1, and Spear Throwing at DX 1 [+3]. They may buy the Claustrophobia down to Mild at character creation, but it takes time and roleplaying to remove it entirely. It costs 39 points to play a Sahj Inkahjahj. In a pre-TL8 society, an Inkahjahj costs 49 points to play, as Cyber- Rejection is not applicable. In a campaign with other

magic-using Sahj, the Taboo Trait should be removed.

Linhj

The Linhj are, like the Inkahjahj, a Sahj breed on the edge of acceptable society, keeping to their own ways. Unlike most Sahj, however, the Linhj question society at each turn, and stand in a unique position to alter the society in ways they see fit. They continually argue with the rigid regime of the Sahj caste system and any strongly held traditions. They are technologically inclined . . . or rather, they love technology in all its forms. Most Sahj think all Linhj are perfectionists, and prefer technology over their inborn psionic abilities -- a stereotype based on truth. A Linhj born without psionics does more than fine in their society, as long as he proves his intellectual capabilities.

Before the great birth of technology Linhj are outcasted, rejects on the edge of society. Most Sahj prefer temperate or tropical climates, but the Linhj cling to cold and subterranean environments. (Linhj are the entire reason Sahj have air conditioning systems; their natural comfort range is from 15 to 70 degrees Fahrenheit.) They have become instrumental to the Sahj's industrial revolution and evolution, though, at first forced by the incursions of their unfriendly cousins and later by bribing their ways up with their devices. Past TL4, the Linhj are real movers and shakers, promoted up to the Commoner caste, and finally given their own niche, the Engineer Caste, by TL7. They have long memories, though, and their ancestors' tales to remind them of their former positions before they proved their worth to their fellow Sahj. They often demand respect from those around them.

Linhj are very short, only averaging about 4'8" for the males, an inch shorter for females. Most Linhj have white fur with some striping, especially about the face, with the rare Linhj being red or orange furred -- Irihlinhji. In ancient times, Irihlinhji were sometimes regarded as potential heroes or delegates to the other breeds, but there are no real differences other than a difference of coloration.

Linhj are proud of their facial fur and take good care of it, but do not sport long head-fur in back. They have very pointed ears with wisps of (generally) dark hair at the ends of them. Pulling these hairs is the highest insult in their culture! Albinism is more common amid the Linhj than any other, although it's sometimes hard to tell, since they are white-furred anyway the only real difference is faded or absent striping.

Linhj enjoy bucking the system. The Linhj of the modern and spacefaring societies enjoy their power within the Sahj hierarchy, because it doesn't matter how good a leader a Skakak is or how great a warrior the Kohj is if their ships or their weapons are broke, they have to come to the Linhj! This gives them something of a superiority complex. Linhj are also much more apt to like any non-Sahj, viewing encounters as opportunities to trade ideas.

All Linhj have technical skills, as taught to them growing up; it's their ticket out of a lousy cave in the Sahjis antipodes and into a nice air conditioned condo. However, they diversify quite a bit in their skills. Although many are engineers, yet other Linhj work in medical fields, construction, and other technical or scientific enterprises. It's the rare Linhj that doesn't admire building and technology.

In addition to the standard Sahj package, Linhj have ST-2 [-15], DR +2 [+6], Temperature Tolerance +4 versus Cold [+4], Sharp Teeth [+5], Versatile [+5], Mathematical Ability [+10], ESP 1 [3], Reduced Move 1 [-5], Sahj Code of Honor [-5], Odious Racial Habit: Enjoy arguing with the System [-5], and Intolerance: Peoples who like heat [-5]. They must have a minimum of 5 points in Scientific Skills. It costs 29 points to play a Sahj Linhj, 26 without psionics.

Government

Below TL5, the Sahj system of government is a city-state system not unlike ancient Greece, with Skakak or Kohj making up the warriors or elector-nobles of a city. Over time, the system became imperial. Like ancient Japan, however, this system fails and the Emperor loses power. This causes the shift to a large-scale feudal system, in which ultimately the Skakak come out on top as universal rulers. The advent of technology pushes the individual feudal states towards more organized government, including a loose democratic system in which individual Skakak (or Sorah, later) are elected to pseudonoble positions. Ultimately, upon arriving in the space age and encountering other species, they

reinstate the Emperor as an elected position, picked by a Great Council consisting of representatives of every breed. The bulk of Sahj society is very traditional, and they reached back to ancient roots to develop a universal system of rule. Most of the modern Sahj states and organizations have their predecessors in either the feudal states or even the most ancient city-states, while the Emperor is elected from a Royal Family that theoretically dates back thousands of years.

The final form of government is therefore a constitutional monarchy. Instead of a "constitution with rights," though, the Sahj have the Declaration of the Castes, which lists the traditional duties of the breeds and "amendments" allowing changes in society. Technically, any breed can move to any caste under the law; there is simply enough prejudice to keep this from actually happening. All breeds do have representatives spread throughout the system, not just the breed representatives, although the outcastes and barely casted (the Inkahjahj and Linhj) only have a handful. The general populace elects all of these representatives. A breed elects its breed representatives, while state and colony representatives are elected by their constituents.

The Emperor is chosen by the Great Council from the Royal Family, although the previous Emperor has a strong opinion which he expresses. Traditionally, the eldest son is groomed to inherit the position, but if the Council can declare him incompetent. They will then move on to another of the Emperor's children, then the Emperor's nephews and nieces, and so forth. "Emperor" is just a title there have been more than one Empress. In addition, although there is one, primary Royal Family, there are also closely related families from which an Emperor may be selected if there are no acceptable members in the primary family. In this case, the primary family changes as well. This is very rare.

The local-level governments hint very strongly at the ancient nobility system. Most positions have noble titles, and most higher up positions are held by Skakak, with the rare Kohj or Sorah holding a position of authority. The exception is the military; in the military system, the leadership positions are split about 60/40 between Skakak and Kohj.

Campaign Ideas

The All-Sahj Campaign

- In ancient times, Sorah rebels must confront brutal Skakak and Kohj warriors, a la Spartacus.
- An industrial revolution-focused game, such as *Steampunk*, with berserk Linhj scientists and engineers frantically trying to outdo each other for noble support, status improvements, and raw money.
- An Inkahjahj tribe, wandering the lands, attempts to find the traces of the lost civilizations of their earlier eras, when they attempted to settle down, before being driven out into the wilderness yet again. These ruins could hold the secrets to powerful magic unknown to all others.
- A classic fantasy-style game focusing on a group of medieval Sahj trying to stop Kohj raiders from ruining local lords, while trying to make heads or tails of the strange weapons the Linhj are trying to sell to them.

Sahj Mixed with Other Races

- A mixed-species scout ship runs across a world with semi-sapient creatures remarkably similar to the Sahj. Perhaps they're a lost breed? How did they get here? Why are they here? Maybe something is wrong with the planet itself, and they're not simply not evolved, but devolved.
- A splinter group of Kohj has broken with the traditions of the last thousand years and has declared itself independent of all governments, founding a militant colony on an obscure world. This is a breach of all the ancient pacts, and a blemish on Sahj society but how can they convince the splinter group to come back into the fold?
- An Inkahjahj tribe has decided to leave the homeworld. They've saved up enough money to pay a fortune to the ship that will take them to a plains-covered, friendly colony world. It seems the ideal job for a down-on-your-luck ship, until all those Inkahjahj are stuck onboard, claustrophobic and miserable. Of course, disaster sticks the ship in space for far longer than the voyage should be, supplies run short, and the Inkahjahj are making hell for the crew. Can sanity and supplies hold out for everyone?

* * *

Special Thanks the Archangel of Archives, who is kind to me even when I'm nagging her about writing and ideas, and the hubby Kayn Bernard, who changed the Sahj spellings to better fit linguistic logic and my ideas of pronunciation.

The Universal Breakdown Manual for *GURPS*

or, "What's in a Machine?"

by Eric Funk

"The universe is made of stories, not atoms."

-- Muriel Rukeyser

GM: *"Ok, your tank is hit; 700 points of damage get through armor, and you must make a Hazard Control Roll at -6."*

GM: *"After the hit rocks the ship, your distraught chief engineer calls the bridge, 'Captain, that last hit damaged the engines; we lost our main plasma regulator pump. Until we can replace it, I can only promise you 50% power.' "*

* * *

Do either of these situations sound familiar? The first example is concise, and perhaps a little too informative. Unless it directly affects the PC via a neural link, that character will probably not be in a position to know all the details about damage to the vehicle. "Minor damage" to a vehicle may mean that only the cooling system is damaged, so there's no immediate threat (from inside). An attack that barely penetrates armor might only knock out some backup systems, not impairing any functions -- for the time being.

Every component of a vehicle ceases to function at some point or another. Weapons fire can hit sensitive equipment. Bugs and inconsistencies in maintenance, scheduling, and operation software can run a part out of factory specs. Good old carelessness and neglect can just as easily push parts to a premature old age. Radiation and bombardment by solar and atmospheric winds and waves will eat through anything, given time. Reckless piloting and battle damage can overload even the best self-regenerating components.

Now that the heroes broke something, the real adventure begins: finding a replacement (which is easier than repairing it . . . usually).

A Place for Everything

"We adore chaos because we love to produce order."

-- M.C. Escher

From Steampunk submarines and modern automobiles to starships, engineers, mechanics, and scroungers will encounter a myriad of components with brand names, popular names, and slang attached to them. Every vehicle moves different substances around within itself to function and/or provide environmental control for its occupants. One will find examples of all combinations of tables "B," "C," and "D" within a modern automobile (with the noted exception of table item B6!). The point of all this is to be able to provide the GM with ideas of components so they can better be described to players, and to get them more involved in the game.

When a part is damaged, roll on Table A to determine what grade of component it was. Roll once each on tables B, C, and D to determine the exact nature of the part that must be replaced or repaired. Each result carries a modifier to the Scrounging skill, except Table A. Its modifier is handled by the Size of the component (see below for details).

Table A: Importance (roll 1d)

- 1-2** Backup/Reserve: Tiny units that you hope you never need. Perhaps 10-25% of full capacity.
- 3-4** Secondary/Auxiliary: Small units that may have 33-50% of normal capacity.

5-6 Primary/Main: Your front line units, what you depend on.

Table B: Scrounging Modifier from Component Examples (roll 1d)

- 1** +2 Harmless Gas Low pressure air, perhaps with harmless particles suspended (dust)
- 2** +1 Harmless Liquid Low-pressure water, waste or mildly toxic coolant like windshield wiper fluid
- 3** 0 Moderately Dangerous Liquid High-pressure Water, Toxic Coolant
- 4** -1 Moderately Dangerous Gas Hard Vacuum, or high-pressure (invisible) CO, CO2
- 5** -2 Flammable Liquid Hydrogen Gas/Liquid, Gasoline, Liquid Propellant
- 6** -3 Burning Corrosive Plasma, High-pressure Steam, radiation/Iodine Gas

Table C: Scrounging Modifier from Purpose (roll 2d)

- 1-3** **1** +3 Relay/Rifling
- 2** +2 Drain/Relief/Emitter
- 3** +2 Fill/Feed/Intake/Collector
- 4** +1 Limiting/Flow/Regulator/Flux
- 5** +1 Filter/Separator/Distributor/Phase Discriminator
- 6** 0 Cooling/Retarder
- 4-6** **1** 0 Heating/Accelerator
- 2** -1 Pulse/Phase Regulator
- 3** -1 Fusion/Combining
- 4** -2 Pressure/Balance/Expansion
- 5** -2 Processor/Reclamation/Generator
- 6** -3 Neutralizing/Stabilizer

Table D: Scrounging Modifier from Component

- 1** +2 Tank/Tube/Conduit/Pipe/Battery
- 2** +1 Sensor
- 3** 0 Valve
- 4** -1 Port/Vent/Intake
- 5** -2 Regulator
- 6** -3 Pump

For those who claim to have a vehicle with no moving parts, this alternate "Table B" for particle-based components may better suit the situation:

Alternate Table B: Scrounging Modifier from (Sub-)Atomic Particulate Component Examples

- 1** -5 Photon
- 2** -6 Electron
- 3** -7 Proton
- 4** -8 Neutron
- 5** -9 Neutrino
- 6** -10 Antiparticle (or other exotic)

These tables are arranged in order of complexity/size so that one could more easily estimate a price and rarity for a replacement. A suitable/compatible replacement "small air drain pipe" is logically simpler to find than a "large plasma processing pump."

Locating Parts

"To invent, you need a good imagination and a pile of junk."

-- Thomas Edison

The Scrounging skill (p. B67) will still be invaluable in finding these components. Subtract the part's Size Modifier from the total Scrounging Modifier, and modify this by the City Job Modifier (p. B195) to represent the chance of the part being available, or easily manufactured. If you really want to find it (and you don't mind the publicity), the advertising rules could also apply. Finally, apply cross-TL Penalties (p. B185) to find parts relative to the dominant TL in your area; finding a TL8 watch battery in a TL5 African village is near impossible, while finding a Model T (TL6) engine is just hard in a TL10 world. After all the knowns are tallied, the GM may add additional penalties or bonuses if the part itself is rare in this area (such as trying to find British auto parts in Japan).

Example 1: The Waddling Duck, a large 18-wheeler, has lost its Primary Vacuum Retarder Sensor (Emissions sensor) near a small city of 50,000 people. The GM rules that the part is between 0.3 and 1 cf (Size Mod -2). On his own, the driver would have a -2 (main) -2 (vacuum) +0 (Retarder) +1 (Sensor) +2 (small city) -(-2) (part size) for a total of +1 bonus to the Scrounging Roll.

Example 2: The One-Winged Angel, a delta-wing rocket glider built in someone's backyard was being tested. During the test, a secondary Proton (-7) Expansion (-2) Regulator (-2) was irrevocably damaged. Fortunately, this is a small part (Size Mod -2, which becomes a +2 bonus), and the yard is next to a major city (+3), for a net -6 to Scrounging rolls.

This is all scaled for a private civilian trying to access possibly dangerous technology. For individuals who are part of corporations or military units using official channels, the hunter must roll against his Administration skill, with a bonus equal to his Administration (or Military) Rank. A "professional" scrounger will then use his own Scrounging roll, modified by the Administration success and the perceived need of the part. Signatures from higher-ups can act as increased "Money Offered" (p. B195) (with a bonus equal to the difference in Rank over the supplicant's); this increases the amount of money actually paid for the item accordingly. Other methods for requisitioning goods in military are described in sidebars of p. SO 94-97, such as obtaining cash vouchers and using Patrons. These rules could just as easily apply to large organizations, which may (or may not!) have their own private security force(s).

Scrounging is the skill of locating items, and it is then up to one's Merchant, Thief, or Administration (in the case of a hierarchial organization) skills to acquire it. Once a component is located, a successful Engineer or Mechanic Skill Roll (of the appropriate Speciality) is required to assess the [current quality](#) of the item (assuming this is not a mail-order outlet). The local value of a component increases with the size and complexity (e.g. higher table numbers) but decreases the more common an item is, and also decreases with a higher bulk demand (because of greater mass production). To perform the actual maintenance or repairs, see p. VE146-147.

Taking Damage

"I have this terrible pain in all the diodes down my left side."

--Marvin the paranoid android

Ruggedized components (p. VE12 and p. VE27) enjoy a 100% increase in hit points (p. VE 183) at the cost of a 50% increase in volume, mass, and cost (see the Links at the end of this article for a good metric to account for Starship Redundancy). They also can resist shutting down when the section of the vehicle they are in takes damage. Instead of a raw 50% price, volume, and mass increase with no performance change but durability, an alternate viewpoint (that expands on the text on p. VE12) suggests that the "ruggedized unit" now consists of

1. The original main unit (100% original size)
2. A ~50% full capacity secondary unit
3. A ~20% full capacity backup unit

All three of these items fit within the new "ruggedized" volume (which is 150% of the original component's volume).

The 20% overlap consists of mutual access space, and control, bypass, and I/O lines that cannot be used simultaneously.

The end result is that you have two fallback measures with enough power to keep going in different levels of emergency. If the damage was inflicted by a precision shot (kinetic, impaling beam), a generous GM could roll d6 and refer to the table.

Hitting Subcomponents (roll 1d)

	Fraction of normal HP	System	Avg Relative Size Mod
1-3	100%	Main "Normal"	
4-5	33-50%	Secondary "Normal"	-1
6	10-25%	Backup "Normal"	-2

How Not To Put Out A Fire

"The difference between a violin and a viola is that a viola burns longer."

-- Victor Borge

Once a component is damaged, it may catch on fire (p. VE184-185). It may spread the damage over to nearby parts if the fire is not contained properly. Electrical fires (from overloads) should only be extinguished with inert gas or dry chemicals. Ordinary fires (wood, paper, cloth) should be stopped with only foam, water, and dry chemicals. Flammable liquids can be extinguished by any of the above except water, which helps spread the fire. As described on p. VE185, the fire extinguishers all seem to use inert gas except for the TL6 "Fire Extinguisher System."

There are a couple of concerns that must be addressed with respect to the different fire suppression systems. The first is that if a system uses anything other than inert gas (CO₂, halon) there is a mess to clean up that may interfere with equipment and create navigation/work hazards. The second is that if an inert gas system is used sufficiently to quench a fire, then it has replaced all the oxygen in that area. This means that any air-burning device (or life form) in the immediate area will choke. Both will Suffocate (p. B122) until the air can be replaced (from seconds to minutes). A major part will have the same HT the vehicle/structure it is in; the GM may simply set its HT equal to the element's TL or the vehicle's HT. (For more details, see Breath Control on p. B49 and p. B91. For specific effects of a CO₂ overdose, see p.CII 136.) Air-breathing components will keep running until they "choke," and then just stop working instead of taking damage. Safety provisions could be put in place to prevent the suffocation of crew members in the area. On the other hand, if there is a crew member in the area, and that prevents an extinguisher from activating, the fire will continue to burn unhindered. This is yet another reason why many starship crews don space suits and depressurize the ship at the first sign of combat.

Adventure Seeds

"It's time to start living the life you've imagined."

-- Henry James

- **Parts as MacGuffins:**

- They walk into the office of a business associate as per their appointment and find them dead, holding a _____.
- The party is hired to haul/protect a cargo consisting of a box/single huge/small _____. They may have unusual storage requirements, such as in a sealed vacuum, flooded with Xenon gas, or the like. Naturally the container will be damaged somehow. A flaw in the metal will run because of the vehicle's vibrations.
- The heroes have a shipping contract, as above, but the components are hollow and contain minimal life support for the expected duration of the voyage, plus 10%. The stowaways could be spies, illegal immigrants, or eco-lovers, or some combination thereof. Unusual delays at departure will force the time to

run out, and they will be forced to emerge. All will probably offer a handsome sum (or whatever they have on hand) to keep quiet if discovered. What happens next is up to the crew's reactions.

- As above, but the constituent contains mold, fungus, harmful bacteria, viruses that eat only copper or silicon. Perhaps a treasure map or [critters](#) are found within, or perhaps worst of all, a [court summons](#) for the crew.
- The PCs order a component as part of their routine, but instead, they get an _____. They must put off replacing an aging/damaged part until a new one can be returned. Depending on the company, they may not accept a return if someone signed for the delivery!
- A "compatible" third-party component isn't quite as compatible as the manual would suggest. Of course this is not apparent until the part is under stress . . .
- After a minor emergency ends, an old fire extinguisher was used, and it discharged some chemical agent that is reacting with old chemical residue from a cleaner, creating an acid, perhaps unnoticed until something fails.
- New "global" emissions standards were released quietly some time ago, and the deadline is only making news because at the last moment because the ruling authority increased fines for non-compliance to exorbitant heights (rumors may fly as to why, where the money is going, and the interrelations). Most the large corporations have upgraded already, but others are lagging. The adventurers are either hired to refit a corporate "fleet"/building or must themselves upgrade. The focus can be on acquisition of the "environmentally friendly" part that now is in extreme demand, the act of replacing the device itself (perhaps the location is in the middle of an industrial park or city and the owners aren't well liked), or even the disposal of the old parts (perhaps they have noxious, toxic, or even radioactive residue).
- As above, but it's a factory recall instead. Customs agents will enjoy people trying to ship large and/or radioactive parts back to the manufacturer to refund.

Other Suggestions for Integration

Old and unusual auto parts can make good props. The Internet is an excellent resource to find auto enthusiasts who enjoy documenting each "superior" part of their vehicles. See the Links section below for one.

Links

"Everything you can imagine is real."

-- Pablo Picasso

Useful Pyramid Articles

- ["Appendix Z: Starship Troubles"](#) by David Morgan-Mar -- For starship quirks
- ["Appendix Z: What's Wrong With It?"](#) by Matt Riggsby -- For component quirks
- ["Care and Feeding of Big Rubber Monsters"](#) by John Karakash -- How to control critters
- ["Appendix Z: Red Tape Triumphant"](#) by Michele Armellini -- How to wrap the party in red tape
- ["GURPS Magic Tech"](#) and ["More Tech Magic"](#) by John Ross

Useful [Journal of the Traveller's Aid Society](#) Articles

- ["Three Well-Described Infestations"](#) by Amanda Dickerson
- ["How to design ships with different levels of Redundancy"](#) by John Grigni
- ["The Advantages And Disadvantages Of A Ship: Ship Patron"](#) by Tom Bont

A good article describing contemporary spacecraft systems and subsystems can be found at the University of Texas Space Grant website -- <http://www.tsgc.utexas.edu/archive/subsystems/>. Here one can peruse the dozen or so main systems and their subsystems and requirements. Of particular relevance to this article are those of the thermal and life support systems.

Fire Safety is important. -- http://nh.essortment.com/firesafety_pyh.htm

There are many chemicals used to fight modern fires. Here are just a few examples -- <http://www.tagalder.com/tagi-fireequip.htm>

Images of automotive parts -- <http://www.carcentral.net/>

Norgruk Niceaxe

by Phil Masters

Once, not so long ago, life was pretty good -- and pretty straightforward -- for Norgruk. He was a member of a valiant warrior culture, with a middle-ranking place in his tribe, and that tribe had acquired a pretty good base of operations. He even had a really nice weapon, a good sharp axe acquired in battle from one of the *Ibjroohargtk* ("Small Annoying Leathery Furry-Faced Beings"), which in turn had earned him a respectful nickname from his brother warriors.

Then, one day, the tribe's home was invaded by a rampaging, aggressive force -- a mixed band of *Ibjroohargtk*, *Bdjrrkitk* ("Tall Annoying Pale Numerous Outside-Dwelling Beings"), and *Bdjijfaathuk* ("Tall Intensely Annoying Pointy-Eared Forest-Dwelling Beings"). The invaders were evidently employing vile and unspeakable techniques; within seconds, most of the tribe were dead or disabled, and Norgruk had taken an arrow in the shoulder.

Not being a fool, Norgruk left hastily by a convenient exit, albeit one which led to parts of the lair which the tribe hadn't tidied up yet. Jogging briskly down the corridor, he quickly discovered a trapdoor (the hard way), leaving him deeper in the untidy parts of the lair and with a broken arm. Moving on, evading some of the curious local wildlife (thanks, it must be said, more to luck than to skill), Norgruk twice found that his only safe option was to take stairs leading downwards. (His luck only went so far.) He even noticed and ducked through at least one concealed door, which helped keep him alive for a little longer.

Finally, he came to room with a stone table surrounded by silly scrawls of the kind which the tribal shaman might have said could talk. On the table stood a bottle. Norgruk, faint from loss of blood and feeling harassed, felt the need for a drink. Unfortunately, though, the bottle turned out not to contain any liquid; just some kind of dark vapor. A vapor which, Norgruk felt sure as he dozed off, was *talking* to him, even *offering* him something . . .

The being looked down at Norgruk. It was honorable after its fashion, and it had offered a fair reward for the service he had performed. In reply to its question as to his greatest desire, Norgruk had mumbled something about wanting to cut things up. Anything. In fact, he'd said something about wanting to cut up the whole world.

The being considered itself to be a god, but it wasn't a god of healing, and frankly, Norgruk looked to be pretty much beyond repair. On the other hand, it did know about cutting things up, and moving them around afterwards, and it possessed a certain capacity for humor. So, before it left, it repaid its debt, after its fashion.

The adventuring party arrived a full day later, bloody but victorious over countless foes, only to discover that they were too late. The prophesied disaster had befallen, and the twisted god was free. This was going to take a *lot* of fixing. All that was left in the last chamber were a load of broken wards, an unsealed Flask of Imprisonment, a dead goblin, and a dwarven axe. With a howl of annoyance, one of the warriors picked up the axe and hurled it across the room.

As the axe went spinning, Norgruk's spirit flailed about mentally, seeking to exploit the powers which it didn't even know it now had. Then things got *very* strange, as the axe cut through reality itself . . .

Norgruk Niceaxe in GURPS (547 points)

ST 1/25 [-80]; **DX** 12 [20]; **IQ** 8 [-15]; **HT** 14 [45]

Speed 6.5; Move n/a

Advantages: Acceleration Tolerance [10]; Alertness +3 [15]; Damage Resistance 4 [12]; Damage Resistance +21 (Only protects the metal head, -20%) [50]; Doesn't Eat or Drink [10]; Doesn't Sleep [20]; Extra Fatigue +24 [72]; Fearlessness +6 [12]; Immunity to Disease [10]; Immunity to Poison [15]; Injury Tolerance (No Blood, Brain, Cutting/Impaling Bonus, Neck or Vitals) [50]; Natural Attack (sw+2 cut, bought as Long Talons with reach 1, Usable

by wielder +20%, Can't do impaling damage -10%, *Only* works when someone else wields him -20%) [54]; Night Vision [10]; Passive Defense 2 [50]; Passive Defense +2 (Only protects the metal head, -20%) [40]; Peripheral Vision [15]; Polarized Eyes [5]; Temperature Tolerance 20 (range -35 to 300 degrees) [20]; Unaging [15]; Vacuum Support [40]; World-Jumper (Can Visit New Worlds, Extra-heavy encumbrance, No concentration required, Cannot follow another jumper, Must be swung or thrown to use power -20%) [156].

Knacks: Find Weakness [2]; Lend Skill* (Touch Only, -20%) [32]; Might (Only lasts while subject holds axe, -10%) [36]; Shatter [10]; Telepathy (Touch Only, -20%) [64].

*As no item energy cost is listed for this spell, the knack cost was based on the details of comparable spells.

Disadvantages: Bad Temper [-10]; Bully [-10]; Dead Broke [-25]; Dependency (loses all magical powers in no-mana zones: common, constantly) [-12]; Illiteracy [-10]; Inconvenient Size [-15]; Innumerate [-5]; Intolerance (anyone who seems "elvish" -- slender artistic types, people with pointy ears, etc.) [-5]; Lame (legless) [-35]; Mute [-25]; No Manipulators [-50]; No Sense of Smell/Taste [-5]; Primitive (TL3) [-20]; Social Stigma (valuable property) [-10]; Unhealing (can be repaired by a skilled armorer) [-20].

Quirks: Doesn't really trust paper money; Doesn't trust his powers (yet); Likes destroying things; Petty-minded, lacks a real grasp of priorities; Vengeful. [-5]

Skills: Axe/Mace-14 [8]; Brawling-12 [1]; Shield-12 [1]; Stealth-12 [2]; Tactics-6 [1].

Languages: Goblin (native)-8 [0]; English-7 [1].

Notes

The magic which bonded Norgruk's spirit to his axe gave him a package of associated abilities, represented here by advantages and knacks. He is a functional axe, doing sw+2 cut damage, and by using his magical powers, he can strike especially effective blows against inanimate objects -- or rather, someone wielding him can, with his consent. He can also enhance his wielder's strength or skill to some extent. However, he's not indestructible. He'd probably survive having his wooden haft broken (and it probably breaks almost as easily as an ordinary axe handle), but the destruction of his (magically strengthened) metal head would likely be fatal. Details are left to the GM to resolve should the point ever arise; Norgruk tries to avoid testing the principle.

Norgruk also has the ability to see, in a way that feels to him like ordinary vision -- but because he's using magic rather than physical eyes, he can "look" to his sides quite easily, and he's largely immune to being dazzled. The character sheet assumes that he has ended up in a TL7 world where English is the main local language. He has learned to understand the essentials of what people say to him, but not much yet about the local technology. (When he first arrived, he would have had the Confused disadvantage.) GMs can adjust or delete his skills and Primitive disadvantage to reflect different game settings and Norgruk's gradual acclimatization. Note also that he has the power to communicate telepathically with anyone who touches him.

Game Uses

Norgruk has *shifted frames of reference*. He's designed for use in Supers or similarly wild and weird games, probably set in the present day. In a standard fantasy, he'd just be another magic weapon with some unusual features; the further he is from home, the more of a *character* he becomes.

Although he's pathetic in some ways, and some PCs might be tempted to sympathize with him if they get to hear his story (especially if they hear it from *him*), he is definitely *not* a nice guy when you get to know him. He has the personality of, well, a fantasy game goblin; being transformed into a magic weapon has just given an extra dimension to his bad attitude, and something new and unusual to complain about. (Being forced to work with *Bdjrrkitk* does nothing for his mood.) Still, he's definitely the product of his genes (when he had any) and environment, the same way

that a irritated ferret is.

He can make an interesting supervillain, although he will of course need to be wielded by somebody. If he becomes part of a villain team, one of the other villains could carry him, but that might just lead to squabbling; he would probably do better to recruit a series of teenage heavy metal fans with far more ambition than sense, to act as his hands and legs (and to lay claim to his share of the loot; it's going to be hard for Norgruk to buy off his Dead Broke disadvantage). These might be regarded as Allies, though Norgruk would probably see them as disposable. In fact, it is quite likely that the PCs will hear of and encounter a low-grade but dangerous new villain named "Axemaster" or suchlike, long before they determine that the real problem is not the man (or boy), but the weapon.

As presented here, Norgruk hasn't yet got the hang of his world- jumping powers, hasn't "memorized" the world he's in (or his homeworld or anywhere else), and won't try to use that power again unless he feels seriously threatened. (And then he'll have to persuade someone to swing or throw him to do so.) In time, he will probably gain in confidence (perhaps after making some emergency jumps), buying off the relevant quirk and "memorizing" several worlds. With the right wielder, he could then become a *serious* nuisance, leaping between realities to gain access to secure targets or to evade pursuit. Note that he can shift up to 160 lbs. (usually his wielder) with him each time he cuts through the fabric of reality, if he wishes; he'll have to avoid teaming up with anyone overweight . . .

Creative Leadership

Options for and Augmentations of the *d20 System's* Leadership Feat

by Owen K.C. Stephens

The Leadership feat is one of the most powerful feats available in the *d20 System*, giving a character both a loyal cohort to back him up in dangerous situation, and a bevy of lower-level followers to take care of more menial tasks. It is also one of the least-common feats, for a variety of reasons. It requires more work on the part of the GM, has the possibility of unbalancing a campaign quickly, and often is overlooked in favor of a combat-related ability.

It's also one of the very few standard *d20 System* feats that's more about playing a role than rolling dice. A character with Leadership has built-in concerns a GM can play on, and provides easy means for the GM to channel information to players. How a character treats and cares for his cohorts and followers can be the subject of hours of roleplaying, as can differences in philosophy between a character and those who obey him. With a little thought, a GM can get whole games out of a character's followers, and use them to help set tone, handle pacing, and generally enhance a campaign.

Many players have meta-game concerns with followers, seeing them as little more than minor figures that are likely to cost money to maintain and need constant guarding. Cohorts can also raise questions, especially about who runs them (GMs often have enough to do without adding an NPC, and players may not want to run their own cohort). Players sometimes feel another character having a cohort reduces their own "screen time" unfairly, and discourage others from taking the feat. Most of these issues can be settled with a discussion of expectations between the GM and players (and may include ideas such as having another player run a cohort, with GM approval of unusual actions, and having cohorts be informants or sages rather than combat monsters).

Often the stumbling block is not the balance of power or bookkeeping issues Leadership causes, but a sense that a group of followers do not work well with a given character concept. Only a few militant-types are very interested in having small armies at their beck and call. Especially at high levels, this is combined with a lack of ideas about what to do with 40 1st-level characters. Unless a character has a stronghold that needs butlers and stableboys, such followers are only useful in limited circumstances.

Below are presented a number of ideas about what else followers (and occasionally cohorts) may represent. These are often story-driven ideas that can be part of a character's background, though not becoming clear until he takes the feat. Many of these ideas assume that followers need not be humanoids, but can be any creature of approximately the same power level. A 1st level fighter is an appropriate follower, and thus a CR 1 light warhorse or darkmantle likely is as well. Further, a GM should feel free to play with a creature's power level by adjusting its level of loyalty and usefulness (a shark may be higher than CR 1, but if the campaign only occasionally enters the ocean, and the shark only aids the character rather than take orders from him, it may balance out).

A GM could also use the Leadership feat as an alternate award for success, replacing more common forms of treasure. As a rough benchmark, a feat can be considered worth 5,000 gp in a fantasy game. A GM may have a single character earn the feat for performing a particularly heroic act, or may make an entire party of adventurers the "leader" (averaging their Leadership score) of a single cohort and a few followers.

For a truly epic award, a GM may opt to pass out the Leadership award to every member of a party, allowing them to each earn a cohort and a number of followers. This would be appropriate for a group that saves an entire town, for example, causing them to be seen as worthy heroes by the populace. A band of four characters with leadership scores of 9, 12, 12, and 15, for example, could attract one 10th, two 8th, one 6th, one 3rd, two 2nd, and 36 1st level characters -- easily an entire town militia, or the whole of a thieves' guild. Many of the ideas below work better as rewards than traditional Leadership results.

Follower Concepts

A Follower in Every Port: Rather than followers being a group gather in a few places, make them individuals scattered across the world. For example, the character may be the son of a simple barber, but discover that barbers are part of a secret society that aid their own. In dozens of towns throughout the kingdom, there is at least one barber who knows the character and is willing to provide local rumors, a place to hide, and even a free disguise.

Ahoy!: A ship and its crew becomes beholden to a character (possibly with a cohort as the captain). It may have been saved by the character, or it may have been bought by a relative or ancestor and willed to the character. The advantage is that the ship is available for long sea-journeys when needed, but can care for itself when the character spends considerable time on land.

Blood is Thicker than Water: All a character's followers may be part of an extended family, such as young cousins who look up to him as a hero. They may be distant relations from a "disreputable" side of the family, or even lost relatives who have just discovered their new, famous, relation.

They may also be of a different species, representing a single cross-bred encounter in the character's distant family tree. For example, an elf may discover he's related to fairies, or an orc learn she has the blood of wolves in her veins.

Chosen One: A small cult is convinced the character is a divine leader, perhaps the reincarnation of their founder, or the offspring of their god. Regardless of what the character thinks (or wants), the cult (including all his followers, and possibly a cohort leader) do their best to spread word of his divinity and importance, as well as looking out for his best interest as they see it. They may obey a direct order from the character, but only if he accepts his role as their spiritual leader.

Guildsmen: Followers can represent a guild or business a character buys, inherits, or is given as an award. Rather than be useful in combat, the followers sit in a guildhall using their Craft skills to earn the character money. If any are able to make masterwork goods, they may even be useful as a source of high-quality equipment for the character and his allies. A cohort spellcaster able to make magic items may serve a similar role as non-combat support (especially one able to *identify* or *analyze dweomer*).

Harem: Killing an evil overlord, prelate, or slave master leaves a horde of attractive companions looking for direction and possibly protection. To make things more interesting they may secretly be thieves, sorcerers, or assassins. The same idea can be used with any foreign society where the characters interact without understanding the culture -- a rogue who thought he was just carousing wakes up to discover under local law he's married 37 women.

Nurture vs Nature: Characters who end up with infant or unhatched monsters may take the young as followers. Even powerful monsters like griffons can't be more than one hit die at birth, and their growth can be matched to the character's access to higher-level followers. The same idea can answer what happens to the infant orcs left after characters destroy a tribe.

One Ring to . . .: Some object that comes into the character's possession is linked to a horde of creatures that must obey its owner. To make things interesting, they may be of a radically different alignment. For example, a lawful good wizard takes a ring from a fallen foe only to discover a minor demon (the cohort) and a swarm of imps (followers) obey the orders of he who wears it. The wizard can't destroy the ring (as it would free the demons) or trust the demons (as they must obey the letter of his commands, but may twist the spirit because of their evil nature), but may not be willing to kill creatures that are truly devoted to him despite their failings.

Part of the Pack: Saving a wounded animal (wolf, lion, horse, etc.) from a monster of some kind results in that creature's entire pack/herd adopting the character. They can serve as guards in the wild (though they rarely fight anything dangerous, they can alert the character to danger), steeds, and even foragers (allowing the character to carry less food and not have to slow enough to forage for himself).

This also works for characters whose histories include being raised by wild animals.

Smitten: Rather than determine followers in advance, the GM may use them as needed to represent something irresistible about the character. For example, an elven princess of legendary beauty finds that men often become smitten with her at first glance. The GM uses her followers one at a time to represent random useful people suddenly becoming willing to do things for her. Jailors release her, bartenders hide her, and bards gather information for her as needed, each one using up one of her followers (though obviously remaining fairly loyal even after they've been defined).

The same idea works for many rakish swashbuckling character types.

Strange Bedfellows: In an urban game with strong ties to politics, followers can simply be supporters who march in favor of the character's ideas and vote for his initiatives. Their level becomes less relevant than their total number, and they are of use to the character despite their low total power. This can easily be added to many other follower ideas, especially Chosen One, Harem, and The Faithful.

Stronghold/School/Guild: The most traditional use of followers is to provide loyal servants for an organization the character runs. If a character builds a castle, starts an academy, or buys a business, followers are perfect for any hireling roles.

Even this trope can be made more interesting with a little thought, however. For example, a wizard's school might attract noble's children who can't perform magic, but want to learn how it works so they'll be better rulers when they inherit. A fighter could end up with a spymaster offering his services for a new castle, with thief and assassin followers outnumbering warriors.

Another good way to make followers more interesting and helpful is to pick a few to treat as very low-level cohorts, and having them increase in level when the character's Leadership score allows for higher level followers. If one of a character's followers is a 1st level bard, Bartle the Semi-Informed, allow Bartle to be second level once the Leadership score reaches 13. With bardic knowledge Bartle may have useful information occasionally even at low levels, and characters will grow to know and appreciate him as he (slowly) gains levels with them. Rather than a faceless follower, Bartle becomes a friend.

That Was the Pact!: The followers are all random, minor monsters and creatures scattered across the globe. The only thing they have in common is intelligence, and the knowledge of a pact made ages ago between their families and the character's. Each is bound to the character by this pact, though not all may be happy about it. The GM may opt to replace some minor followers with more powerful creatures, but rather than be followers each owes the character a single favor.

The Faithful: If the character is a religious figure of some kind, his cohort and followers may simply be loyal members of his flock. This works best if the character has a physical church, but they could also be wandering believers, who follow the character and spread his praises in towns near where he adventures.

New Feats

The Leadership feat is useful, but limited. The following feats are designed to augment Leadership, and provide alternatives for it. Though none of these feats require the Leadership feat, most are useless without it.

Cult Personality

You are the kind of character that attracts swarms of lesser followers.

Prerequisites: Cha 15+, char level 6+

Benefits: Cult personality works like the Leadership feat, with three differences. You do not attract a cohort. Your leadership score is your level plus twice your Cha bonus. You double the number of followers you get.

Elite Commander

You attract followers and cohorts of a higher caliber than most.

Prerequisites: Cha 15+

Benefits: All followers and cohorts you attract from this point onward have +2 Str and +2 Con.

Great Leader

You have a natural ability to lead, easily attracting cohorts and followers.

Prerequisites: Cha 13+

Benefits: Add 4 to your Leadership score.

Group Empathy

You have an empathic connection to your followers and cohorts.

Prerequisites: Cha 15+

Benefits: You can receive and send basic empathic feelings with your cohort and followers, up to a range of 10 miles. These are very basic feelings (pain, hunger, curiosity, fear, happiness), but they are enough to know if a follower is in trouble, or even conscious and/or alive.

Master of Two Worlds

You are leader of more than one group.

Prerequisites: Cha 17+, Leadership, Char level 9+

Benefits: This feat works just like the Leadership feat, but it allows a character to be leader of two different groups. He gains a second cohort, and another band of followers as determined by his Leadership score.

Pack Leader

You have a natural ability to attract and maintain a large number of loyal followers.

Prerequisites: Cha 13+

Benefits: Add 6 to your Leadership score for purposes of attracting followers (not cohorts).

Tyrant

You are adept at treating followers and cohorts poorly, but still inspiring loyalty.

Prerequisites: Cha 15+

Benefits: You take no penalty to your Leadership score for aloofness, cruelty, having a familiar, special mount or animal companion, recruiting followers or cohorts of different alignment or causing the death of a cohort or followers.

Digging Up Resurrection Mary

*"On a wild Chicago night, with a wind howling white,
I caught my first sign of Resurrection Mary.
I was trembling like a leaf, I was scared beyond belief,
After all my conscience ain't that clear.
I used to work for Mickey Finn, I did the numbers for Big Jim
Perhaps my day of reckoning lies here?"*
-- Ian Hunter, "The Ballad of Resurrection Mary"

It's after one in the morning, on one of the oldest roads in Chicago. There might be a moon out -- it might be cold, or just seem that way. In the headlights, you see a flash of white, and a toss of blonde hair; a girl's dress, and then the girl herself. Who is she? What is she doing on the side of the road? And where is her shadow, behind her -- or in the car with you? Slow down, and open your door. Let's find out -- I'll give you directions.

*"Girl Killed In Crash
Miss Marie Bregovy, 21 years old, 4611 S. Damen Avenue, was killed last night when the auto in which she was riding cracked up . . . The scene of the accident is known to the police as a danger spot."*
-- Chicago Tribune, March 11, 1934

Drivers in the southwest Chicago suburbs sometimes see a young girl in a white dress hitching a ride. She's going home after a dance, she explains, and gives directions along Archer Avenue, past South 70th Street. As the car passes Resurrection Cemetery, she disappears. Sometimes, her lucky date (always a man) picks her up at the Willowbrook Ballroom (formerly the Oh Henry) at 89th and Archer, or one of the other joints on the Southwest Side, and drives her "home." Sometimes he stops to let her out, and sees her melt through the bars of the graveyard. Sometimes, she runs (or stands) in front of a car near the cemetery, disappearing when the car hits her. Scores of eyewitnesses since 1936 have seen "Resurrection Mary"; she is Chicago's best known ghost.

Her true identity remains murky; early speculation in the 1930s centered around Mary Bregovy, whose unmarked grave is still pointed out to ghost tourists -- despite the fact that Mary was killed in the Loop, and had brown hair and an orchid-colored dress, unlike the "beckoning fair one" in white. Two other girls have been fingered, including one Anna Maria Norkus, who did die in a car wreck in 1927 on Archer Avenue after a dance (albeit at age 13, a little young for Mary's sirenish behavior) and was (possibly) buried at Resurrection Cemetery during a gravediggers' strike at St. Casimir's, her home parish. This may explain why Mary was seen wrenching at the bars of Resurrection Cemetery on August 10, 1976 -- the bars, which bore the burned marks of a young girl's fingers, were removed by the Archdiocese after they could not be painted or straightened. Or so they say.

"A prime example of the adaptability of older legends is 'The Vanishing Hitchhiker' -- the classic automobile legend. This returning-ghost tale was known by the turn of the century both in the United States and abroad. It acquired the newer automobile motif by the period of the Great Depression, and thereafter spawned a number of subtypes with greatly varied and oddly interlocking details, some of which themselves stemmed from earlier folk legends."
-- Jan Harold Brunvand, *The Vanishing Hitchhiker*

It's the "they" that get you; folklorist Jan Harold Brunvand identifies Resurrection Mary as a prototypical "Vanishing Hitchhiker" urban legend. You know how these stories go. A man picks up a girl hitchhiking. She may reject his advances, or have a story of rejecting another; either way, she prefers to ride in the back seat. When he gets to her house, she's gone. In many versions, he returns to the house the next day on some pretext -- perhaps she borrowed a book, or a sweater -- only to be told (or discover from a photo or portrait) that the girl is dead, and has been for some time. In some (somewhat more literary) versions, the man visits her grave to find his book, or sweater, there waiting for him.

"Behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians . . . was returning, and sitting in his chariot reading Isaiah the prophet . . . And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet

Isaiah, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. . . . And [Philip] commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more . . ."

-- Acts 8:27-39

Brunvand sees an explosion of such stories beginning in the 1930s (perhaps Mary's death opened up the [doorway](#) to her sisters across America), but can trace them back to at least 1876, and a horse-drawn coach version told in Watseka, Illinois. Variants appear in Korea by 1941, and all over Europe. One specific Chicago variant is the "prophetic hitchhiker" who declares, apropos of the 1933 World's Fair, that the fairgrounds would "slide off into Lake Michigan." Brunvand collects versions of prophetic hitchhikers including "Jesus," a "hippie dressed in white," and the Nephites of Mormon lore -- which echo the "vanishing Christ" on the road to Emmaus, as well as the "disappearing deacon" from the Book of Acts quoted above. Other hitchhikers (all across America) prophesy earthquakes or falsely promise early ends to WWII, often unpleasantly phrased thusly: "Hitler will die in six months just as sure as you'll have a dead man in your car tonight."

Death in the car, and Archer Avenue, also connect in the 1897 story of two Irish musicians playing at a church dance at St. James-Sag, at 106th and Archer. Late at night, they saw a woman in white, "filled with despair" in the churchyard. A spectral coach approached her twice, and she sank into the earth. A similar coach, drawn by horses "running from Hell itself" appears along Archer, in the Archer Woods Cemetery. Where, one may be interested to learn, the cries of the "sobbing woman" are heard in the night. Pieces of a larger story than one unfortunate Polish girl seem to come together along the old Indian trail known as Archer Avenue, lined by the Illinois and Michigan Canal.

"Ah me, Llorona

Llorona of yesterday and today

Yesterday I was a marvel, Llorona

Today, I am less than a shadow of that."

-- José Alfredo Jimenez, "La Llorona"

A sobbing woman by the water, dressed in white, needs no explanation in Mexico or the Southwest. Such an apparition is La Llorona, "the crying one," plaintively bewailing the death of her children -- who, the legend maintains, she killed herself. Luisa de Loveros, a mestizo woman, had two children by Don Nuño de Montescarlos. When he refused to marry beneath his station, she drowned the children and was hung. Since then, she has haunted Mexican women, seeking her children -- or drowning theirs in envy and hatred. (Political ghostologists sometimes identify La Llorona with Cortez' mistress "La Malinche," for no very good reason.) There are a couple of very interesting parallels with La Llorona in our ambit. The Aztec deity Cihuacoatl, who was a water-goddess and a goddess of childbirth (and child-death) supposedly appeared and prophesied doom to the Mexica in 1502 -- like the death of Hitler, it was a prophecy too soon. And La Llorona herself has appeared near the Calumet River along Cline Avenue in Gary, Indiana -- just over the border with East Chicago -- beginning in those ever-interesting 1930s. (And like Resurrection Mary, Gary's Llorona supposedly died in a car accident.) La Llorona is but one of the global manifestations of the "Women in White," who always appear in white, often wailing or sobbing, usually by water, and are associated with the death of children. The Bean Fhionn of Ireland and her banshees, [Berchta](#) and her German *weisse frauen*, France's Melusine and the other White Ladies, even the [Lamia](#) of Greece, are all part of Resurrection Mary's lineage, despite her Polish blood. The Manx *lhiannon-shee* even leaves burned fingerprints behind her, just as Mary did in 1976.

"[T]he name of Arthur's wife, Gwenhwyvar, resolves itself into White Phantom or White Apparition, in harmony with Arthur's line of descent from the region of phantoms and apparitions and fairy-folk."

-- W.Y. Evans-Wentz, *The Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries*

But the most famous of the Women in White comes not from the smoking [mirrors](#) of Mexico (behind which, perhaps, her cousin still lurks as "Bloody Mary"), but from the misty hills of Britain. Although Geoffrey of Monmouth tried to invent a Roman legacy for "Guenhumara," the White Phantom (*gwen hwyfar* in Welsh) is clearly a lady of the Otherworld in the older stories. In the Triads, in fact, she is depicted as a triple goddess, the daughter of giants and *sidhe*; the *Mabinogion* hints at her parallels with Blodeuwedd, the Flower Maiden created to bestow kingship on her

lovers. Obviously, the aristocratic Guinevere has more in common with the social-climbing La Llorona than with the girlish ghost of industrial Archer Avenue -- but we've already seen how the white dress shifts to cover different ladies as the story shifts in time and place. But always, there is water -- the Illinois and Michigan Canal along Archer Avenue, or the Water Bridge of Meleagant. As Evans-Wentz so charmingly puts it, "There is always the mystic water between the realm of the living and the realm of subjectivity." Looking a little harder at Guinevere, we note that she is childless (a hint of La Llorona's child-murder also plays out in some of the more dubious Mordred tales) or young. In almost every one of her histories she vanishes, usually being kidnapped by an Otherworldly figure (into a graveyard or underworld at times) -- death and resurrection? (Perhaps Lanzelet or Meleagant drives the dark coach from St. James-Sag.) Finally, she embodies the sovereignty of Britain -- as does the "figure of Mary" who Arthur wore on his shield. Young, vanishing, resurrected Mary -- from Britain to Chicago.

Folklorists such as Brunvand say that these hints and reflections, these pale apparitions of older stories, are the natural effects of a folk tale told over the generations; what we see as echoes or shadows from the supernatural past can be easily explained as the fossil record of our folklore. But -- true to our Heisenbergian age -- what if they are actually signs that the entities themselves adapt to fit niches in the "cantosphere," the invisible body of story and lore that seeps into and covers every nook and cranny of a society? Just as some habitats are more welcoming to creatures displaying certain evolutionary adaptations, might not some societies be more welcoming to myths that have dropped their vestigial triplicities and flowers in favor of fingerprints and immigrant accents? Perhaps these entities are always flowing down the canals and ley lines, shaping themselves into the holes our culture leaves them, in [Tombstone](#) or [Cleveland](#). Perhaps the White Phantom has put aside her crown in Chicago, for a night at the dance-hall and a ride in a really cool car -- doesn't that sound like Guinevere "the merrie" to you?

Pyramid Pick

Diana: Warrior Princess

Published by [Heliograph Incorporated](#)

Written by **Marcus L. Rowland**

Illustrated by **Aaron Williams**

116-page 6- by 9-inch b&w softcover; \$14.95

Take several thousand years of ancient history and knead as necessary until you have a pulpy mass. Force through a sieve and then again so that all of the boring bits have been removed. Spread liberally over the topography of New Zealand before it ripens into Middle Earth, sprinkle with a dusting of the best aged Greek and Roman pantheons, drizzle over with the best jump kicking, sword-swinging action, and for a final measure serve with a pair of push-up bras. This is of course, the recipe for the television series, *Xena: Warrior Princess*, and to some extent for *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys*, where the extra support was deemed not quite as necessary.

Since this exact formula has already been repeated for a game of its own in the form of West End Games' *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys & Xena: Warrior Princess Roleplaying Game*, it would be churlish of anyone else to apply it quite so exactly to one of their own games. So instead Marcus Rowland applies the concept to the history and culture of the 20th century, with a nod to the 19th century along the way. The writer is known for his numerous and often fondly regarded scenarios for a variety of different games -- *On the Trail of the Loathsome Slime* for *Call of Cthulhu*, *Queen Victoria and the Holy Grail* for *Golden Heroes*, and *Canal Priests of Mars* for *Space 1889* -- but is best known for his exploration of the science fiction in the 19th and early 20th centuries, in both [electronic format](#) and book form. Like *Forgotten Futures*, Rowland's new game is published by Heliograph Incorporated, who brought us the reprints of *Space 1889* and its supplements, including [Transactions of the Royal Martian Geographical Society](#), and who are currently working on the pulp action game, *Zeppelin Age*.

The idea of this little game, *Diana: Warrior Princess*, which originally appeared as "Diana: Amazon Princess" in issue 23 of *Valkyrie Magazine* in August 2001, is to view our era with the same kind of distance we view the ancient Greeks and Romans. Then throw any sense of realism or historical accuracy out of the window along with the baby, and then -- in turning it into a television series -- pick and choose the bits that will make it anything other than boring. This is a world in which clichés, absurdities, and anachronisms abound side-by-side most cheerfully. It is also a game that cocks a scurrilously satirical snook at the establishment, invariably to highly amusing effect.

This is a "world" in which Nell Armstrong, astronaut for Norton's Agency for Space Achievement, could be the first "man" on the Moon; CDs are played on phonographs *a la* "His Master's Voice"; Britannia is ruled by Queen Victoria and her Consort, Prince Albert Einstein, and protected by her loyal Beefeaters and her woad-daubed Scots bodyguard, John Brown; and mobile phones are chunky, novel-sized devices with heavy aerials and a text function that involves ticker tape. Britannia is, of course, ruled from Windsor Castle -- that is, Windsor, Ontario. While Queen Mary rules a misty land of bare-chested and kilted barbarians who gather in clans and drive steam-powered cars festooned with spikes, her cousin Queen Elizabeth rules England aided by her chancellor and advisor, Thatcher the Sorceress.

But Elizabeth has another side, in secret being the Queen Mother, evil criminal mastermind behind the worldwide trade in arms and tobacco. Seduced by the Dark Side of the Mystic Powers of Royalty, she has allied with Landmines, the God of War, and has plans to replace him eventually. (Likewise, Thatcher the Sorceress has plans to replace Queen Elizabeth.) As part of furthering her plans, Queen Elizabeth uses her easily controlled son as an agent, turning the affable, well-meaning, but often-ineffectual Bonnie Prince Charlie, into an uncaring swine given to casual violence.

It was Bonnie Prince Charlie's involvement -- though one he was not aware of -- in his mother's criminal doings which led his wife, Diana, to divorce him. Despite her not being Royal by birth, Diana has kept her own Mystic Powers of Royalty, which uses in the name of good and peace, toiling ceaselessly to thwart her mother-in-law's plans and those of Landmines. She is aided in this fight by her faithful, ever-present (though incredibly unlucky) sidekick, Fergie, who is always being captured, hypnotized, bitten by vampires, kidnapped by aliens, and so on. Other allies include Red Ken, friend and ally to reptiles everywhere and leader of the London Underground (who spearhead the anti-Thatcherite resistance); and Wild Bill Gates, River Boat Gambler and entrepreneur, whose motto is, "Make Money Fast." Other enemies include the conman, Ron L. Hubble, who was able to sell NASA a space telescope so bad it needed spectacles to actually work; Archer the Assassin, the cloaked and hooded figure that is Thatcher the Sorceress' most deadly henchman; and numerous warlords who worship Landmines, including Churchill, Mao, Milosovitch, Napoleon, and Stalin. The rest of the world is full of wild beasts -- from rabid coyote to saber tooth tigers, and wild savages . . . from Zulu tribesmen in Vietnam to Sikhs in the Indian territories of North America.

At its heart, *Diana: Warrior Princess* is an episodic television series based around two characters: the star, Diana, and her co-star, Fergie, with occasional appearances from guest stars such as Red Ken and Wild Bill Gates. There is nothing to stop players from generating characters of their own, but these are perhaps best used for the other series ideas also suggested. These include "Parton: Lust for Glory," in which hard-bitten General "Dolly" Parton commands a unit of cyborg camel-riding Amazon mercenaries across the deserts of the Korean War; "Richard of Hollywood," in which the deposed Duke Richard Nixon leads his merry band including Tiny Tim, Will Shakespeare and Maid Marilyn against the evil "Uncle" Sam from their forest hideout; "Gandhi's Angels," where Mahatma Gandhi trains three woman warriors -- "Babe" Ruth, Marion Morrison, and Toni Curtis -- in preparation for a series of mystic quests; and "Toni the Vampire Slayer," where ordinary school girl by day, Toni Blair, becomes enemy of Thatcher the Sorceress.

Characters are broadly drawn using 16 attributes that are as much skills as they are stats, and range from zero to 10. Thus the Marksmanship attribute covers any form of ranged combat, Science any knowledge of the physical universe, Driving control of any vehicle from bicycles to space shuttles, and Athlete any physical feat not covered by Speed, which includes initiative, dodging and swiftness. Some characters also possess a Mystic Power, such as Diana's Mystic Powers of Royalty that always keeps her clothes spotless, lets her heal some diseases by the laying on of hands, and occasionally boosts her attributes. Conversely, Queen Elizabeth's Mystic Powers of Royalty give her mind control abilities via her Crown, life draining beams from her Mace, and the ability to bestow deadly diseases with her bare hands.

How many points a player has to spread between the 16 attributes depends upon the Star Status of their character. Stars like Diana have a Status of 40 plus, co-stars like Fergie 30 plus, guest stars such as Red Ken and Queen Victoria have between 20 and 30. Major gods, like Landmines and Queen Elizabeth, have 50 and over, minor gods such as AmX, Goddess of Wealth and FedX, Messenger of the Gods have 20 to 40, villains like Thatcher the Sorceress have 30 to 40 and so on. Status also determines each character's Hits (hit points) and their Success number, which is the target needed to do anything rolled on a six-sided die. Both Status and Hits are equal to a fifth of a character's Status value.

The game system for *Diana: Warrior Princess* is exceedingly simple. Roll a number of six-sided dice equal to up to any three appropriate attributes, the aim being to obtain as many successes as possible. However, the more attributes involved, the more successes that are required. The Success target is 4+ for major gods, 5+ for stars, co-stars, guest stars, villains and henchmen, and 6 anyone else. All successes are rolled again, repeating until no more are rolled. For example, Wild Bill Gates suspects that Ron L. Hubble is cheating in their poker game. His Success is 5+, and he has the attributes of Thief (3) and Thinking (3), giving him six dice to roll. He rolls 6, 5, 5, 5, 3, and 2, for four successes; then those four are rolled for another two successes, and then no more rolled, giving Wild Bill a total of six successes. These would be counted against any of Ron L. Hubble's successes, and those left over would count in the winner's favor. Combat is equally simple, and designed to be as cinematic as the game's inspiration. Much of this should come from the players as much as the referee, with both playing up to the tongue-in-cheek, slightly over-the-top genre.

Successfully completed adventures can earn characters Bonus Points, between five to 10 for each scenario. These can be used to increase a character's Status, though this *is* an expensive process, and really it is not in keeping with the point of playing *Diana: Warrior Princess*. Instead they can be spent on a one-for-one basis to add more dice to a roll,

or alternatively, to alter the plot to a character's advantage. An appendix also discusses further options for the game, notably the Virtual Campaign, in which actors play the characters, in some form or another. In other words, adding a second layer of reality to the game, which can also be explored as part of the game.

Although several episode treatments are given, including "Plan Nine From Outer Mongolia," "Romancing The Scone," and "The Gnus Of Marylebone," roughly a fifth of playing *Diana: Warrior Princess* is devoted to the adventure, "Diana Does Dallas." This has Emperor Norton calling upon Diana's aid when someone threatens to kill President John F. Kenny, the elected official who does the day-to-day running of America. After a pre-credits scene in which Diana must rescue Fergie from the hands of the evil worshippers of the demon lord of disease and pollution, Nick O'Teen, they must fly to Dallas (which looks very much like Sydney) and board the steamboat, the *Norman Bates*. This is where President Kenny is negotiating with Elliot Ness, the leader of the Untouchables caste (who do all of the cleaning and other mucky jobs in America), for an end to segregation. This is a solid adventure that takes the characters across America and showcases the game to its best advantage.

This is excepting, of course, that it is somewhat at odds with the central setting of the game -- England (and possibly Britannia, but mostly England). All right, the title of the adventure, "Diana Does Dallas" is very much in keeping with the tone of the game and its approach to late 20th century history and culture. Yet this dichotomy -- having the adventure for what is a very Anglo-centric game set outside of our green and pleasant land -- also goes some way to address the fact that playing *Diana: Warrior Princess* is a very Anglo-centric game. Not every non-English gamer is going to understand *all* of this RPG's references.

Putting this problem aside, *Diana: Warrior Princess* is a highly amusing read; the author's prose is ably abetted by the illustrations of Aaron Williams, which are as on target as the writing. And though the writing is solid, the satire of *Diana: Warrior Princess* is affectionate in nature, rather than being truly scathing or biting. This explains why the author can get away with not so much poking fun at such a sacred cow as the late Princess Diana, but rather playing up to her supposed relationship with the rest of the Royal Family. In the end, *Diana: Warrior Princess* is more of a clever idea than a game to be played, though it is still quite playable. Even when played, it is something to be dipped into and visited occasionally, rather than being played over and over. Yet it is still well done, and if you can get the joke in the play as well as in the read, then *Diana: Warrior Princess* is a television series worth repeat viewing.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

The Penguin Ultimatum

Published by [Eight Foot Llama](#)

Designed by Jim Doherty

Art by Scott Starkey, Rick Chamberlain

110 full-color cards, 12 wooden invitation markers, 8 glass scoring stones, color rules sheet; \$19.95

If you've ever seen a nature documentary on the South Pole, you know what a bleak, white wasteland it can seem to the untrained eye. Penguins by the thousands mill about, all of them looking alike and waddling this way or that, seemingly without purpose. You may have thought to yourself, "What a boring existence that must be." The penguins couldn't agree more. They've had enough of this dull routine, so they have gone to their emperor (get it?) and laid down the law: Make this place livable -- or at least entertaining -- or there will be flightless trouble. In turn, the emperor comes to you and your fellow court jesters and demands that you throw one helluva penguin party. This is *The Penguin Ultimatum*.

The object of the game is to score the most points by entertaining more penguins than anyone else. Game play entails bringing out entertainers and surrounding them with an audience until they start their show. When the show starts, you want to make sure your guests are front-row center so you get all the credit.

The game is played using several different types of cards. The players (two to four of them) receive a hand of penguin cards, which show different colors and values, and depict penguins enjoying one of the four types of activity: acrobatics, dancing, music, and juggling. The four colors are the penguin families, and each prefers to see a different animal perform: sheep, bears, kangaroos, and seals.

Entertainer Cards will be placed on the table -- which represents the iceberg -- showing one of the four animal types performing one of the four activities. The entertainers have various arrangements of "triggering dots" located in the corners or on the sides of their card. On his turn, a jester takes a penguin from his hand and plays it adjacent to a card on the table (making this one of the few games in which diagonal is also adjacent). If you play like colors next to each other, you'll be forced to pay a "mingling fee" from your current victory point total (the clans want to meet new penguins, not other members of their extended family).

Just because you play a card doesn't mean it belongs to you. You can only "claim" a card by placing one of your three invitation markers on it. That makes them your special guest, i.e., they may gain victory points for you when the entertainer does his stuff. Entertainers break into song (and dance, or juggle balls, or whatever) when there's a card adjacent to all its trigger dots. Anyone who invited a guest to the party scores points if the guest likes that animal or that form of amusement. Points are awarded, the curtain falls (literally -- a Curtain Card replaces the entertainer), and the penguins all go find another performer to be amused by.

The player who scores the least from the performance is awarded the Entertainer Card. These can be saved up for more victory points at the end of the game, or can be spent to eliminate the mingling fee for placing a Penguin Card.

When all the Penguin Cards are gone, the game is over and everyone tallies their score. Extra points are given for having the most of any one kind of animal, and everyone has a different Activity Card that shows specific Entertainer Cards from the deck. If you were awarded that card during play, you get more points for that as well.

The Penguin Ultimatum is a lot to take in. There are a lot of card types to keep track of . . . and you use cards to track your score, too. Each player has two cards -- the 10s and 1s -- and two stones that sit on those cards to keep a running victory point total. The definitions sort themselves out after a bit, but considering how much else you have to look out for it's a bit of a task. The artwork on the cards may be one of the best things about the game. It is positively irresistible, and there will be many well-deserved "ooo"s and "aww"s generated by the cartoonish but heartwarming pictures.

The game has a good, simple mechanic in the triggering dots and a lot of point/counterpoint to balance things. You want to score high points for performances, but the low score gets the entertainers. Even if you didn't score the most for a performance, the current player gets to place the next entertainer; you may be able to force a show to start early, before others really get their invitation markers piled up near it, and that lets you decide the placement of the next entertainer. On the griping hand, the player to your left gets to place the next penguins and invitation markers. And with only three markers and a limited ability to move them around, you have to exercise caution about who you will invite.

There's so much to keep straight in your head it becomes hard to judge what will help you the most or hurt your opposition the best, especially when you're trying to plan for the endgame. The game plays better with multiple people; with only two jesters, it's almost an even trade, and you don't want to get into a pattern of spending your whole turn setting your foe up to score on his turn. However, if players can handle the math and can think a turn or three ahead, *The Penguin Ultimatum* is a clever and delightful game that will give the group a fun and intellectual workout.

--Andy Vetromile

Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic

Making Links and Bridging Gulfs

Okay. You're in the middle of a long-running campaign, you're starting to run out of ideas, and you'd like to get an idea for a new direction or series arc. Or maybe you're just starting a campaign, and are looking for some seeds to plant that can remain dormant for as long as you'd like, but can be sprung fairly easily.

When you're strapped for ideas, one of the surprisingly rich sources of inspiration is to look for tangents or connections that can either tie in elements of the universe together, or branch out the campaign world in a new and exciting direction. And often it's possible to do both.

Confused? I'm sorry; it's a fairly big concept I'm trekking around this time. I think it's best if I go through example.

Over in DC Comics, there was a long-running series called *Swamp Thing*. (This character's popularity and brand on the collective unconsciousness of the comics world is assured by a superb run by writer Alan Moore. I also understand a new *Swamp Thing* series will be starting in a few months, although I expect this one to last about as long as a teriyaki-marinated child in a real swamp. But I digress.)

Anyway, when the character was first established, he was a typical man-swamp amalgam, doing marshy things around me and having swampy adventures bayou. (Get it? HAH!)

At some point, however, they wanted to beef up the character a bit. So they decided that he was more than an animate plant-guy . . . he was the DC Universe's earth elemental -- the embodiment of that element for the universe.

This worked; it didn't contradict any known facts, and allowed the character some more room to grow and have adventures.

Now, those of you up on your alchemy know that an earth elemental immediately suggests three other elementals: fire, air, and water. And thus the editors at DC decided to incorporate this concept more broadly, and declared that semi-popular hero Firestorm was the fire elemental, and not-terribly-popular-but-recognizable-to-long-term-fans hero Red Tornado was the air elemental.

This was fine and, again, made sense (especially since it didn't ferociously step on any toes that were too popular). But the existence of three elementals gave the creators of this story the ability to fill in a hole by creating a *new* elemental . . . one tied to water. This character was called Naiad. (I'm not sure why they didn't use Aquaman in this role, except that DC might have been pretending he was still a first- or second-tier character. Or maybe he was too busy talking to Amazing Sea Monkeys at the time.)

Anyway, having used up a jillion words so that I can continue to justify my comic expenditures to the IRS, I note that this same technique can be used in RPGs very easily.

There are two general paths to take when using this technique; it is usually helpful to use both at the same time. You need to pick which character or game element will be used, and you need to figure out which pattern will be followed (and possibly extrapolated from).

The chosen character or element is often the easiest, since the requirements are fairly strict to make this technique work. The character or element needs to be easily pigeonholed into some aspect of the chosen pattern, so generally the character will be the ultimate embodiment of some element of that pattern. As such, picking out iconic characters - or characters with some iconic element - is often a good starting point. Alternatively, look for characters or elements that seem to imply - perhaps obliquely - the existence of other, alternate elements of the pattern. (Confused? Skim ahead to the examples below.)

The pattern is quite possibly the more difficult one to realize, because there are so many patterns in the world. In general, the less obscure the pattern the better. Swallowing that a PC is part of a grand cosmic pattern requires a

certain suspension of disbelief; learning that this pattern is based on Disney's Seven Dwarfs would probably make the whole thing fall apart.

Some classic iconic patterns include:

- Four classical elements
- 12 Zodiac signs
- The Tarot deck
- The nine planets
- The seven deadly sins/cardinal virtues
- Colors of the rainbow
- Four cardinal directions

There are, of course, many *many many* more. One resource I find invaluable for this (or other inspiration) is *The Book of Numbered Lists*, currently out of print but available pretty darn cheaply from Amazon. Other book of lists will likely provide similar inspiration; take a browse through the reference section of your Friendly Local Book Store.

So let's take an iconic character like Superman. This character could fit into plots that center around:

- Celestial bodies (Superman embodies the Sun)
- Aspects of ability (Superman embodies Power; perhaps Batman embodies Skill, and an unknown third could represent Knowledge?)
- Modes of travel (Superman embodies Flight; Flash embodies Running/Ground Movement)
- Nationalities (Superman embodies America)

And so on.

So, as a full-fledge example, consider DC hero Green Lantern. This character has a ring of power that can emit a beam of green light, which can be formed into any construct the wielder envisions. It has been called the DC Universe's "ultimate weapon." Now, considering the colors of the rainbow - and the works of noted mnemonic Roy G. Biv - green is in the middle of this spectrum, with red and violet at either extreme. While there are a number of directions we can go from here, I note that Green Lantern's ring is most often shown for its versatility. What if, through some cosmic pattern, there existed two *other* counterparts to Green Lantern whose powers derive from the other ends of the spectrum? Red - the color of passion, anger, and fire - might represent the ultimate offensive capability, while violet - the cusp of human visibility, and part of the phrase "shrinking violet" - might represent the ultimate defensive capacity. (I won't flesh out these concepts, but the names "Redlight" and "UltraV" sprang to mind as characters.) Both of these characters, once realized, could prove interesting challenges or counterparts to Green Lantern, from a completely different angle. There are two points to make regarding these patterns. First, they do not need to actually represent some Cosmic Kismet tying the world up in a neat bow. The pattern can merely serve as a jumping off point for adventure ideas; if Superman embodies America, what would the iconic metahuman of other countries - or other *planets* - look like?

Second, keep in mind that it's entirely possible that someone only *believes* this pattern to be true; the actual reality can be quite different. It can even be changed depending on how enthused (or un-) the players are to this development. Thus a nutjob might be convinced that a magic-wielding PC is the embodiment of "The Magician" Tarot card; he assembles a group to combat him, consisting of other adversaries who fit into the Tarot mold (the Devil, Justice, Strength, and so on). Whether or not this adversary's role as "The Fool" is revealed is up to the GM . . .

While it may seem that these kinds of overarching links can only apply to more fantastic or heroic campaigns, this technique can be used to fill in holes anywhere. For example, consider a game where the heroes work for the Department of Paranormal Investigation. The existence of this ultra-tippy-top secret organization can imply that there are other organizations out there; after all, "investigation" does not encompass all activities that may extrapolate from the paranormal. What if the heroes stumble across another secret agency at work, seemingly engaged in a covert war with a phenomenon that *they* discovered first? Learning that there is a Department of Paranormal Neutralization that exists alongside the DPI - both of which are unaware of the other - would open up a new avenue of adventures and

interactions.

While these link-joining ideas can be great to interject into an established campaign, they can be even *easier* to insert before a game begins, or before a new PC is brought into a game. If a player expresses an interest in being the greatest swordsman of all time, that can be interesting . . . especially if that implies the existence of the ultimate archer, ultimate cavalier, ultimate strategist . . .

Links can be a great way to tie the background more tightly together, or branch out in new ways. And, if nothing else, it can give some unexpected ideas. Have fun, and think laterally!

--*Steven Marsh*

Toadtown

by **Brian Rogers**

Toadtown is an example of how continued exposure makes the fantastic mundane. It is a small village residing in mostly safe lands and producing something exotic to outsiders but boring to the natives, it is an excellent place for PCs to come from, because the environment gives them every reason to leave.

Or, as one player put it, "Boy, and you thought moisture evaporators sucked!"

The Geography of Toadtown

Crapaud, commonly called Toadtown, is bisected by the Greenbriar River. Wide and slow for most of its length, it sometimes narrows and accelerates but is always navigable. The forest usually runs up to the riverbanks, forming a river canopy over the narrow points. A bridge connects the two halves of Crapaud, and there are several communal skiffs. Toadtown is the Greenbriar's northernmost community, so a bridge blocking river traffic doesn't matter. While the kingdom may surround it, Toadtown's inaccessibility makes it an isolated outpost of civilization in a vast wood.

Residents have felled the woods for a significant distance around the town, producing a grassy lawn several hundred yards from either bank. Sheep and goats are raised on the east, gardens are planted on the west. The town is of wood construction and spacious. The town is divided as follows: the wranglers are on the north Greenbriar (Warts to the East, Bufons to the West), shepherds on the east side, farmers on the west, fishers and traders on the south river. The town center holds the businesses that support and are supported by local industry.

Past the cleared land, the forest has been partially timbered -- more to the east than west, and the goatherds will lead their animals into the lesser forest to graze. Beyond that east-west (or immediately north-south), the forest is deep and thick. In all directions except south it gets even deeper and more dangerous. Few people have any cause to head north up the Greenbriar. The last people traveling north were a quartet of outsiders a decade ago who claimed that the Greenbriar reached Gnarl Ford, near the kingdom's North Keep (if true, could make the Greenbriar a possible trade route). They may be right, but if they reached Gnarl Ford, they never came back to Crapaud to tell anyone.

Politics in Toadtown

The town is in Dana, the realm of King Daniel the Wise, and in Mignonette County, which runs from Toadtown south and west to the Charity river. Mignonette is ruled by the Countess Anne. Toadtown is directly overseen by the aged knight Kenneth and his resident family: his wife Estelle and his youngest son Kendrick, a swordsman and wizard. Kenneth has three older children but all are off serving in the army. Kendrick stays to defend the town and keep the peace with his father, as is his duty.

There are two reeves in town, Emmett and Emmanuel. Emmett is 20 years older than his partner, and was a trader on the Greenbriar for years before an Optimate (a business leader, similar to a royally recognized guild-master) recommended him as a reeve. Emmanuel just retired here, having served under one of Kenneth's sons as a supply sergeant. They work together to transfer orders from the knight to the people. They are also the "long arm of the law" in Crapaud, which is easy enough given that the town has almost no crime. The families of the reeves (Emmett has several children and a couple grandchildren) act as deputies; Emmett's eldest daughter, Samantha, is expected to take his position when he retires. Samantha is the current toad-wrestling champ, but she faces stiff competition next year.

The town has one Optimate, that being Teague Tanner, the head of the Tanner clan and the main driving force in the aggressive marketing of toad products. He is friendly (if distant) with Kenneth, since the two share a desire to see the community improve. Sometimes Kenneth holds Teague in check, sometimes he pushes him forward, depending on Tanner's current ideas. Since Optimate is a purely mercantile, non-hereditary title, Teague desperately wants to see

himself knighted by the Countess for his work in the region, and for either he or his heir to be given oversight of Crapaud when Kenneth dies. Whether this will happen is unknown, but no doubt Teague is greasing the wheels. He is commonly assumed to be the most powerful man in Toadtown after Kenneth's family -- so much so that the reeves and deputies never bother him and seldom visit the Tanner complex (which lies outside Toadtown proper).

The Businesses and Families of Toadtown

The key aspect of Toadtown's economy is breeding Giant Toads. The toads are native to the Northern Greenbriar, thriving in the particular climate. Crapaud's residents have ways to use all parts of the toad except the ribbit. There are two groups that handle toad breeding: the Bufon family, and the Wart clan. The Warts are the original toad wranglers, and with the death of their patriarch Ryan Wart two years ago the three brothers, their wives and children have started an internal struggle for control of the family business. This has let the smaller Bufon clan make inroads into the toad market, despite having only two generations to work with (though the older brother is recently married). People following this profession are known as Toad Wranglers. The preferred tool of a Toad-Wrangler is a Toad-Spear, which looks like a lower case "y" -- the crook being used to catch small toads to the ground or prevent larger ones from running themselves up the spear.

Moving downstream, the center of town holds the Greenbriar Inn (informally called the Toadstool), which has three bedrooms for rent. Given the amount of traffic in Toadtown, these are most often used by Silas Wart after fights with his wife (this happens about once a month, though other times when kicked out he just vanishes for a while). The Toadstool is run by the Hostel family: John, Lisa, John Jr. and Liza. It is the only restaurant in town, and does brisk business as a tavern -- most nights the dining hall is $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ full for the evening meal. Depending on who's around, this may include entertainment; some of Crapaud's citizens are skilled singers or storytellers.

A common sight at the Toadstool is Jenkin Trapper, also known as Red-Nose Jenkins. Jenkins is famed for his routine of returning from a trapping run with a variety of non-toad animals, spending the money earned on drinks at the Toadstool and sleeping in the woods. When he's out of money he goes back into the woods. Since he's generous with his cash when he has it, and is a quiet drunk who doesn't bother anyone (though he can spins mad delusional stories while in his cups), the reeves leave him alone. Plus, his non-toad animal supplies are in great demand.

The center of town also boasts temples to both Kisha and Mathelwyn, a carpenter, a cooper who doubles as a ship-wright and toad-spear maker, a smith (who works with scarce imported metal), two bakers, a butcher, the man who keeps the town's donkeys (communally owned by the farmers, but rented out to others for heavy work), and a weaver. Finally, there is the Knight's estate (a walled yard with a large house) which contains a shrine to Gabriel.

There is also a Chandler, named Isaac, who came into the town 14 years ago. Brought in by Teague Tanner and Kenneth, he proved skilled at making candles and lamp oil from toad by-products, letting him set himself up rather smartly. Isaac Chandler is a clever and industrious man -- he used a sum of money he brought with him to make a large order from the river merchants for staples such as cloth and needles and sold them on the side. His shop quickly became a general store on the west bank of Crapaud, and he opened a second, smaller one on the east bank. Isaac has his house outside of the town proper where he maintains several small beehives that provide both beeswax and honey

A Brief Word on Toads

The Giant Toads of the Greenbriar hatch as tadpoles the size of kittens, and quickly grow into toads the size of dogs. They continue to grow for as long as they live: a three-year toad is as big as a human, a six-year toad is as big as a bear. Around seven years toads die of natural causes, though there are rumors of the occasional "decader," which would be the Grendel of giant amphibians. They are carnivorous, surviving on fish and the game found in the woods, including the wild dogs. (As a cultural note, the people of Crapaud don't keep dogs and pets, referring to them as "toad kibble.") They attack by suddenly leaping at prey and either swallowing them whole or landing on them and biting. Their mouth's ridge does some damage, but the main threat is the toad's paralytic saliva. A toad four years or older could leap on a human, paralyze the pinned head, and then consume the body at its leisure. Toad wranglers will hamstring their herds, and often remove the poison gland; after that operation the Toads can't consume live food.

for his store. He has three female assistants who watch the shops for him during his frequent absences at his house/workshop or hives.

Further down river we have the community of fishermen and river traders. The traders bring the toad products to the rest of the world, and goods from the rest of the world here. They are strong-limbed men who row against the current to get to Crapaud and are fonts of lore on the outside world. This makes them dashing and romantic figures, and the youth are cautioned to not compromise themselves. One of them, Henrietta, a native daughter to one of the goatherds, is now owner of her own boat. She and her ever-changing crew of three will stay in town longer than most traders, giving the crew a chance to meet the locals and providing Henrietta opportunities to wander the woods her parents taught her as a child. She is in town once every other month.

The fishermen consider themselves the most cosmopolitan of Toadtown's residents because they spend the most time with the River Traders and therefore are most in touch with the "outside world." They read whatever they can find and write poetry -- some of it quite good. They fish by net during the slow period, but usually do line fishing from the banks or by boat during the spawn. This assures an even catch spring through fall and prevents damage the local fish population (which was severely over-fished 20 years ago and took years to restore). Their wives run a fish-market, selling the latest catches and smoking or salting the remainder with communal equipment for a fair profit. Many of the fishermen's families are inter-married, which gives this part of the town a very close knit feel.

The eastern edge of Crapaud is home to a variety of goat and shepherds, who use the several hundred yards of cleared land, along with partially forested eastern woods, to graze their respective flocks. Quiet and family oriented, they are as a rule firm devotees of Kisha, and can get rowdy on her holy days.

The slaughterhouse and tanner are in the northeast woods, mostly to keep their scents away from the town. This is Teague Tanner's domain, and he runs the Tanner clan with the same iron hand that his brother-in-law Ryan used with the Warts, all-but-insuring that his death will lead to as much familial in-fighting. The Tanner outpost -- five buildings, including a worker's dormitory/commissary -- is very nearly a town to itself. Teague is only seen in town on holy days, or for quarterly meetings with Kenneth. All other times, people come to him when summoned.

The western edge of Toadtown belong to the farmers, who use the timbered land for a variety of vegetable plots. The farmers are as interdependent as the fishermen: there simply isn't enough tillable land, so a complex arrangement of rotated crops is in force. The main farming families rotate the growth of beans, corn, wheat, and assorted vegetables (cucumbers, tomatoes, carrots, and beets). They do their best to provide all the community's needs, but the river merchants still provide the majority of the town's grain -- paid for by the Tanner family. The farmers desperately want to make the town self sufficient with vegetables and grain, and advocate to Kenneth that western land be timbered to give them more room. He has so far refused.

In those woods lie two houses. The deeper of the two is the one belonging to Isaac Chandler, discussed earlier. The nearer (abutting with the farmland) is the home, plot and workshop of Derek of Ambervale, the local healer. Derek came to town within a year of Isaac, and for much the same reasons. With ready access to Toad Poison, he has found many uses for the stuff -- from knockout drugs to a topical anaesthetic to a rash cure. He has a moderately sized plot for growing the herbs he requires, and he goes on occasional trips into the woods for esoteric ingredients. Derek is a willful man, good at getting townsfolk to do what's best for them even when they don't want to.

All told, the total population of Crapaud is about 400 people. There is only one non-human family.

Religion in Toadtown

There are two temples in Crapaud. One is to Kisha as the goddess of community and domesticated animals, the other to Mathelwyn in his aspect as the god of rivers and forests. Both of these shrines have about a half dozen initiates who also act as other members of the community. The initiates of Kisha do odd jobs through the town, helping the shepherds, farmers and wranglers as needed during the year. The initiates of Mathelwyn fish and occasionally hunt. The High Initiate of Kisha is a short, broad-boned woman named Alonza. The High Initiate of Mathelwyn is an older, thin and balding man named Robert.

There is also a small shrine to Gabriel in Kenneth's estate. The two initiates, Murphy and Ilea, oversee funeral rights and keep the town's records. Neither holds high rank, and there are no major services to Gabriel in Toadtown (unlike the ones for Kisha and Mathelwyn), though citizens can attend the smaller services if they choose.

Young Adults in Toadtown

Tradition has children taking up their parents' business, with the eldest assuming control when the parents die. Sometimes, if there is enough business or too much friction, children demand their share and strike out alone. They usually start their own businesses in Crapaud but sometimes leave all together. In the farmer, fisher, and herder trades, this has little impact. For tradesmen, it leads to new businesses on the opposite side of the river; this is why the town has two bakeries.

For social groups, children usually congregate with those who live near them, leading to cliques of the town's youth. The Fishers are seen as uppity or putting on airs -- reading poetry, gossiping about town -- but can be dashing, charming rogues to local girls as they emulate the river merchants (who actually *are* dashing, charming rogues). The Farmers and Herders have a tendency to not get along, and there is fierce competition between the two in sports, especially the field sport played in town (very similar to soccer). The knight and reeves work hard to keep these two sides of the river from arguing, aided by marriages in the last few years. If current gossip is correct, there is another one in the works -- Tess Harvest and Gerald Ram are often "missing" at the same time, bumping into one another in town or while visiting Kisha's shrine. It is rumored that the Initiates arrange clandestine meetings between the rival children to smooth such a courtship.

One nuisance is Mortimer, the Carpenter's son. He thinks one of the young social groups (the PCs) are really cool. For several years he has followed them around and tried desperately to fit in. Unfortunately, he was sullen and moody and sensitive and not very good at social interaction. Being three years younger than his idols just made things worse. Mortimer has been going off on his own lately: he had wanted to be an initiate of Mathelwyn, but that desire seems to have fallen by the wayside. He certainly isn't taking great pains to learn his father's profession.

Wendell and Quentin River are two of the fishermen community who intend to follow Henrietta's example and get out of town. They are somewhat oily and don't look entirely scrupulous, imitating the worst of the river merchants. They also disparage anyone else who talks about leaving town, stating that they're the only people who have any hope of getting out, and they're leaving once they reach their majority. Their general air of insolence has the reeves keeping a close eye on them. They bristle under that, further straining their relations with the law.

Sherri Baker is another peer, but missing of late. A pretty, vivacious girl, she vanished unexpectedly about three months ago. Her parents say that they sent her to apprentice to a city baker down river, but given her age this seems unlikely. If the gossips are to be believed, the girl is pregnant (probably by one of the River boys, who aren't to be trusted, the little rakes!) and was sent away until she could have the baby without stigma.

The Gods of Toadtown

Some brief information on the deities mentioned, though obviously the GM should replace them as needed. They could be new saints to the church on Yrth or *Warhammer*, any deities with the appropriate domains in *Dungeons & Dragons*, or the passions Garlin, Jasperee, and Floranis in *Earthdawn*.

Kisha: The goddess of cities and towns, strength and domesticated animals (especially horses). She oversees the defense & construction of community, and is a great warrior & promoter in stability. She is the goddess of gardens -- the embodiment of the taming of nature -- and of motherhood.

Mathelwyn: The god of wizards, rivers, forests, and jungles, Mathelwyn is the patron of the cunning and wily. Those who want vengeance invoke his name, as do those who hope for inspiration. Mathelwyn is said to have had an elder sister who shared these aspects but died before his birth; his name is common among people who have shared that misfortune.

Gabriel: The god of arts and literature, of instruments, and most importantly of teaching and history. He is also the overseer of the dead. It was his presence and his church that made written history possible, and he is a great promoter of

Johnny and Reggie Wart, two of the Wart clan, wander the town acting as bullies and pests. Often slapped down by the reeves, they haven't publicly done anything criminal . . . yet. Mostly they are blowhards who think that their family's prestige should afford them privilege. They are particularly belligerent to the Bufons, who they fear threaten their livelihood. It is interesting to note that no Tanners (who *do* have special consideration) act in this fashion. Of course, few of them are ever seen in town, and Teague would have their heads if they disrupted the economy.

The one Tanner commonly in town is Edward, Teague's first grandson and groomed to take his father's position when his father takes his grandfather's. Edward is tall, strong, well spoken, attractive and charming. When in town he is mostly talking with Isaac or Derek, looking in on the toad based industries or talking with other tradesmen to see if there's anything the Tanners can do to help business. Given where Isaac and Dominic live, Edward has to pass through the farmers, who don't like this pleasant young lad (an extension of their general dislike for the Tanners). Over recent months he's been an ambassador with the Bufons, who complained that the Tanners short-changed them in favor of the Warts. That is no longer a concern, but Edward is still around the Bufon ranch quite a bit, checking in. The town gossips have Edward and the Bufon's eldest daughter married in a year.

Introducing the PCs to Toadtown

Toadtown is the small isolated community from which our heroes emerge. With this assumption, the PCs should be young adults within a few years of age of one another, perhaps kin by marriage ties.

The most logical starting point are the Bufons; directly engaged in the town's peculiar business, this upstart family engages in a struggle for respect and market share. It lacks the heavy handed discipline of the Tanners or the back-stabbing arrogance of the Warts. Since the family is moderately small (the parents, one married eldest son, and five other children), Bufon PCs would feel the weight of responsibility to their kin which is appropriate for the genre. The eldest daughter -- the one courted by the Edward Tanner -- makes an excellent PC choice.

There are several avenues of training in Crapaud. PCs could work with the reeves to get formal combat training (as opposed to wrestling toads); woodland skills can be absorbed from Mathelwyn's initiates or via Jenkin Trapper; Kendrick is a spellcaster who could take promising youth as apprentices; the shrines are on the lookout for suitably devout young people and cover both "civilized" and "natural" worship; many see entertainment as a critical aspect of life, so Bard skills are available. Thief training is difficult to obtain, but a former-smuggler riverman could be introduced if a PC requires those skills.

Race variation is deliberately small; one aspect of this genre trope is the small town heroes limited contact with other races. As such, all of Crapaud is human except for one family. That family is of the PC race desired. Orcs captured in the last war might have been integrated into the community as a goatherd or slave, producing full or half-orc offspring. Likewise, an elven or halfling family or individual might have settled here for reasons of their own (or even pre-date the town's founding) to provide young adventurers.

Adventures in Toadtown

Lost Explorers: What did happen to those explorers a decade ago? Were they really trying to trace the waterway, or following directions to a lost and distant dungeon? This is the best way to integrate Toadtown into a classic *Dungeons & Dragons* game. For *Earthdawn*, replace the dungeon with a lost Kaer. The town can simply be a home base for

civilization. He is the nominal leader of Humanity's gods in peacetime.

Healing in Toadtown

As the description of Derek of Ambervale suggests, Toadtown does not assume a link between religion and healing. If your game has religions dominate healing skills, you may want to make changes. Remember, the town doesn't have many initiates and it's likely the much of local clergy are lay-people with little spellcasting ability. This should keep the PCs cautious in the absence of healing magic, keep Derek involved with his various medical skills, and make healings miraculous once the young heroes enter the larger world. Alternately, Derek could be a cleric of a healing god who doesn't preach, or a wizard with a magical knowledge of healing that doesn't depend on faith.

limited healing and supplies, the young adventurers could juggle secret dungeon delving with the politics of the town, or the economic effects of such a find near this isolated town could be explored.

Secrets, Lies, and Toads: Readers might have noticed that there are a lot of characters who conveniently vanish or who are never seen. If the young heroes find evidence of a cult or other foul activity, they'll be hard-pressed to pin down a culprit. This can lead to investigation, spying and inevitably trying to convince the authorities that the PCs are more than just children spinning tales. While this works well for any game, the darker undertones are appropriate for *Earthdawn* or *Warhammer*.

Town Hi-Jinx!: In the absence of any real threats the players could easily make their own! Youth conflicts between the Bufons and the Warts (or the farmers and the herders) could counterpoint actual community tensions. Fanciful PCs could wage daring excursions into the well-defended Tanner complex at night. Sports conflicts between two riverbanks, seeking or avoiding arranged marriages or preparing for the spring festival with its toad wrestling competition could occupy the young adventurers for some time.

Hunting the Greenbriar: The Greenbriar river has few predators. There are no fish that pose a danger to humans, and precious few water-snakes (most of which have mild venom). On the banks, there are some comparatively rare giant spiders. Wild dogs and toads can be threats as well -- sometimes significant ones. This makes a good threat balance for young adventurers heading into the woods after less common game. The people of Crapaud hold a "toad culling" roughly twice a decade, heading out in small groups to kill larger toads before they become a hazard.

Wipe them out . . . all of them: Many children of destiny have their idyllic childhoods destroyed (or at least damaged) by invaders. You could easily jump a Toadtown game into high gear when the orc/goblin/drow army pours out of the woods or targets attacks against the prophesied heroes. The PCs will be forced to leave their lives behind, with a bittersweet reunion when they return and learn they no longer fit in.

Apparitions, Genius Loci, and Mingled Reality

Optional Rules for *Transhuman Space*

by James P. Barrett

Angela observed Victor entering the hotel room in Shanghai via the cameras discreetly located around its edges. He resolutely strode towards the desk at the center, moving out of the way of the furniture as he passed. Using the array of sensors in the suite she had an almost perfect three dimensional impression of where he was, and what actions he was taking, which was further enhanced by the location signals which Helmut (his person AI residing inside his VII) was transmitting to the building's v-tag network. With scarcely more than a thought she was negotiating access permissions with Helmut, and a fraction of a second later she had limited privileges to provide Augmentive Reality information which would be shown on Victor's VII. Flicking through her "wardrobe" she selected her customary tall, attractive northern European appearance, clad in a uniquely created ensemble based upon the current fashion for women in London.

Victor was unsurprised when Angela appeared out of thin air directly in front of him. Helmut informed him discreetly that she was an apparition and not physical, something he really felt he could have worked out for himself. His movements and speech made it obvious to Andrew, who was observing through the same camera system, that he must have been talking to Angela. Seeing that the discussion didn't seem to be too personal (dealing with a private members bill Victor was helping to move through parliament) he signaled Angela and Helmut asking to set up a three-way conversation.

Apparitions and Mingled Reality

The virtual interface equipment used by most sapients in fifth wave nations has led to considerable blurring of the distinction between reality and VR. This is never more apparent than with the recent phenomenon of so called "Mingled Reality" environments, locations which are neither wholly physical, nor wholly virtual, but instead combine elements of both. The main technology behind MR domains is not new. It consists simply of a full surveillance grid (generally combining cameras, infrared sensors, and sometimes even surveillance dust), a dynamic system of v-tags, and a Virtuality node containing a Digital Kingdom modeled precisely upon the physical structure of the area. While in the physical room all persons (and indeed non-persons such as animals and 'shell equipped NAIs) are monitored by the surveillance grid, and the data is used to control a representation of them within the Digital Kingdom. At the same time, any user accessing the Digital Kingdom has an image of their character (often referred to as an apparition due to its insubstantial nature) projected onto the VIG equipment of all physically present characters via the local v-tag system. The effect is to allow users accessing the Virtuality Node to interact with persons physically located in the room exactly as if they were physically present themselves, with the one proviso that, since they have no physical presence they are unable to touch or lift solid objects, being, in effect, insubstantial.

The Software required to run an MR domain is referred to as an MR Manager. It is twice the price and one Complexity level higher than VR Manager software (p. TS145) capable of handling the same number of users; for these purposes both those physically present and those accessing via the web are counted against the number of users the software can support. Interacting with an MR environment via the web requires only normal VR software and equipment, and all actions take the normal Telepresence penalty (p.TS144).

Although for most purposes the MR environment has little or no advantage over a similar purely virtual environment, it has recently started to become popular with groups who carry the "really being there" meme, but wish to still be able to interact with people who are for whatever reason unable to be physically present.

Free Floating Apparitions

Although apparitions appear most frequently in Minged Reality environments, with the correct access any AI is capable of sending visual information to a person's VIG for display no matter where they are (as long as they are on the web). The creation of an apparition as a means of properly communicating and interacting with a person however requires more than simply the ability to send visual and auditory information, it also needs a good perceptual image of the person's surroundings and a knowledge of their location, together with the ability to manage a simulated VR character internally. If the GM wishes to allow it, characters with the Digital Mind feature may be able to be designed with this capability. This is a modified form of the Spirit Projection advantage (p.SP76):

Spirit Projection (Easy Materialization 3, +60%; Unlimited Lifespan, +30%; Limited Materialization: Sounds and Visual Effects Only via VIGs, -15%; Limited Perception: Can Perceive the Physical World Only Through Cameras, -10%; Missing Powers: cannot taste/smell, or ride in vehicles, cannot use Awareness, or Spirit Travel, can communicate telepathically only with VII users, cannot tap fatigue, use poltergeist effect, possession, or Probability Alteration, -105%) [60]. Unless the character also has Mindshare, projecting an Apparition takes full concentration, and the character may not perform other actions at the same time; in effect whatever 'shell the infomorph is currently inhabiting is rendered "unconscious" for the duration of the manifestation. Infomorphs with the Mindshare Advantage can use it to allow them to operate their current 'shell while projecting, or to project multiple apparitions simultaneously.

The ability to manifest is also very dependent upon the availability of accessible surveillance instruments in the area in which the target is located. Most public locations in fifth wave cities will be well-covered, but payment and permission may need to be negotiated in order to make use of the equipment depending upon the location. For private dwellings it is likely that only trusted friends and acquaintances will be given access, and sometimes not even they will. As a general rule, the more public a place is the more likely it is that the surveillance equipment there will be accessible to the general public. For example, a common tourist site and widely-used thoroughfare in a major European city is likely to have full camera coverage with no restriction as to who can view the footage, while a camera monitoring a back alley leading to the loading area for goods to be brought into a row of shops in the same city is probably only accessible by the police. Similarly the higher Control Rating of the area, the less likely the footage is to be available to the general public; thus a similarly large thoroughfare and tourist site in Kazakstaan is very unlikely to be publicly accessible (and if it is then the feed is highly unlikely to be accurate).

Genius Loci

The concept of the Apparition brings up the possibility of a new kind of infomorph character: the Genius Loci, or spirit of place, which keeps its program stored and running on a distant server upon which it pays for computer time, while interacting with other characters and in other places by the means of Apparitions and telepresence. GMs should be warned that the Genius Loci template below should only be allowed to Infomorph characters whose physical location is, for the purposes of the game, irrelevant, because either the computer upon which they run will never be attacked, or because backups are made almost continuously, and so physical destruction would not matter. Such characters are probably out of place in (and would be of little use in) a heavily combat-based game, but make good characters for heavily political or social games, and even in combat-heavy games can make good NPCs.

Genius Loci

30 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST -; HT -.

Advantages: Radio Speech (Infrared and radio, +20%) [30]; Spirit Form (Easy Materialization 3, +60%; Unlimited Lifespan, +30%; Limited Materialization: Sounds and Visual Effects Only via VIGs, -15%; Limited Perception: Can Perceive the Physical World Only Through Cameras, -10%; Missing Powers: cannot taste/smell, or ride in vehicles, cannot use Awareness, or Spirit Travel, can communicate telepathically only with VII users, cannot tap fatigue, use poltergeist effect, possession, or Probability Alteration, -105%) [60].

Disadvantages: Dread (Lack of Web Access) [-10]; No Manipulators [-50].

Features: Any computer. **Taboo Trait:** Physical Changes. **Date:** Any. **Cost:** Per computer (p.TS142).

The Genius Loci template is combined with an Infomorph template, and so replaces the normal cybershell or bioshell which the infomorph would need to purchase; in effect this is an infoshell, a body constructed entirely out of computer data. As always, the infomorph character may buy Mindshare (which will allow the manifestation of multiple apparitions at a time), or Vessel, which will allow the infomorph to have physical bodies into which it can be transferred. Since such an infomorph will retain its dedicated apparition managing capabilities when transferred to another body (although without Mindshare the normal restrictions on number of apparitions and/or 'shells controlled at once still apply) the GM may wish to treat the Spirit Form advantage included in this template as being part of the character's mind rather than their 'shell, and thus still accessible (as the modified Spirit Jumper Advantage described above) while the character has been transferred to a different Vessel.

Arcane Laws

Magic and Society for the *d20 System*

by Michael Tresca

Let's face it; arcane magic is powerful. Unlike divine magic, arcane magic is not subject to the discretion of a divine being. With the wide variety of enchantments, illusions, and alteration spells at their disposal, wizards can cause havoc and chaos in civilized areas. If your players have gotten too cocky with their spells in public, you may want to remind them that mortal society has its own means of dealing with wizards.

There are two kinds of authorities that are likely to take a dim view of a wizard casting fireballs in town, depending on the ruling political system: the secular or the ecclesiastical.

The Secular Arm

Here is one way the secular arm of the law might manifest in a *d20 System* game; even if not used whole-cloth, it should provide ideas for other campaigns.

The secular world is concerned with the effects of magic. A wizard casting a fireball during a barroom brawl has broken the law, regardless of his alignment. Laws that deal with force will be applied to wizards who commit crimes of force. A sorcerer casting magic missile at a peasant will be treated as if he had fired an arrow from a bow -- while the source is different, the effects are the same.

All NPCs who are affiliated with the secular world, from guards to judges, will have a prevailing attitude towards the wizard based on the magical crime for which he is accused. For spells that are from the schools of abjuration, transmutation, and evocation, the Secular Arm is likely to have an attitude of indifference. Magic that has a less obvious effect, such as enchantment and illusion spells, poses much more of a threat, and thus the prevailing attitude is hostile. Necromancy, the art of controlling life and death, is stigmatized as a very dangerous and illegal magical practice, and is also perceived as hostile. Conjunction and divination, which are considered to be traffic with extra-planar (and therefore, demonic) beings creates an unfriendly attitude.

Accusatory Procedure

A trial begins only when an aggrieved party presses charges in court and takes the responsibility of proving them. If the accuser does not prove the allegations then he is liable to suffer the same punishment that the wizard would otherwise have suffered. This keeps serious accusations to a minimum, but desperate or vengeful victims of a wizard's wrath may be willing to take the risk.

Some reasons that would include accusations of magery include:

- **Murder.** Casting a lightning bolt at someone in the middle of town, even in self-defense, will definitely bring out the local law. Accuser: Family of the deceased.
- **Intrigue.** Whenever someone seems to reach a means of political power in a noble's court and there's no other dirt to drag up, accusations of sorcery are a final recourse. Accuser: Court rivals.
- **Turf Wars.** When a relatively new religion is trying to establish itself, its first order of business is to prove to the secular authorities that its magic is divinely influenced. Accuser: Head of the religious institution.
- **Major Disaster.** Crop failures, plagues, and strange weather phenomena are all likely to be attributed to a mage in the area. Accuser: Landowners or influential citizens.
- **Implication.** A wizard whose master is arrested and tortured may be implicated as well. Members of the wizard's party who wear magical armor, weapons, amulets, or any other magical items will also be accused of

magical crimes. Accuser: Inquisitors and witch hunters.

Accusers will attempt to steal spell books and any other obviously magical items as proof of the wizard's guilt. Several witnesses who are able to account for a wizard casting a spell in public are more than sufficient. The accuser must then arrest the wizard with whatever help is provided.

A magistrate then institutes an inquiry. The informers and witnesses make an oath before the Justice and their depositions are committed to writing for certification to the justices. The accuser enters into a recognizance to appear before the justices and then writes up a bill of indictment against the wizard. The witnesses are likewise bound to appear.

Reinforcements

When a wizard escapes arrest, the law has another recourse. The Vehm, the secret police of the secular arm, will be called in. Treat them as Lawful Neutral Rogues equal in level to the accused wizard.

The Vehm is ruthless and efficient. They stalk their prey carefully, using their extensive information network to track the weaknesses and strengths of a wizard, and striking at the most opportune moment. What the Vehm lacks in power, they compensate with guile.

An officer of the Vehm makes the accusation in one of the courts and a summons is issued. Three such summonses are issued, each 45 days apart, giving the wizard ample opportunity to make a defense. At the trial, a sword and a noose are placed on a table in front of the judge, which symbolizes the judge's powers of administering justice and the penalty entailed by transgression.

The wizard has only compurgation (see below) as recourse. Should he answer a summons, he must produce no less than 30 witnesses to attest to his good character. The accuser has the right to do likewise. Each is able to have a barrister represent him. Tribunals are conducted quickly and secretly. If convicted, the wizard is hung on the spot. When a convicted person is hung, a knife is stuck into the tree from which he was hung to demonstrate whose authority convicted him.

Should the wizard not show up for the trial, he is condemned in his absence. Any three supporters of the Vehm are within their rights to hang him. The accusing officer can produce a sealed document that allows him to claim assistance from any other members of the Vehm. Anyone who aids or abets the condemned in evading the Vehm will also be hung.

Trial . . .

The most difficult problem in answering accusations of wizardry is in proving one's innocence without the use of magic. The secular arm does not use magic and it does not recognize the legitimacy of the wizard's own magic. There are four legal means of proving one's innocence.

- **Compurgation.** Only wizards of high birth and reputation can call upon this defense. He must find two witnesses of good standing to swear he is telling the truth. Should the accuser bring co-accusers, the wizard will have to produce an equal number of compurgators. This form of justice is essentially a popularity contest. If the wizard is accused of using enchantment magic the court may prohibit this form of defense. Witnesses won't help a wizard unless their attitude is considered Helpful.

Resolution: The wizard and accuser must make an Opposed Check using the Diplomacy skill.

- **Judicial Duel.** The wizard may choose to fight a chosen champion in one on one combat. Magic cannot be used, but few sane wizards voluntarily choose this means of defense. The law assumes that fate and the gods will adjudicate the outcome of a battle so that the just win. If the wizard is older than mature, he may ask for a champion.

To start a judicial duel, it is the responsibility of the injured party to call out the opponent. This can be an oral challenge in front of witnesses or a written challenge. The secular arm is then petitioned for a field. The field typically constitutes a courtyard or open field where there is enough room to hold the combat and also allow for the judges and spectators. Each combatant declares a grandfather who is his spokesperson and one or more seconds. The grandfathers come to the terms of the combat (weapons used, armor worn, time of the duel, etc.) and they also check for hidden weapons and magical protections on the part of the wizard. The seconds either fight on the side of or, in the case of a champion, for the parties involved.

Resolution: Regular combat is joined. The duel ends when one party is injured, when one or both are killed, or when the sun sets.

- **Ordeal by Fire.** Before an ordeal by fire begins, all involved take part in a religious rite. This rite lasts three days, during which the wizard undergoes fasting. The trial requires the wizard to carry a three-pound lump of hot iron for three yards. The other type of ordeal by fire involves walking blindfolded across hot coals. In both trials, the burn wounds are then wrapped. After three days, if the wounds are still open, the wizard is guilty.

Resolution: In both cases, the wizard must make a Fortitude save (DC 15) to walk the required distance under duress, and then another Fortitude save (DC 15) to see if the wounds heal over.

- **Ordeal by Water.** In this type of ordeal, the water is meant to symbolically wash the crime from the wizard. As in the ordeal by fire, a three-day fasting rite is held beforehand. Afterwards, the wizard must plunge his arm into boiling water to the depth of his elbow. The burn is bandaged for three days before the fateful examination.

Alternately, the ordeal may be by cold water. The wizard's hands and feet are tied and he is lowered into cold water by a rope. This rope is tied around the wizard's waist and has a knot a particular distance from the torso. If both knot and accused dip beneath the surface of the water, the wizard is proven innocent. If the knot is dry, the wizard is guilty.

Resolution: In the first trial, the wizard must make a Fortitude save (DC 15), and then another Fortitude save (DC 15) to see if the wounds heal over. In the second trial, the wizard must make a Swimming check (DC 15).

... and Punishment

Secular punishment will generally take the form of one (or more) of the following:

- **Execution.** Most wizards will be hung for their crimes. Others will be garroted first and then burned at the stake. There are more creative forms of execution, including: impaling, iron maidens, flesh torn with hot pincers, pressing, or being broken on the wheel.

Resolution: The wizard must make a Fortitude save (DC 15) or die. Success means the wizard must make another check at an increased DC of 1 each round until the wizard finally expires.

- **Imprisonment.** Although many wizards would be in a fix once stripped of their spell books and components, some may still be capable of casting verbal spells to escape. The answer to this problem is the branks -- a metal cage for the head with a built-in gag. This cruel device will effectively prevent the caster from casting any spell with a verbal component. Coupled with shackles, the wizard will probably be quite helpless. Confinement to jail may also end fatally due to cold, disease, or starvation.

Resolution: The wizard loses one Constitution point per year. He is considered perpetually Entangled and Fatigued. To escape shackles, he must make an Escape Artist check (DC 30).

- **Pillory.** The pillory is a public shaming device for criminals, binding the head and hands to a pole, or thrusting them through boards cut to fit and restrain them. Branks will also be used. The punishment lasts for six hours, during which the wizard is exposed to weather, ridicule, and attack.

Resolution: The wizard suffers from Hot or Cold Dangers, depending on the weather conditions.

Table 1: Secular Punishments

<i>Crime</i>	<i>Punishment</i>
Murder	Execution and forfeiture of all goods.
Harm 1 person (1st offense)	One-year imprisonment, pilloried four times, public confession.
Harm 1 person (2nd offense)	Imprisoned for life and forfeiture of all goods.
Harming 2 or more people (1st offense)	One-year imprisonment, pilloried four times, public confession.
Harming 2 or more people (2nd offense)	Execution and forfeiture of all goods.
Divination (1st offense)	One-year imprisonment, pilloried four times, public confession.
Divination (2nd offense)	Imprisoned for life and forfeiture of all goods.
Enchantment (1st offense)	One-year imprisonment, pilloried four times, public confession.
Enchantment (2nd offense)	Forfeiture of all goods

Ecclesiastical Authorities

The ecclesiastical law, unlike the secular arm, is more concerned with the nature of the spells cast. Because divine spells are meant to be symbols of a god's power, dominant religions can often perceive any arcane magic as a threat to their authority. Again, here is one possible interpretation of ecclesiastical law in a fantasy world.

Wizards are likely to end up being condemned as heretics or pagans. Being condemned as a heretic is a death-sentence for most. Clerics who use hermetic magic or magical items that are not directly tied to their religion may be condemned as heretical. While players may find multiclassing as cleric/wizards a decided advantage in adventuring, the dominant religion may not look kindly upon such behavior.

Accusatory Procedure

The ecclesiastical answer to the heretic is the inquisitor -- a cleric of the dominant faith with access to the spheres of Law or Knowledge. Inquisitors undertake persecution on their own initiative without waiting for an aggrieved party to lodge an accusation and take responsibility for proving the charges. The inquisitor is licensed to use intimidation and torture to secure a confession. One 3rd-level warrior and five 1st-level warriors always accompany an inquisitor. He is expected to bring his full clerical powers to bear in apprehending the heretic. The inquisitor's level will always be equal to the accused wizard's in level.

Table 2: Ecclesiastical Punishments

<i>Crime</i>	<i>Punishment</i>
Murder	7 years of penance, 3 of which must be spent fasting.
Divination	5 years of penance, 3 of which must be spent fasting.
Heresy	Excommunication.

Reinforcements

An inquisitor will seek a very public showdown so that there are witnesses to his deity's superiority when the cleric strikes the wizard down. The cleric will accept only three outcomes: the wizard agrees to leave the area, the wizard agrees to convert (thus burning all spell books and renouncing his magical arts), or the wizard dies. If the wizard should succeed in defeating the cleric, a cleric one level higher will appear an extra week later.

Top 10 Casting Tips

1. *Don't look the part.* Obvious magic items that might draw unwanted attention can be concealed with a Disguise check.
2. *Keep it private.* By

Wizards who manage to win these showdowns are branded as wicked beings. Even good wizards may find themselves being forced to defend themselves against good-aligned clerics. After three attempts the deity will send an outsider (depending on the deity's alignment) to deal with the offending wizard personally.

Punishment

- **Excommunication.** As a result of this punishment, no member of the religion may conduct business with the wizard, speak with the wizard, or stand within four paces of him. Failure to do so results in excommunication of the offending individual.

Resolution: All followers who are aware of the wizard's excommunication have an initial attitude of Unfriendly.

- **Fasting.** The wizard may eat only one full meal a day. The other two meals united (in weight) may not exceed the weight of the whole meal.

Resolution: The wizard loses one Constitution point for each year he must eat in this fashion, but the points are gained back for each month spent eating normally.

- **Penance.** The wizard must retreat in prayer and almsgiving.

Resolution: The wizard must pray every day to the dominant deity. He must donate 10% of his earnings every year to the poor and an additional 10% of his earnings every three years.

- **Imprisonment:** Wizards awaiting judgment will be imprisoned as an unofficial punishment. The above punishments are only if the judge favors the wizard. If the wizard loses, he is sentenced to death. In all cases, if the wizard is unrepentant, unwilling to burn all magical paraphernalia, and unwilling to implicate all other known wizards, he is tortured. Ill-treatment is seen as a loophole around restrictions against torture. This includes walking, starving, sleep deprivation for three days and nights, and swimming. If torture or ill treatment fail to elicit testimony, the wizard is summarily executed.

Resolution: Wizards suffer the effects of Fatigue or Exhaustion as a result of such treatment.

The wizard, then, is a dangerous individual indeed. In the eyes of the law, he could well be seen as an "unregistered weapon" that is unpredictable. In the eyes of religious authorities, he might be an embarrassing enigma at best and a heretical rival at worst. Unless the wizard lives in a magical fortress beyond the grasp of an army, he would be wise to carefully choose when and where he casts his spells.

concealing spell gestures with the Still Spell feat, wizards create fewer witnesses.

3. *Keep your mouth shut.* By concealing spell chants with the Silent Spell feat, wizards create fewer witnesses.
4. *Don't get too familiar.* In court, a familiar will be used against a wizard by harming the familiar to see if it causes the wizard grief.
5. *Always have a contingency.* Because the wizard may end up being imprisoned rather than specifically harmed to a certain amount of hit points, a contingency spell placed for when a branks is placed on the wizard's head is an excellent idea.
6. *Don't settle down.* A wizard who lives in a town where magic is restricted may return home to find him dwelling ransacked and his spell books burned. Wizards should have more than one hideout, preferably away from civilization.
7. *Get fit.* Because many of the tortures and ordeals are tests of endurance, wizards who have the Endurance feat have better chance of surviving ordeals.
8. *Money works wonders.* Unscrupulous (or desperate) wizards may try bribing officials with a Bluff check.
9. *Friends in high places.* High-level connections with clergy or chief justices will often gain the wizard a pardon or a

lesser sentence with a successful Diplomacy check.

10. *Be sneaky.* A wizard/rogue can extricate himself from particularly sticky situations where spell casting is impossible.

Pyramid Review

Redhurst Academy of Magic: Student Handbook (for *d20 System*)

Published by [Human Head Studios](#)

Written by Matt Forbeck, Seth Johnson, Timothy S. Gerritsen, David Gulisano, & Paul Tutcher

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160-page color hardcover; 29.99

That there are many supplements on magic -- especially for *Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition* and the *d20 System* - is no surprise. Although it does not appear directly in the title, magic has always been a core feature of the game. The majority of these supplements have taken one of the eight schools of the *d20 System* and focused upon it exclusively, providing an examination of its subject, along with a selection of new spells, magic items, and artifacts. Of course, with some many independent publishers, there have been several different books released upon the same subject, such as Mongoose Publishing's *Necromancy: Beyond the Grave* and *Secret College of Necromancy* from Green Ronin Publishing. Other supplements have similarly concentrated on magical items. The latest supplement for the arcane aspect of *d20 System* concentrates not on any one college of magic, but encompasses all of the in a manner that will be familiar to fans of Harry Potter everywhere!

Redhurst Academy of Magic: Student Handbook details an educational establishment that sets out to instruct the most promising student wizards from across the known worlds. Indeed, the Redhurst Academy of Magic can traverse the known worlds, teleporting from one location to another at the beginning of each day. In this way, the fortress-like school can visit those it maintains cordial relations with, let students visit their homes, and have new ones enroll and arrange field trips to visit interesting places, meet interesting peoples, and view interesting phenomena. Some eight such worlds, all from well-known publishers, are detailed.

The most notable fact about this supplement is the format. It comes in the horizontal landscape format rather than the common portrait. As the title suggests, this book is written as a handbook, given out to every new pupil at the Redhurst Academy of Magic. It differs from an ordinary student handbook by the two major ways in which it has been amended. First, various details about the academy and its faculty staff have been encoded according to the *d20 System*. This is done by the perpetrator of the second more obvious amendment: the commentary included in the margins of each page, in red ink and a cursive font at the bidding of the perpetrator's master. While the identity of this master is unknown -- in other words, he can be whomever a DM wants -- that of the perpetrator is at least hinted at. He certainly bears the Redhurst Academy of Magic no little ill will; he admits to murdering at least one of the Academy's founders and parents to the current headmaster, knows more about the staff than they might each wish, and is a wizard on the staff at the Redhurst Academy of Magic. He has also heard rumors of the "Wizards of the Coast," but knows little of them and believes that they represent a possible threat to his master's plans, and that their actions should be monitored accordingly.

As an in-game artifact, this book has been created using Redhurst's magical printing methods. These include the use of one spell among many that in particular to the Redhurst Library of the Arcane. This is the *capture image* spell, an illusion cantrip that takes whatever the caster can see and transfers it to paper or parchment. This is employed by the many artists who have graduated from the Redhurst Academy of Magic, and who have since returned to have their images grace the pages of the Student Handbook. It is also written in the style of a collegiate handbook, barring some jarring uses of American English. But in keeping with its world-hopping ability -- which has proven useful in the defense of the fortress-like campus -- the well-known author, Margaret Weiss, pens the book's foreword.

The many buildings of Redhurst Academy of Magic are mapped, from their rooftops through the third and second floors to the ground floor. A set of general maps is given inside the front and back pages; these provide an overview of the campus' 55 locations. Then each of these locations is magnified alongside their actual descriptions to give a greater sense of their layout. No one room is specifically detailed or numbered, and such information will have to be furnished by the DM.

All magic eight schools of the core *d20 System* are available for study at Redhurst Academy of Magic, including the most feared aspect -- the Mordant School of Necromancy. The Academy's stance is that one cannot study magic by negating one core part of it and it is only right that its students should be prepared in case they have to defend against such death magic. Each of the eight schools is fully detailed, with the write up and statistics for their Dean and Assistant Dean (some of whom have 20 total levels); descriptions (though no stats) for two or three other staff members; a list of their basic and advanced classes; and several signature spells. There is some groan-inducing humor employed for some of the class titles, such as the Bisechen School of Conjunction's "Something for Nothing," the Jecture School of Divination's "I Know What You're Thinking," and the Nammor School of Enchantment's "To Sleep Perchance to Dream" class which attempts to answer the question, "do people under the effects of a sleep spell dream of magical sheep?" Students are encouraged to choose a school in which to specialize, though some do not and graduate as Wizards, rather than Diviners, Enchanters, Illusionists, or the like.

Students can pursue extra-curricular activities, including sports on the dueling grounds (enchanted so that no one is truly hurt). Excursions to the worlds where the Academy stops are popular, as are the various magically enhanced games and dramatic presentations. Of the former, all types are played, as well as live action dungeon events organized by the Grand Adventurer's Club. To wizards from outside of the Academy, as well as alumni, the libraries and laboratories offer excellent research facilities.

The Student Handbook devotes a page each to eight of the locations that the campus visits. These include Battle City, as described in Atlas Games' *Seven Cities*; Green Ronin's *Freeport, City of Adventure*; various locations within the *Kingdom of Kalamar* from Kenzer & Company, but most notably the city of Seavue; near Lake Gomala in Atlas Games' *Nyambe*; the Lands of Lerum in Sovereign Press' *Sovereign Stone* setting; and *Hollowfast -- City of Necromancers*, set in Sword and Sorcery Studios' *Scarred Lands*. The faculty have had contact with Fast Forward Entertainment's *Dungeon World*, but students are not allowed to visit it. Outside of these eight, any world that uses magic can probably be visited by the Redhurst Academy of Magic.

What this means is that the players could create characters from any of these settings and of any race that the GM allows. Essentially players can create the characters they want, and a game can be run using a surprisingly eclectic mix! They enter the academy as 1st-level wizards and should graduate at 3rd level, having spent 2,000gp per year for their tuition. Instead of experience points, the students are awarded merits and demerits, needing 6,000 to graduate. These are translated back into the normal experience points upon graduation, when the wizard also gains the free feat of Redhurst Alumni.

Throughout the book, any OGL material is kept to a minimum and invariably to one side. What new magical items, spells and monsters there are tend towards interesting rather than world-shaking or powerful. Of course, the comprehensive nature of the Redhurst Library of the Arcane means that any spell and details of any magical item can probably be found in its stacks. In this way, any *d20 System* magic sourcebook (and others!) can be a supplement to *Redhurst Academy of Magic: Student Handbook*.

The most obvious way in which the *Redhurst Academy of Magic: Student Handbook* can be used is as a *d20 System*

campaign setting for young wizards. The relative unobtrusiveness of the *d20 System* material means that it could run in a similar fashion, but for whatever game system the DM prefers. A lesser use would be to relegate the Redhurst Academy of Magic as somewhere to visit; more obviously, it could be a roving resource and research center for wizard, sorcerer, or bard characters. On the whole, this option would make it harder for the GM to involve a party in the entire internal goings on of the eight schools and relationships between the staff of the campus. Of course, there is one other obvious option (one that is not mentioned in the book for equally obvious reasons). It's possible to ditch the more obtrusive of the setting's *Dungeons & Dragons*-style trappings and use it to run a game like J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter stories. In other words, make Redhurst Academy of Magic into Hogwarts. This would be a relatively easy exercise, and there already exist some minor parallels.

It should also be noted that *Redhurst Academy of Magic: Student Handbook* is the first pen-and-paper released by Human Head Studios, the software company better known for their *Rune* computer game, which of course, has been licensed as an [RPG](#) itself by Atlas Games. As such, *Redhurst Academy of Magic* is a very nice take upon an old idea - the college of wizards -- particularly because it is designed to encompass any *d20 System* setting where magic is known. Its parallels with the Harry Potter tales means that *Redhurst Academy of Magic* could be used as an introductory game for fans of those books, and it would be wonderful if the publisher could support this through a series of adventures or year-books that would take the player characters from 1st level and enrolment to 3rd level and graduation. Such releases might provide more of a structure to study and academy life than is given here, which is slightly loose. It's also regrettable that an unamended version of the *Student Handbook* is unavailable as a massive handout, since this copy reveals many secrets from an unknown villain.

These are the only niggles to what is otherwise a solidly done sourcebook and setting. That it can encompass any magic setting is a very clever design feature as is the built-in flexibility, which both serve to make *Redhurst Academy of Magic: Student Handbook* suitable for all games with an arcane bent, and not just the *d20 System*.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Carcassonne: The Castle

Published by Hans im Glück Verlags-GmbH/[Rio Grande Games](#)

Created by Reiner Knizia

Carcassonne game system designed by Klaus Jürgen Wrede

10-piece jig-cut castle wall, 60 castle tiles, 18 wall tiles, 14 pawns and 2 keeps in two colors, color rule booklet; \$19.95

Short of going into outer space, it seems like there aren't many more places into which the *Carcassonne* series of games can expand. Trust Hans im Glück, then, to go to the other extreme. For the first time, instead of a wide-open playing surface limited only by the edge of one's dining room table, a *Carcassonne* game has built-in limits. Enter *Carcassonne: The Castle*.

The object of the game is to score the most points by occupying the right tiles in Castle Carcassonne.

Once more, thematic changes have been made to the *Carcassonne* formula. Here within the walls of the castle, there are no fields and no livestock for farmers to watch over. Instead, small market stalls dot the open courtyards. Roads are simple paths with wells and bounded by town squares, and since the whole game takes place inside a single structure, pawns gain points for completing houses and towers instead of fortifications or cities.

The heart of the game is still about laying tiles and placing one's followers on these spaces to score points. Where previous versions of the game allowed players to connect the tiles wherever they choose, The Castle forces players to play in the castle walls.

The walls enter play in a number of ways. They are made of the same material as the tiles, but are long and jig-cut at the ends to interlock. Aside from simply determining where castle tiles must be played, the walls have a selection of starting spaces from which the tiles must originate. The walls also display the point track. The numbers 0 to 99 run the circumference, and the score markers are placed here.

Additionally, the track has counters called wall tiles placed at irregular intervals; a player who gets points during the game and lands on one of these counters with his scoring marker gets to turn it over and use it. Most allow the player to get extra points for structures during or after the game. As a sort of midpoint between *Hunters & Gatherers* and traditional *Carcassonne*, players do not normally score for uncompleted buildings or paths at the end of the game, but the right wall tile allows you to change that. The wall tiles may also offer the player another turn or a free increase in the size of his keep.

The keep is a new pawn; this one, the player puts on his first completed house. Anytime he builds a larger house (one made with more tiles than the last one), the keep moves to that location. At the end of the game, whichever player holds the largest keep scores points for the biggest "hole" -- there will be as many as 16 spaces within the city not covered by castle tiles, and the largest contiguous gap formed by these empty spaces scores an equal number of points.

Although the components are high quality, they also offer the game's biggest concern: the paths don't match up. In all versions of the *Carcassonne* series, there are trails or streams of some sort to connect for points, but here some of them match perfectly and many others do not (often both, depending on which end of the tile you're using). Given the close quarters for play in this version, the rule limitations on where paths may or may not be placed (and terminated), and

the tendency of many paths to hug the edges of buildings, one begins to wonder if this is sloppy graphic work or the designers really didn't want players placing certain tiles in certain arrangements. The nomenclature can also be a little confusing at first, with wall tiles and castle tiles being two distinct entities and starting spaces and tower spaces having separate functions.

Carcassonne: The Castle is a more easily manipulated operation than its predecessors. Players can see what's happening and, while they're not likely to be able to prevent their opponent from placing his tile, they'll actually be able to maneuver to outdo or outpace each other. Anticipating moves is easier when you can't sprawl all over the table. Decisions about whether to score small now or wait and score big in the endgame are much more critical -- claiming a smaller point value now could land you on a valuable wall counter worth more in the long run. These wall tiles have to be placed face-up, so they still add enough unpredictability to keep participants exercising their minds during play while giving the enemy a chance to respond meaningfully. There are also more such pieces than are used in one game, so it's never a sure bet whether the piece you need is there.

While ***Carcassonne*** has always been touted as being great for two players, this version is *only* for two players. This is a wise decision, given the tight quarters and the benefit to the aforementioned player ability to direct the game, but it costs the game some of that friendly, competitive spirit that makes other editions such a pleasant pastime. The degree of control is a refreshing feature, and more than any other incarnation in the series, ***The Castle*** keeps the same feel of play while significantly changing the way it runs. In short, you're not buying the same game again. Some variations offer mostly cosmetic changes, but this is a genuinely different experience even for veteran players.

--Andy Vetromile

A Brief History of Dice

A few years ago there was a common trend in the comics, which - although still-tapped - isn't as common nowadays. (For those of you wondering why I'm doing another comic-based column, my only defense is that - in my biggest cleaning binge ever - I recently sold off one-third of my collection. As a result, I've spent a *lot* of time recently staring at comics and wondering, "Hmm . . . about this comic makes it special or worthy of saving?" For those of you growing antsy, I note that I've got a television-based column in the percolator even as you read.)

Anyway, for a while it was chic to make references to the different eras of comics, either by telling "lost tales" from those eras or by superimposing modern characters in that sentimentality. Thus in one story Superman might find himself in a 1940s World War II tale, with greatly reduced powers and the ability to leap buildings instead of flying over them. In the next story he might be caught in the whimsy of the 1960s, with psychic dogs, time-traveling monsters from Planet Drooom!, and Jimmy Olsen spouting dialog like "I'd believe Superman had a big, red *ant head* before I'd believe he was a coward!" (yes, he really said that). And he might finally be in a socially relevant 1970s-style story, with world hunger, drugs, and protesting hippies providing the narrative thrust. In the end it might be revealed that it was all the mastermind of some reality-altering villain who yadda yadda yadda . . . really, the justification isn't as important as much as the opportunity to visit the continuity (or lack thereof) that makes the history of comics so interesting.

I've always enjoyed these tales, mostly because I find the evolution of the backdrop of superheroic comics fascinating, and partly because I love looking at the relation between real-world history and how it's dealt with (or not) in comics. (It seems unthinkable that comics published during World War II could escape dealing with the global conflict, and indeed they often *did* deal with imaginary Nazi saboteurs on American soil. On the other hand, the Vietnam conflict went largely ignored at the time it was raging, and the current "war on terror" has been little touched upon by most modern comics.)

Anyway, I've wondered how it might be possible to run an RPG using the same technique. All you need is one reality-bending villain, some players who are game (ha!), and you're set to hop through different expressions of the gaming hobby.

To a certain extent, some games have already done this. White Wolf, for example, has explored different genres in both its World of Darkness line (*Vampire: Dark Ages* is more similar than not to many Fantasy games) and its Aeonverse (which combines pulp, supers, and sci-fi in the same universe but different eras). And AEG's *Spycraft* game has decade books coming out, allowing players to recreate the feel of different spy eras . . . not unlike the *Austin Powers* movies, only presumably with fewer excretory jokes.

However, I'm not aware offhand of any RPG or adventure that has bridged the various eras and *styles* of gaming. I suspect that, for one thing, it would be a nightmare mechanics-wise. If the point is to recreate some of the types of games that have come down the river, then almost by definition no one system could encompass it . . . and creating different systems for what is, in essence, a one-off event would seem to be an awful lot of work for a publisher. On the other hand, there's nothing to keep the gaming omnivore from raiding his shelf and tapping into the Shelves Of Gaming Past, filing off serial numbers if so desired.

There is another problem, however. Much like the point of Cecil Adams' column on ["We get nostalgic for Victorian Christmases. What did Victorians get nostalgic for?"](#), it's tough to get nostalgic for something if it won't go away. Unlike comics' seven or so decades, gaming is still relatively new. And, for the most part, the various eras of gaming are still here and among us; if a 1977 *Dungeons & Dragons* player were teleported to a *d20 System* gaming table, he'd probably be able to pick up a character sheet and start playing pretty quickly. (Of course, he'd wonder why everyone was using dice instead of cardboard chits in a cup, but still . . .) Likewise, most other significant eras of RPG gaming are still here, in some form or another.

Nevertheless, it should still be possible to tap into the meta-multi-RPG well, and come up with a series of adventures that would bring a series of characters through an evolution of gaming. Off-hand, this is how I'd do it.

First, I'd determine what genre I'd be playing in; this would probably be fantasy since, for better or worse, the history of the hobby is still closely tied to the fantasy genre. I'd have the players define their characters as loosely and as broadly as they were comfortable with.

Then I'd come up with a series of game styles. I'd probably mix them up as best I could, chronologically, just to keep players on their toes. (After all, you don't want them to *know* it's a cross-meta-genre RPG extravaganza from the beginning . . . do you?)

Straight "Dungeon Crawl" Fantasy: I'd probably start the players off with as close to a "generic" Fantasy game as possible. Pre-rolled stats, levels, straightforward combat . . . the works. I'd try to make it *interesting*, of course (unlike the other dabbling in the [metagenre](#) I'd discussed in another article), but it would be as classic as possible.

Whodunnit?: Then I'd probably have a *How to Host A Murder*-esque adventure, where the players don't even *have* a GM, for the most part, but instead follow the instructions of the rules to reveal the story and determine the outcome of the event. (Whether or not they figure it out may determine how events proceed later on.)

Damned (You Do, You Don't): Of course, by now the players know that something strange is going on. For the third adventure, I'd probably tap into the gloomfest of the early 1990s, inflicting some dread vampirilycanthropicghostfaemummialidocious on the players. The adventure would probably focus on the downward spiral of that era, although it probably would need to be accelerated so that the players "got it" . . . after all, in the stereotypical games of this sort the players generally don't sink into oblivion for at least a few game sessions. I'd probably try to have each of the players hit rock bottom, however it's appropriate . . .

Do You Want To Play A Game? . . . And then I'd run the next game session online, or by e-mail. The players wake up in a scenic village. They're all better, everyone is happy, etc. This would be a heavily story-based adventure, with little-to-no mechanics. While the previous adventure would advance the darker side of the story, this one would be a good time to advance the more mundane aspects of the game; after all, almost by necessity plots generally need to be smaller online. I'd probably try to end this adventure with all the heroes outside some castle they were going to siege . . .

Move 1d6 Squares: . . . and the next game would be a literal tribute to their wargaming roots. The characters would all be reduced as much as possible to even simpler stats, with die rolls representing the various attacks. The players would then control their miniature throughout the castle siege, going room to room as tactically as they could. They'd encounter the Master Villian, who would reveal some aspect of the Over-Arching Plot (it needs to be big!), and end there before going on to . . .

Suddenly! . . . the next adventure, a tribute to the cinematic player-tilted logarithmic systems that reward high dice rolls, decisive action, and Big Stories! (Think *DC Heroes/MEGS* or *Torg/Masterbook*.) This would be, by far, the most cinematic story of the series, and I wouldn't consider it a success unless at least one player managed to pick up a mountain and toss it at someone (or something similar). Ideally, once the heroes manage to thwart Tvlinok the Kingdom-Eater, the eldritch energies that wash over them will separate them . . .

Abort, Retry, Fail: . . . and I'd give each of the players a computer disc at the end of the session. There, they would need to work their way (separately) through a small dungeon computer game, using one of the RPG-generator programs out there. At the end of each player's adventure, he would find himself in a large antechamber, having acquired one line of a poem . . .

LARP, I Need Somebody: . . . and the next adventure would be a live-action game, combining Cops & Robbers, *Killer*, treasure hunts, and so on. Here, the players would get all the clues together to realize what's Really Going On (you know, that Reality-Altering Bad-Guy Yadda Yadda Yadda), and then steal themselves for . . .

What's The Point? . . . a point-based system, such as *GURPS*. Here, the players would have combat, interaction, and so on, all culminating in the final confrontation, where the heroes need to make some cosmic revelation about themselves (probably that their selves are encompassed in each of the meta-genres explored).

Fade to black.

Before you all write me, I will confess that there are a number of trends I didn't pick (such as cross-genre gaming or diceless tabletop roleplaying); also, the LARP one encompasses more history than I'd be comfortable doing in a term paper. But, as a whirlwind outline to let the players *and* characters explore gaming history, it's a good start.

Of course, much of narrative pull for this series would be the surprise of each genre and "revelation" . . . so, by reading this, none of you all could ever play in this game.

Whether or not this is a good thing I will leave as an exercise for the reader.

--*Steven Marsh*

Tomb 55, Who Are You?

*". . . I have watched
Thy shadow, and the darkness of thy steps,
And my heart ever gazes on the depth
Of thy deep mysteries. I have made my bed
In charnels and on coffins, where black death
Keeps record of the trophies won from thee,
Hoping to still these obstinate questionings
Of thee and thine, by forcing some lone ghost,
Thy messenger, to render up the tale
Of what we are."*

-- Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Alastor, or the Spirit of Solitude," lines 20-29

We've bisociated [lenses](#), [and maps](#), and [books](#), shifting our stance to overlay contending truths for vibrant effect. This time, it's a whole body -- well, a skeleton, anyway -- that might shift as we shift our perspective. Male or female, Pharaoh or courtier -- human or alien? Nobody knows. The mummy in Tomb 55 took its secrets into the earth -- and somebody made sure that they stayed there for three millennia. Get a chisel and a mirror, and we'll find out what's behind door number one. Or two. Or 55.

"The fact that they had time to brick up the entrance with these valuable gold-covered artefacts lying within arm's reach, could only mean that the outer portal to the tomb was regarded as a magical barrier against whatever evil they imagined to be inside . . . not to protect the tomb from influences from the outside as was usually the case, but to prevent whatever was inside from escaping. It would seem that Tomb 55 was not so much a final resting place as a prison."

-- Graham Phillips, *Atlantis and the Ten Plagues of Egypt*

On January 6, 1907, the Egyptologist Edward Ayrton, clearing the rubble from other tomb sites in the Valley of the Kings, discovered an unknown tomb entrance, 21 steps down hacked into the limestone -- implying a royal tomb. However, the wall at the foot of the stairs bore no royal seal. Arthur Weigall, the representative of Cairo's Antiquities Service, ordered Ayrton to begin cataloging the site and called Howard Carter (in Luxor at the time) to join the dig. Rather than wait for Carter to arrive (and possibly steal the credit), Ayrton ordered the wall broken through, only to find a second wall behind the first, this one still sealed with the royal seal of Anubis and nine bound captives. Ayrton's backer, the rich American lawyer Theodore Davis, Ayrton, and the formerly cautious Weigall then smashed the sealed wall with pickaxes, tossed aside two gilded wooden "doors" lying on top of the rubble in the corridor, and generally Indiana Jonesed the site to heck. Whatever clues once existed to the completely unorthodox "double wall-single seal" structure were gone forever.

Inside the tomb, the three vandals managed to smash the rest of the "doors", which turned out to be part of a funerary shrine of Akhenaten, the mysterious heretic pharaoh of the XVIIIth Dynasty. They then dropped the coffin and split it open, following their act by tearing the bandages off the mummy, powdering one of its teeth and most of its body, and damaging its pelvis. They weren't the first vandals to enter the tomb, however. The gold foil in the coffin was torn and wadded, the mask on the mummy had been ripped apart, and all the cartouches -- inscriptions naming the person buried in the tomb -- had been chiseled out. Some clues remained, however. The four canopic jars were women's jars, the coffin was small (and possibly "female"), the mummy had been wearing a queenly vulture crown, and the mummy had been left in a symbolically female pose.

"Forbes also stated that 'several noted Egyptologists' had unofficially claimed to have seen the coffin elements, or photos of them, and reported that the cartouche of Smenkhkare appears on a band of hieroglyphs running down the interior bottom of the restored basin. Forbes also reported, however, that Dr. Schoske denied the existence of this cartouche but maintained that some of the titles appearing in the existing inscriptions 'would surprise many Egyptologists.'"

-- William Max Miller, "KV 55's Lost Objects: Where Are they Today?"

Based on that evidence, Davis decided that the tomb (later designated Tomb 55 in the Valley of the Kings, or KV 55) was that of Queen Tiye, favorite wife of the Pharaoh Amenhotep III, and the mother of Akhenaten. His argument was also bolstered by the inscription on the shrine panels, indicating it was made for her. When Ayrton discovered Tutankhamen's royal seal in the rubble (belatedly sifting through it like a proper archaeologist), that clinched it for Davis -- Tiye was the only royal woman known to have died during Tutankhamen's reign. For Ayrton, the seal proved that the body was Tutankhamen's -- an early identification of the mummy as female by a local obstetrician dismayed him not, as he promptly sent the body to an anatomy professor in Cairo who pronounced the skeleton that of a young man. (The despised Howard Carter disproved the theory more convincingly in 1922 by discovering Tutankhamen's tomb -- 15 yards away and directly across the Valley from Tomb 55.) Another archaeologist, Norman de Garis Davies, proposed that the body was actually that of Smenkhkare, a mysterious Pharaoh between Akhenaten's reign and Tutankhamen's, who served as co-regent during Akhenaten's last years. Modern discoveries of the "lower coffin" in Munich (stolen from Cairo some time during 1915 or 1916) provide more evidence for the Smenkhkare theory, including a possible cartouche bearing his name on the gold foil further crumpled and creased by Ayrton and company.

This would all be fairly clear cut, even given the skeleton's sex changes, were it not for a body of evidence that suggests that "Smenkhkare" never existed at all. His "regency" begins immediately after Nefertiti, Akhenaten's wife, disappears from the records, and Smenkhkare shares "his" title Neferneferuaten (a female title) with Nefertiti. So could the mummy of Tomb 55 be Nefertiti? Her mummy (unlike that of Queen Tiye) has never been found. Other theorists have proposed Meritaten, the daughter-wife of Akhenaten (who vanished at his death), Ankhesenamun (daughter of Akhenaten and sister-wife of both Smenkhkare and Tutankhamen), and Kiya, the (possible) mother of Tutankhamen and wife of Akhenaten. Whoever the mummy was, she (or he) was definitely closely related to Tutankhamen -- they share the same blood type and skull shape.

"The body was lying in a coffin inscribed with Akhenaton's name; it was bound around with ribbons inscribed with his name; it had the physical characteristics of the portraits of Akhenaton; it had the idiosyncracies of a religious reformer such as he was; it was that of a man of Akhenaton's age as deduced from the monuments; it lay in the tomb of Akhenaton's mother; those who erased the names must have thought it to be Akhenaton's body, unless one supposes an utter chaos of cross-purposes in their actions; and finally, there is nobody else who, with any degree of probability, it could be."

-- Arthur Weigall, "The Mummy of Akhenaton," in the *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*

Or, of course, it might be Akhenaten himself. Weigall proposed that theory in 1907, after the discovery in Tomb 55 of four "magic bricks" inscribed with Akhenaten's throne name, Neferkheperure. The shrine and coffin also bear similar oblique inscriptions -- and the missing cartouches become evidence for Akhenaten's presence in the tomb, since the priests of Amen chiseled his name off of every surface they could find after his death. (They also forced Tutankhaten, Akhenaten's son, to change his name to Tutankhamen.) The fact that we know perfectly well where Akhenaten's tomb actually was -- in his capital city of Akhetaten -- boots us little, since his body was never buried there. Again, the disarranged, ad hoc collection of ornaments for men and women match an image of the hasty reburial and desecration of a hated king's corpse. Even the odd skeleton can be explained; existing depictions of Akhenaten show him with an elongated head and wide pelvis, a possible consequence of Frohlich's Syndrome, Marfan's Syndrome, or "47XXY" chromosomal disorder, any of which might also throw off the age forensics of the skull and bones.

"After an appropriate silence, King Akhunaton spoke: 'My heritage is celestial. I shall reveal my stellar origin on the last day of the month of Khoiak. All of Egypt will see signs in the sky on that day. The next day, the first of spring, in the fifth year of my reign, these signs will again be seen. By daylight, two boats of the sky, the Atet and the Sektet, will dance under the sun over Thebes.'"

-- Daniel Blair Stewart, *Akhunaton: The Extraterrestrial King*

There might, of course, be another explanation for Akhenaten's deformities. As we've [seen before](#), the presence of divine -- or ultraterrestrial -- DNA in a human shell can warp and distort its shape into monstrous levels. Descended

directly from his grandfather Re-Harakhty (a version of the hawk-god Horus, often parsed as "Horus of the Two Horizons") and from the oldest lineage of Theban priesthood (via his mother, Queen Tiye), Akhenaten joined a divine bloodline to that of Egypt itself. Unlike even his deified father, Amenhotep III, Akhenaten was an incarnation of the divine on earth. Hence, his wholesale reforms and persecutions of Egypt's religious establishment, replacing it with a single deity -- Aten -- who could only be approached through himself. Akhetaten, his capital, resembled Pyongyang, with wide streets and the image of the Divine Leader everywhere. His social experiments recalled Mao's Cultural Revolution and his use of the army to enforce order and collect taxes had something of Saddam Hussein about it, as did his bizarrely incompetent foreign policy. Make no mistake -- Edwardian sentiment aside, Akhenaten was a first-class megalomaniac, altering religion, art, and even geography to worship himself. Akhenaten's startling resemblance to the Grey aliens (bulging eyes, narrow chin, long head and fingers, weak chest, spindly legs) makes such behavior even more suspicious -- especially when such a being exalts the image of a flying disk.

"It becomes apparent, therefore, that the object of veneration of the so-called Aten or 'disk worshippers' signalled the re-introduction of a vastly ancient cult. The disk typified, not the solar orb, but a cycle of time described in space, literally, by the Seven Stars of Typhon, who brought to birth, and was thereby manifested by, her son, Set . . ."

-- Kenneth Grant, *Outer Gateways*

Conventional Egyptology, and much of Akhenaten's propaganda, identified "the Aten" as the disk of the sun, perhaps in an attempt to win the heliophilic people of Egypt over to his cult. During the Middle Kingdom, however, the term Aten could be applied to any disk, including the surface of a [mirror](#), the moon -- or a "winged disk" in the sky. Akhenaten had a fascination with the benben stones, conical sacred stones marking the holy sites of Egypt -- the first of which [fell from the sky](#) before the Pharaohs emerged. Between flying disks, descending cones, and sacred geography, we arrive back at Akhenaten's capital, Akhetaten, which he placed (in a miserable desert bowl) in the exact center of Egypt. This "horizon of Aten" was chosen for more than one reason. Although the language of the Akhetaten boundary stelae is a murky blend of hippie and bureaucrat, it seems to proclaim that Akhenaten founded this city in the middle of the desert because here "for the first time [he] discovered it by His [Aten's] Presence." This Roswell by the Nile became the alien capital of a twisted pharaoh.

In Akhenaten's first temple to Aten, in Thebes, Aten shared the honors with two gods: Re-Harakhty (fair enough, given that he was Akhenaten's grandfather) and Set, the mysterious god of evil and night. (Re-Harakhty is also depicted as a [sphinx](#), the only non-human form ever shown for Akhenaten.) Although Set eventually vanished from the official iconography, he symbolically re-emerged when Akhenaten in the ninth year of his suzerainty declared Aten not only the chief, but the only, god of Egypt. Only Set had dared to kill other gods and usurp the throne of Heaven. The Egyptian chronicler Manetho, a millennium later, recalled the era of Akhenaten as one of Set-worship by "unclean souls." And sure enough, by the end of Akhenaten's reign, a deadly plague swept through Egypt, killing his wives and children. Akhenaten's ascension was perhaps also prefigured by pestilence -- Amenhotep III, in his last years, erected a staggering 700 statues to Sekhmet, the goddess of plague and sterility (and sphinxes). But Sekhmet would not be placated, and Akhenaten (of whom there is no record during Amenhotep III's reign) emerged from the shadows to take the throne of Egypt.

"The Pharaoh Nephren-Ka built around it a temple with a windowless crypt, and did that which caused his name to be stricken from all monuments and records. Then it slept in the ruins of that evil fane which the priests and the new Pharaoh destroyed, till the delver's spade once more brought it forth to curse mankind."

-- H.P. Lovecraft, "The Haunter of the Dark"

The imaginative Graham Phillips proposes that Akhenaten (and possibly Smenkhkare) were seen by the Egyptian priests as the "carriers" of some horrific supernatural evil, evidenced by the wars, plagues, and disasters of Akhenaten's rule, as well as by the nightmarish heresies promulgated from the "horizon of Aten." Hence the defacement of the cartouches -- with no *ren*, or name, visible in the tomb, the pharaoh's spirit would be unable to leave his coffin. (Similarly, Akhenaten's name was removed from the ritual king lists, taking it out of the heavenly record.) Perhaps the multiple doors, the women's artifacts, and the other confusing remains in Tomb 55 similarly served as magical chaff, to blind the Aten and trap it in a dark, nonsensical hell-tomb. Until, of course, 3,000 years later, it sensed Ayrton and

Davis' greed, and twisted their minds as it had twisted Akhenaten's body. Their bizarre destructive monomania was very much out of character for Egyptologists, even in 1907, but it may have served the purpose of something else quite well.

Did the Aten call out a few years earlier, to Aleister Crowley in Cairo in 1904, dictating *The Book of the Law* as the entity Aiwass? Both, after all, are identified with Re-Harakhty, and both can be described as "faceless." (Crowley also channelled something that looked a lot like Akhenaten -- or a Grey -- in 1918, called "Lam.") Crowley manifested his "New Order," the Argentinum Astrum, in early 1907, the year that Tomb 55 was opened. However, if Crowley was the Aten's "John the Baptist," we must still look for its incarnation. In 1907, [Rudolf Hess](#) left Egypt for Germany. Was he a "carrier" of the Aten? Was this the explanation for his drastically changed appearance after his bizarre defection in 1941? Did he initiate his Nazi comrades into the new cult of the solar wheel -- the swastika? Or did the Aten merely hitch a ride with Hess, entering a young, would-be architect (shades of Akhetaten) in Vienna? Does this explain the Aten host's rumored ambiguous sexual deformities, and his increasing physical disintegration during the war? Did the Aten announce its coming by disease in 1907, just as it did in the XVIIIth Dynasty? Because that would explain why, on the day Tomb 55 was opened, Adolf Hitler's mother was diagnosed with cancer.

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Out of the Mud

A World War II Scenario

by Austin Chamberlain and Dylan Craig

A secret German rocket weapon project is being dismantled and shipped to Germany to keep it away from the advancing Allies. One of the shipments holds a disassembled V-3 rocket along with fuel and construction plans; this train has gone missing between stations, and now both the Germans and a small advance group of Allied soldiers (the PCs) are searching for it. The PCs' orders are to:

- proceed to the train's last reported location and determine which route it took from there;
- follow that route and find the train, neutralizing any resistance at the site and securing the rocket (after determining that it is, in fact, on board the train);
- Radio for backup and await the arrival of a motorized battalion with armor support, who will retrieve the rocket.

This adventure can thus be divided neatly into three sections: following the trail, finding the train, and then holding off the German counter-attack until help arrives.

Characters

This scenario is set in Poland, and thus it is assumed that the characters are soldiers of the Red Army, pushing West towards Germany. This becomes significant at several points in the adventure, especially with regard to NPC attitudes towards the party. However, the scenario can easily be adapted to handle soldiers from the forces of the Western allies; this may mean replacing the Ukrainian POWs in the final scene with Italians or Romanians to preserve the tension in their relationships with the PCs.

The Fate of the Train

Three days ago, upon arriving at Dzialoszyn, the train (designation: Waffezug 4) was notified that partisan activity along the main track to Peenemunde had rendered that route unsafe; accordingly, it was diverted along a secondary track, via the town of Krzepice -- a tiny settlement at the base of a hydroelectric dam. However, as the train pulled into the siding, a flight of Russian fighter-bombers, returning from another target with unused ammunition, dropped out of the sky and strafed the dam wall. Slowly the concrete arches buckled and crumbled; a wave of mud and water swept down the valley, drowning half the town and most of the train under an avalanche of black silt. The town's garrison were entombed; the survivors fled, leaving Krzepice a ghost town populated only by scavengers, the shell-shocked remnants of the train's *SS Totenkopfverbände* (Death's Head Group) guards, and the survivors of a Ukrainian POW detachment attached to the train as a manual labor component, who have armed themselves and are intent on killing everything in a uniform which sets foot in the village.

Part I: Dzialoszyn

The characters are concealed on a hillock overlooking the railroad track leading into Dzialoszyn. It is 30 minutes before sunrise; it has taken the heroes most of the evening to get into position, but they have all had a few hours' sleep here and there and are feeling as rested as possible given the circumstances.

Below them, Dzialoszyn is very quiet. Several SdKfz-231 (half-tracks) are parked in the middle of the village, but no patrols have been sighted since the sky began to grow light. As sunrise approaches, the occasional scurrying figure of a civilian can be seen moving along the streets, delivering milk or getting ready for work.

Refer to the map of Dzialoszyn. You may show this handout to the players; their elevated position allows them as good as a bird's-eye view.

Dzialoszyn Map



The Germans

There are 20 German soldiers encamped in Dzialoszyn:

- Four, plus a *hauptmann* (captain), occupy the main command post on the ground floor of the town's largest hotel (location A1). Two of these soldiers are regular infantry; the other two are a radio operator and a typist respectively.
- Four more men are on guard at the train station (A3), four more at the post office/ telegraph station (A4), and the remaining six men plus a *leutnant* (lieutenant) are organized into two patrol forces, one traversing the town's perimeter and the other moving up and down the main roads checking for partisans and mines. Both of these forces regroup by returning to their starting positions outside the hotel every hour.

The *hauptmann* and *leutnant* have the only two-way radios in the group. In the case of weapons fire inside the town, the two patrol groups' orders are to pull back to the hotel and the railway station respectively (with the *leutnant* and his

radio in the latter group), and hold them until further orders are received. This means that unless pinned down, German troops encountered by the characters will always seek to disengage and pull back the safety of the machine-gun emplacements and grenade stashes at these two locations.

If the characters' attack becomes too much for the garrison to handle, causing more than 25% casualties, or if their presence as a regular Red Army detachment becomes known, the *hauptmann* will call for reinforcements (assuming the long-range radio antenna at the HQ is still functional); see the Reinforcements section, below.

Captured German soldiers may, of course, be interrogated. Only the *hauptmann*, however, knows that the train the characters are looking for was rerouted through Krzepice. The rest are only good for informing the characters that yes, the train was here, but that they have no idea where it went; they also know that the captain and the train guards' commanding officer consulted with the station master (now under arrest at the German HQ -- see below) before rerouting it. They can also tell the characters the day's password. However, it should be noted that while trying to bluff their way into the town (perhaps by wearing captured German uniforms) will fool any citizens who might observe the characters -- new German troops pass through here every day or two -- it won't work on other soldiers except at night, because they know each other too well.

The Citizens

Dzialoszyn's remaining civilians are few in number and have been made timid by prolonged military overlordship. Around 60 men and women are still living in the town itself, and perhaps another 50 in farms and cottages dotted across the surrounding landscape. Ethnic Poles, they bear no special love for Russia; any notions of Slavic loyalties from which the party might benefit are balanced against their fear of retaliation by the Germans -- several locals have already been hung as an example against assisting partisans in the last few months. The most recent crop of bodies still swing on the gallows (location A2).

In any given encounter with citizens of Dzialoszyn, a good rule of thumb is that they will betray the party to the Germans as soon as possible 25% of the time, assist them 25% of the time, do both (i.e. first assist and then betray) 25% of the time, and simply shake their heads, cower, and refuse to get involved 25% of the time. Several factors might modify this distribution, though.

If the party can convince a local to take them to the head of the town council (in a farm two miles outside the town), they will be told that Slawomir Radziwill, the mayor, is being held under guard with several other town notaries in one of the rooms of the hotel. Among this group is the town's station master, detained since the start of the German occupation because of the sensitive nature of his profession. If the party show good faith by freeing these prisoners, the locals will contact their partisan colleagues and find out where the train they are looking for has got to.

Embarking on this rescue is one way to bypass a bloody firefight by tackling the station; another possibility (should the characters be less than charmed with taking on a side mission of this nature) will be made clear to them as they leave. Barbara Lubomirski, a local woman and the baker's wife, takes food to the prisoners every day at noon. If the characters retrieve her son's body from the gallows in town, she will make discreet enquiries of the station master during her lunchtime rounds, and return to the characters' hideout just after two with his answer. The consequences of each of these courses of action are detailed below.

Raiding the Hotel

The first floor, where the prisoners are kept, is accessible from the main staircase and from the fire escape along the side wall. The main entrance is guarded by a single German soldier outside the building; the side entrance is not guarded, but the doors on each landing are securely locked and noisy entrances will draw the attention of the second guard, whose position is just outside the prisoners' door.

There is no easy way to sneak up on the main door guard; the characters will have to try and bluff their way up to him if they intend to take him out quietly. The second guard is much more vulnerable, especially given his tendency to investigate unusual noises and footfalls in the deserted hotel rather than calling for backup. If either guard sounds the

alarm or shots are fired, the hauptmann and remaining soldiers will rush to the main stairwell and take up defensive positions there while coordinating the movements of the patrol groups.

The prisoners, once rescued, are in good condition and cooperative. Their primary concern is for anyone involved with the rescue to flee the town and any German reprisals; however, they will be glad to point the characters off in the direction of Krzepice. Of course, if the German hauptmann was captured, they will be able to get the same information from him.

Retrieving the Body

Four bodies swing from the gallows -- two men, a woman, and a teenage boy. The boy is the one the characters are looking for; his crime was being caught placing caltrops along the main road past Dzialoszyn -- an act of sabotage, as far as the military authorities were concerned. Cutting him down is not a particularly difficult task, except for two complicating factors:

- First, the gallows lie on the route of both patrol groups. This gives the heroes only a 20-minute window of opportunity to enter the town, cut down the body, and make their escape. This will require stealthy action from each member of the unit. If more than one person fails, a Polish civilian will come out to see what is going on. A critical failure draws one of the patrols. The task can be made simpler by hiding near the square while one patrol goes by, popping out once they have left, cutting down the body, and withdrawing; these methods will impose a minor penalty to the stealth checks, depending on the novelty of the technique, location used to hide in, and the number of characters participating.
- Second, the occupying troops have left a grenade stuffed into the inside coat pocket of one of the other bodies on the gallows -- the elder of the two men, who was executed for partisan activities. If his body is cut down or searched, or the boy's body is cut down roughly (a Dexterity roll is needed to avoid), the grenade will roll free and detonate. Apart from injuring or killing anyone nearby, this will raise the alarm and draw the German troops' attention. Noticing the bulge requires a vision check if anyone examines the other bodies, and a demolitions roll to retrieve it and/or make it safe.

The mother will be as good as her word, assuming the characters can retrieve the body without causing a firefight, and will reveal the train's destination as promised. If the characters retrieve the body but get into a firefight while doing so and thus betray their presence, the *hauptmann* will put two and two together, seize the mother during her bread delivery, extract the group's location from her, and coordinate a relief force to attack the PCs.

Storming the Station

The final option open to the characters is to storm the train station looking for clues or the station master's log book. The German troops defending it are arranged as follows; one guard on the platforms, one sniper on the rooftop, and two soldiers manning a machine-gun nest inside the ticket counter, facing out of the station and down the street. While not in the habit of shooting anything that moves, the soldiers know that the townsfolk are under orders to stay away from the station; thus suspicious figures will be challenged first, and then shot. Weapons fire will draw the lieutenant's patrol group within a few minutes.

The station master's log makes the train's intended path clear, as well as the deviation in course to Krzepice authorized by the hauptmann and the train guards' commander, Sturmbannfuhrer Hartmann. A final annotation indicates that a query was received from HQ yesterday, noting that the train did not arrive in Peenemunde as scheduled, and indicating that several scouting elements had been detached from their regular duties to track it down.

Moving On

If the station is liberated, the characters have the option of taking a petrol-powered track repair trolley along the track towards Krzepice, rather than walking. The townsfolk are more than happy to let the characters "liberate" it in exchange for their help. This is the safest option, although there is a only 50% chance to make it to Krzepice without

encountering any Ilyushin Il-2 Shturmoviki (Russian ground-attack planes), which might decide to strafe the trolley. Each character on the trolley should make hearing checks; those who fail don't jump clear in time and should take light wounds from flying shrapnel, cannon rounds, etc.

Commandeering civilian or German military vehicles is similarly risky, but also carries the possible complication of German roadblocks 50% of the time. These roadblocks can be avoided without incident if the group makes its vision checks, followed by a drive roll to escape. If they tangle with a roadblock, it will be manned by four soldiers and a *feldwebel*, equipped with a machine-gun and panzerfaust.

Walking is without doubt the safest method of reaching Krzepice, but also the slowest; it will take six hours to march the distance, but only one to reach it by trolley or vehicle. Keep track of what time the characters arrive in Krzepice; every hour they save in getting there is an hour they will be able to spend on its defense (see Part III).

Part II: Krzepice

From far outside Krzepice, the destruction wreaked by the collapsed dam is evident. Farm animals wander unattended and starving, bloated bodies (human and animal) are visible in trees where the water deposited them before receding, and above it all the caws and croaks of carrion crows echo harshly off the sides of the valley, providing a raucous counterpoint to the far-off thunder of the front lines. The shattered dam wall is clearly visible as the agent of the destruction.

Unlike Dzialoszyn, Krzepice is not guarded by any organized military force. Instead, the two main groups of combatants in the town are scattered loosely all over the area, with the exception of a hard core of SS guards dug in around the front of the train (see map). Between this and the ruined nature of the town, conducting operations in the town is simultaneously more and less difficult than in Dzialoszyn.

Dzialoszyn Map

- **Scouting:** Unlike Dzialoszyn, Krzepice is not surrounded by hills and thus, unless they take a long detour into the mountains where the dam used to stand, the party cannot get a bird's eye view of the town, and scouting is required to get an idea of its layout. This will require a scouting, tactics, or strategy roll; it will be more difficult at night, but easier with field glasses (binoculars). If this is successful, you may show them the map of the town. If they fumble the roll, they have encountered armed resistance -- see Entering Town, below. If they simply fail (but do not fumble), they have been unable to get a clear idea of the town and you should describe it in general terms and provide a simplified sketch rather than the handout. Scouting takes an hour, or two hours if performed by less than three characters.
- **Going to Higher Ground:** The dam itself is ruined and deserted, but still provides a good position from which to observe the town. The main problem is that the minefield that used to protect its base has now been swept up by the deluge and spread all the way down the river valley. Spotting a mine sticking out of a mud bank requires a vision roll; characters with Danger Sense or a similar ability get two rolls. If all rolls are failed, making it to an elevated position without stepping on a mine is fairly easy (with only a 20% of encountering a mine). If the mines are spotted, but the characters decide to press on anyway, the odds become very easy (10%), because of the heroes' forewarning. Once they have reached the dam, show the players the map of Krzepice; however, the heroes need to negotiate the mines again on their way back. Detouring to the dam and back takes two hours.

Entering Town

The town is black, muddy, and lifeless. The civilian population, apart from those driven mad by the calamity, has disappeared. Apart from these unfortunates -- who can be glimpsed digging in the wreckage of their houses or skulking in the shadows -- everyone in the village is armed and hostile, falling into the groups detailed below. If the characters are simply moving through the town, there is 30% chance per quarter of the town explored of encountering one of these groups (equal chance of either group), in which case the groups encounter each other at 10-60 meters distance with no surprise benefits in either case:

- **Bands of armed POWs:** These former combatants are roaming the town, looting, and looking for stray Germans and Poles to shoot. These groups are composed of five to 10 individuals, roughly equivalent in martial skill to the average raw recruit. They will fire on Russians and Germans with equal vigor; at this stage, any armed figure is a target. If the characters are stalking such a group, surprising it is a fairly easy task, accomplished with a Stealth roll, which will allow them to silently capture a stray POW for interrogation or to ambush the main group with a free round of firing before the POWs can react. There are 30 armed POWs in the town overall.
- **Roving SS:** These elite soldiers are attempting to corner and exterminate the POWs in order to reestablish some kind of defensive perimeter and send for help. Each unit is composed of 1d6 soldiers and led by a *feldwebel*. Stalking the SS is harder than stalking the POWs, requiring two Stealth rolls to get within SMG range; if any of these rolls are failed, the SS immediately become aware of, and begin stalking, the characters with the intent of ambushing them. There are 15 roving SS scattered around the town in total.
- **Emplaced SS:** The *SS Sturmbannfuhrer* has given several small machine-gun units the responsibility of keeping the area around the train free of unauthorized presences. Four of these three-man units are concealed in high buildings surrounding location B1 (the front of the train), with two men on each machine gun and one guarding their backs. The bodies of a handful of POWs and a few civilians lie as mute testimony to their firepower in this area. Flushing them out is a matter of drawing their fire through a ruse or feint attack (requiring a tactics roll -- failure means a machine-gun attack against a random character) and then flushing each team out with grenades or house-to-house fighting. Assisting the characters in this respect is the way the machine guns have been embedded; if they can make it into the building in which each team has concealed itself, the SS guards will be unable to bring their machine-gun to bear and will be forced to defend themselves with small arms. Make a note of how many machine-guns are destroyed in this phase of the operation; the characters may soon find themselves wishing for those machine guns.

Dealing with the "defenders" of Krzepice should be a tense affair, filled with suppressing fire, grenades tossed in through windows, the rattle of submachine-guns up staircases and through pasteboard walls, but it is impossible to detail every location in the town or account for every tactic the characters may come up with. It is thus important for the GM to think on his feet here, maintaining a gritty atmosphere while still rewarding player initiative. Here are two examples of possible tactics and their likely effects:

- **The Alliance Game:** The POWs, as Ukrainians, don't like Russians much (nationalist sentiment ran high in Ukraine during WW2, not least because of the pre-war Ukrainian famine which was partly engineered by Stalin) -- but they hate their erstwhile captors, the SS, even worse. If the characters manage to take a group of POWs prisoner (perhaps by surprising them with an ambush as detailed above), and then release them with the aim of fighting the Germans together, they have a good chance of winning them over. It will take fast-talk or leadership ability, but if they succeed, 10-20 POWs will come over to their side immediately and the others will leave the town. The POWs aren't interested in going into the train, but they will help the characters wipe out the remaining SS with much greater ease if a character with tactical sense takes them in hand.
- **Smoke and Mirrors:** With several heavily-armed groups out looking for trouble, characters who are fast on their feet might be able to lead them into each other. This will require a couple of good rolls: average tactics and stealth rolls to get POWs firing on SS troops or each other; slightly difficult tactics and stealth rolls to get SS to fire on POWs; and difficult tactics and stealth rolls to get SS firing at SS. All these rolls are easier at night. This might also be a good way for the party to find out where the emplaced machine guns are; just get a band of POWs to chase you into the killing zone, and sit back with your notebook and a cigarette.

Either way, the characters need to get to that train, and it isn't going to happen while the SS or the POWs are roaming

free. Once they've killed or allied their way to control of Krzepice, they can move on to the next stage - the train itself.

The Train

Waffezug 4 is still intact after having its front half caught in the mudslide, but that's about all that can be said about it. It's lying on its side 400 yards downriver from the siding, kinked into an S-shape with only the locomotive, tender, and front troop carriage visible above the mud; everything else has been buried under the black silt from the dam.

A military-issue petrol-driven generator stands on the muddy ground next to the entrance to the rearmost carriage, currently turned off but connected to a string of light bulbs disappearing into the darkened maw of the doorway. Whatever the contents of the wrecked train, someone has bothered to extend illumination to them. The generator is almost empty, and will run for only half an hour once switched on. The heroes may decide to switch it on. If they do, its slow putt-putt will disappear behind them as they enter the first carriage and whatever awaits them below. If not, only silence and darkness wait to greet them.

Exploring the train is, unfortunately, a necessity. Even captured and interrogated German soldiers will be unable to confirm the nature of the train's cargo, although they know that it is intact and lying in one of the rearmost armored carriages. The heavy steel plate of the train's walls has kept the carriages from buckling -- for now -- and thus the cargo sections are still reachable by walking from compartment to buried compartment. The soldiers will also be able to tell the characters that their commanding officer, Herr Sturmbannfuhrer Friedhelm Hartmann, is inside the train attending to leaks and structural damage to keep the cargo section accessible. Removing the contents is not possible without heavy lifting and digging equipment. They will also reluctantly admit that they haven't been able to send for help yet, although a Dornier Do-17 (a German scout plane) flew over them at noon and must have spotted them.

The first four buried carriages were troop carriages. These are eerie places indeed, lit only by the flickering string of lights looped from the "roof" (if the characters switched the generator on) or by their own illumination (if they didn't). The "floor" slopes downwards at an angle of about 10 degrees below the horizontal, and is wet with mud, black water, and oil. The final carriage has been converted into something of a rudimentary hospital for the SS soldiers injured when the mudslide hit. There are a dozen soldiers here, mostly unconscious and high on morphine but in one or two cases raving quietly to themselves. Their injuries are mostly severe breaks, sprains, and crushing injuries. A bucket of steaming hot water, for washing instruments, stands in one corner.

The next carriage was a sleeper carriage, holding 80 beds in columns of four along both walls, and it is here that they characters might have their first difficulties with Herr Sturmbannfuhrer Hartmann.

- If they turned on the generator lights, he knows they are coming, and his *subaltern* (a lieutenant) is lying in wait for them with an MP-40. He will wait until at least two characters have entered the carriage and are manoeuvring with difficulty through the uneven floors before opening fire. One fact might work in the characters' benefit, though; if they are wearing regular army uniforms (i.e., not SS uniforms but those of the soldiers in Dzialoszyn), he will think they are the relief force, and will stand up and greet them cheerfully rather than opening fire. How he pays for his mistake is, of course, up to the characters.
- If he has *not* been alerted, the leutnant can be seen moving between crates of rocket parts, bracing the sagging carriage walls with support struts and welding plate steel over jagged tears with the aid of an acetylene torch; Hartmann himself is nowhere to be seen. They will have to deal with the subaltern before proceeding -- same stats as above, except that they have the benefit of surprise.

Whatever the situation -- whether they dealt with the subaltern in here or in the sleeper coach -- Herr Sturmbannfuhrer Hartmann is found sitting in at the foot of a stack of crates in a growing puddle of liquid rocket fuel, with a chest full of bandages, a flaming acetylene torch in his left hand, and a rock-steady Walther P38 pistol in his right. The fuel is leaking from a drum which he has just punctured with his SS officer's dagger. If the characters shoot him, he is sure to drop the torch, blowing them all to hell; and yet, they cannot leave him here. What to do?

- **The Big Picture:** Herr Sturmbannfuhrer Hartmann's objectives are to get the rocket back to Berlin. If blowing it up was more important, he would have done it already -- but he is determined to follow orders, and will thus

only blow it up is all else fails. Currently, he is prepared to sit here with his improvised deadman switch until help arrives, no matter how long that takes.

- **Sever the Hose:** Herr Sturmbannfuhrer Hartmann's acetylene supply is reaching the torch in his hand via a two-meter long rubberized hose linking it to an acetylene tank behind him. A thrown knife could sever the hose, depriving Hartmann's torch of gas just long enough to plug him. Such a throw would require a knife-throwing roll. A blunt object could be thrown against the tap handle to close it in much the same way, although this would be much trickier.
- **Sploosh!:** The bucket of water in the medical car would put the acetylene torch out on a throwing roll, or wash enough of the rocket fuel away from around Hartmann that the torch wouldn't ignite anything if dropped, on an easy throwing roll.
- **Dive:** Diving for the ground next to Hartmann while an accomplice shoots him is yet another possibility. This requires a brawling check by the diver; in addition, Hartmann gets a free shot at the diver in mid-air; landing next to him is no good if you're too dead to catch the dropped torch.
- **"We got them, Sir!":** Staging a "rescue" using captured/turned SS guards with unloaded weapons who "counterattack" from outside the train and force the "Bolshevik scum" to surrender would get Hartmann to turn off his torch.

Needless to say, Hartmann is not open to bribery, threats, or political rhetoric. The minute he decides the situation is untenable, he'll blow the rocket (and the characters, and their mission) to bits. And he won't engage in Evil Nemesis-style banter with the characters either, specifically not the kind that gives away the crates' contents.

Once Herr Sturmbannfuhrer Hartmann has been dealt with, the characters are free to step past him and examine the crates. Yes indeed, there's a disassembled V3 rocket in them, leaving the characters free to radio back to HQ and receive the following piece of bad news:

"Privyet, tovarisch! Congratulations on securing the fascist secret weapon. Your courage is truly exemplary, and your loyalty unfaultable. However, another test lies ahead of you. Our contacts among the Polish resistance fighters tell us that a fascist armored column has been dispatched towards your location. They will reach you sometime tomorrow morning. Their orders are to retrieve the rocket or destroy it. We are rushing to your aid too, but resistance has been stiff and we will need you to buy us time. You are hereby ordered to defend the town to the last round and the last man until relieved. There must be no retreat. Take whatever steps are necessary. Za Rodinu -- za Stalina! Long live Stalin and the Motherland!"

Part III: Preparing for the Fight

What time is it? The characters arrived at Dzialoszyn at 5:30 a.m. Depending on which course of action they followed, they might have arrived at Krzepice any time between 7 A.M. and 8 P.M. Scouting and clearing the town might have added anything from two to four hours to the time elapsed. This gives us a current time (when they get the message) of between 9 A.M. and midnight. The German column will arrive (unbeknownst to the characters) at 7 A.M.

No doubt the characters will want to prepare defenses in order to better resist the German attacks. This preparation can be handled in as much detail as desired, using any appropriate skirmish rules (such as those in **GURPS: WW2**) or simply as a large personal combat. As the characters get better entrenched, their chance of success rises; when the attack occurs, each defensive measure taken during the preceding hours should provide some bonus to their attempts at resistance. Sample defensive measures are as follows:

- **Defensive scouting:** figuring out lanes of fire and good places to attack from.
- **Battlefield Modification:** digging anti-vehicle trenches, barricades, and booby traps.
- **Coordinating Reinforcements:** any POWs on the characters' side can be converted to worthwhile comrades-in-arms, but only between one and six can be trained per instructor per hour. Instructors must use tactics or leadership skills or waste the hour.
- **Minelfields:** The riverbank is thick with washed-up mines. Retrieving mines from the mud and re-laying them requires demolitions roll, with failure losing the mine (into liquid mud, or explodes harmlessly) and critical failure causing injury. This allows two hours of work (one harvesting, one planting) to salvage one to six mines.

This can be done multiple times, but time is doubled for each subsequent attempt, as the mines are harder to get to and farther away. Thus the first harvesting and planting takes two hours, the next takes four hours, the next eight, and so on.

- **Machine-guns:** Ideal defensive weapons, assuming the PCs didn't destroy them all getting in.

The efficiency of other strategies the players come up with will have to be adjudicated by the GM. POWs may be used as brute labor for battlefield modification, and as scouts to keep watch for the approaching Germans, but not for any of the other activities.

Holding the Line

By 6 A.M., the rumbling of an approaching column of vehicles is clearly audible.

The characters may consider a preemptive strike on the armored column before it reaches the defensive line. Depending on scale and tactical soundness, this may do anything from delaying the attack to forcing the Germans to deploy their infantry prematurely and lose the benefit of their armor. Such an attack is likely to be of a hit-and-run nature; once the initial damage has been inflicted, the ambushers would be well advised to withdraw. If they do not, they will be forced to fight the German troops without the benefits of cover and concealment, as the surrounding countryside is relatively bare.

At 7 A.M. the Germans attack. While their Stug-III assault tanks shell the town from a distance, infantry and SdKfz-234 (armored cars) close in along a broad front, making the most of the available cover while still conducting a thorough sweep.

As in the battle for possession of the town fought earlier, the scope of the conflict precludes any specific description of scenes or scenarios. Once again, the GM is recommended to use the action scenes in movies such as *Saving Private Ryan* or *Enemy at the Gates* as his inspiration in depicting the events; a geysering battlefield of mud and whizzing metal, the urgent cries of the wounded, falling back from house to house before the seemingly unstoppable German advance, daring sprints across fire-swept streets strewn with rubble, burning tanks, and so on.

If the characters can survive for an hour, the armored spearhead arrives to deliver them. If they somehow destroy the German force before then, they have repulsed the attack on their own. Either way, they are victorious and their mission a glorious success. Their futures are assured and they can return to their regular units safe in the knowledge that they have done their part to secure the post-war future of Mother Russia and all her children.

Appendix A: Reinforcements

If the Germans manage to get reinforcements at any stage, they will be similar to the relief force in Part III. Make it four Stug-III assault tanks, two SdKfz-234 armored cars and about 30 infantry on foot. None of the heroes should start with anti-tank weapons, since they're too heavy for a fast-moving group like this. If the group get such a weapon from somewhere, use the gunnery skill. A success knocks out one vehicle; rolling on the skill immobilizes the vehicle but does not disable the crew or weapons.

Appendix B: Making the War Weirder

The easiest way to "upgrade" this scenario to handle the peculiarities of alternate-history WW2 settings is to alter the train cargo. Instead of a V3 prototype, Waffezug 4 might be carrying anything from a plutonium-based "dirty bomb" warhead intended for London, or a fringe-science drug cocktail capable of raising the dead (for *Delta Green* campaigns, this could be the secret elixir behind the Eastern Front's "resuscitated casualties"). A further complication could be provided if the cargo has been ruptured or accidentally opened -- this would mean a radioactive or zombie-infested battleground, which the players would need to turn to their advantage if they are to survive the oncoming German forces.

Alternately, keep the train cargo as is but change the PCs and NPCs; either by adding superhumans to the mix (as in the *Godlike*, *Silver Age Sentinels*, or *Brave New World* RPGs), or by introducing occult threads to the setting; perhaps Sturmbannfuhrer Hartmann is a powerful arcanist, or perhaps Krzepice's dam wall was not ruptured by the bomb impacts themselves but rather the ropy tentacles of whatever slumbering being(s) the bombs awakened. Don't forget the townsfolk and the Ukrainians; these groups could be (thanks to inbreeding, exposure to unusual energies, or concentration camp paravivisection) anything from uncontrolled psychics to shape-changing mutants. The potential for terror when the heroes find that the real danger comes not from their opposite numbers in the SS, but from the maw of terror that both sides are now stuck in, is very high indeed . . .

Diplomacy Of Ogres

by Ken Burnside

Allan Calhamer's *Diplomacy* (published by Avalon Hill) is one of the classics of modern game design. With elegant rules, it provides Machiavellian intrigue, tense play, and a wildly seesawing strategic position.

As great as *Diplomacy* is on its own, it's even better as a scenario generator for tactical wargames, such as *Ogre* or *Warhammer 40K*. Using *Diplomacy* as a scenario generator gives players a strategic context for the outcome of a battle, while giving them a reason to preserve units for later engagements.

In a nutshell, *Diplomacy* has two kinds of units (Armies and Navies), and a limited set of terrains (Coastal, Inland, Impassable, Ocean, and Mixed). There are four basic orders to give: Attack(Move), Support, Convoy, and Hold Position. The full rules can be found at <http://www.avalonhill.com/rules/diplomacy.pdf>. Best of all, Diplomacy turns generally take about 15-20 minutes, with low record-keeping overhead, allowing it to add options to a miniatures campaign without being a burden to keep track of. Laminating a copy of the diplomacy map at Kinko's is recommended; it lets the permanent strategic situation be recorded and transported without lugging the boxed game around.

Using a tactical engine to complete the battles in *Diplomacy* remedies one of *Diplomacy's* major design flaws: the dreaded stalemate line. The standard *Diplomacy* map is quasi-historical, and experienced players know where to place units with support that cannot be cut, which will force a draw. A tactical game makes it easier to destroy units on the *Diplomacy* map, making it possible to break the stalemate line. The tactical game results can force a strategic breakthrough, bettering both games.

As a caution, *Diplomacy* is the game of gaining someone's trust, bargaining with them, and stabbing them in the back for material gain when it looks like you'll win the game. It may not be the right choice for your local wargaming group.

Modifications To *Diplomacy*

The first decision to make is what *Diplomacy* map you'll use. Some games just don't feel right when played on a map of 1900 Europe, although some games (such as *Ogre*) make sense. Several hundred variant maps exist, and finding one that suits your needs (including number of players) should not be hard. A useful resource for all things *Diplomacy* can be found at <http://www.diplom.org/>.

The second choice is "What tactical game are we making a campaign for?" It helps if your tactical game can handle naval battles, land battles, and "amphibious assault" battles, as these are the three sorts of fights *Diplomacy* generates. If your tactical game has no naval component, you can make a landlocked campaign by ignoring all the ocean spaces on the map, or resolve all Naval actions on the *Diplomacy* level.

The third major decision is "how many points is a *Diplomacy* army worth?" For *Deluxe Ogre*, recommended army sizes are in the 30 to 40 point range, with *Ogre Miniatures* armies converting at 180 to 250 points. For *Warhammer 40K*, army sizes of around 600 to 650 points work well. The most common actions fought will involve two or three *Diplomacy* armies on the tactical game at any one time. Each army remains a unique entity. For other games, the optimum army sizes will either be reinforced companies or battalions.

While *Diplomacy* standardizes on six-month turns, with new builds happening at the end of even numbered turns, the frequency of build turns sets the "feel" of the campaign and can be changed. Having three-month turns -- with builds happening every fourth turn -- makes losing a unit more painful, but effectively increases the size of the map, as units that are not supported by a supply center can live for up to three turns. Having build turns happen every turn encourages a bit more slugging, and gets into more of an attritional fight. While *Diplomacy* defaults to being able to only build units in your home territories, allowing units to be built in any controlled supply center can add a novel

twist.

To determine the initial selection of countries and units, roll randomly for country selection order. Once countries are selected, have each player select one unit at a time and place it in one of their starting territories in the same order. This lets people choose what their starting armies are with an organic appreciation of what their neighbors are building.

Interfacing Between The Games

There are two questions that need to be answered when interfacing between the games. "When do we resolve fights with the *Diplomacy* rules?" and "When do we resolve on a tactical level to blow things up?" In essence, this comes down to "How do we force an engagement?"

The simplest method is to say that all battles are handled in the tactical game. The drawback to this is that some players don't like playing tactical battles where they're outnumbered at three to one, and would vastly prefer the *Diplomacy* retreat rules to getting hammered.

A better method is to have each player draw two playing cards per supply center they hold at the start of the *Diplomacy* turn, with the person having the lowest number of supply centers drawing two additional cards as a balancing factor. After combat is resolved, the cards are shuffled back into the deck.

When units come into contact, each *player* in the conflict plays two cards, making a Blackjack hand. The player being dislodged in a given space can play three cards. The highest blackjack hand determines the resolution method, with ties handled by players playing an additional card until one side either busts or wins. This adds a touch of randomness to the game, along with a short-term strategic resource to manage.

The territories on the *Diplomacy* map will suggest a range of possible terrain types for land actions. Depending on how long a *Diplomacy* turn is (the default is six months for *Standard Diplomacy*), the turn may also influence what weather is used on the tactical map.

Modifications to the Tactical Game

The tactical game will probably need some additional tweaking or table rules to make things fit.

The first is defining when an army is "broken." Because *Diplomacy* puts a premium on retreating with armies intact, it makes sense to give the tactical player a reason to retreat while he still can. A good compromise is to have each player secretly roll 5d6, multiply by 3, and take that as a percentage: (For example: rolling 5d6, getting 19, times 3 is 57%). If using the "blackjack" method of resolution determination, allow players to play a card to add 2 to 11 points directly to their break threshold percentage.

This "break percentage" is the maximum number of casualties your force can take before the unit is destroyed. This can be treated as figure counts, or as balance point counts. The random break threshold method makes the common two-on-one *Diplomacy* dislodgement scenario interesting to play, while keeping them secret adds a certain amount of tension in play. Thresholds should be kept secret from the other players in the fight; record them, and then place them face down on a card at the edge of the table for verification after the fight. If using a card to increase the break threshold, it should be recorded and revealed at the end of the game.

The second change is defining retreat directions on the tactical battle, which determines which space on the *Diplomacy* map a retreating unit goes to. Most wargames have a scenario comparable to "Ceasefire Collapse" in *Ogre*, which is a good template to for this kind of fight.

A unit engaged in more than one combat in one *Diplomacy* turn repairs half the damage done in the previous combat before going to the next one. This can happen as a result of a three unit "bounce" in diplomacy. (Unit A is holding the

territory, units B and C are both trying to take it from unit A and not supporting each other.)

The trickiest scenario to set up may be the amphibious assault scenario. In *Ogre*, having GEVs dropping troops onto a beach while being supported with off-map cruise missile salvoes barrages is the best way to handle it. For *Warhammer* or *BattleTech*, buying off-map artillery barrages is probably the best way to go.

Bringing The Tactical Back To The Strategic

When moving back to the *Diplomacy* level, units that retreat are assumed to have retreated in the appropriate direction on the *Diplomacy* map. Destroyed units are removed from the map.

All surviving units have their casualties replaced at the end of the *Diplomacy* turn, while new units are built at the end of the build turn. Units lost due to a reduction in the number of supply centers happen during the build turns.

Campaign Experience Levels (Optional)

Units that win battles gain experience; this allows army sizes to grow as the campaign progresses, and other benefits. The following scale may be useful; points are scored per side in the battle, then divided evenly among the players on the winning side, with fractional points dropped. Experience points are only given for winning a tactical battle, not for battles won using the more abstract Diplomacy resolutions.

Per enemy unit destroyed:	3 XP
Per enemy unit forced to retreat:	1 XP
Took an enemy's home supply center as part of the victory:	1 XP

Example: In a fight where two Ogres run by different players drive two infantry battalions off the map, destroying one and forcing the other to retreat, the allied Ogres earned 3+1 experience points, which divided among the two players gives 2 apiece.

Experience points should convert to army boosts. The following conversion rate has been tested and found enjoyable:

1 XP allows you to add points equal to 2.5% of your army's initial value to every army you control. This upgrade happens when the army reaches a supply center at the end of a *Diplomacy* turn. Any new units created will be at this point level.

1 XP allows you to add a number of points equal to 8% of the initial purchase price to any single army. However, if this army is ever broken or destroyed, those points go away forever.

If using the Blackjack method for resolution determination, two additional cards drawn at the end of the Diplomacy phase will consume 1 XP. The experience point can be spent after seeing the cards drawn, but must be spent before any cards are played.

1 XP can be spent to add 10% to the break threshold of an individual army before the start of the tactical scenario.

1 XP can be spent to increase the break threshold for all of your units by 1% as a permanent increase in capabilities.

While experience points are nice, winning the campaign comes from meeting the *Diplomacy* victory conditions.

Tactical Engines Of Choice

The two obvious tactical engines for this article are *Ogre* and *Warhammer 40K*. However, it will also work (with some thought put into scenario creation) for *De Bellus Antiquitatis* or *De Bellus Multitudinis* from Wargames Research Group, *BattleTech* (either *Classic* or *MechWarrior: Dark Age*) or *Mage Knight*, or *StarGrunts* from Ground Zero

Games.

Diplomacy can also be used to set up the basis of conflict in any multi-party game, such as ***Vampire the Masquerade***. Having the Storytellers maintain a ***Diplomacy*** board (where control of supply centers represent the relative influence between the clans) works well in actual play. The key here is to use the conflict over a limited resource (supply centers) as a driving engine behind the plots of the game.

Pet-Antics

by Eric Funk

Pets (BE98) are an often-overlooked roleplaying tool. (Star)ships can have their cat and/or dog. A soldier on an alien planet can befriend an electric squirrel. An adventurer in cyberspace can pick up a cute floating diamond. Pirates can have their parrots. While mainly a comedy, the movie *Fierce Creatures* illustrates different levels of bonds between trainers and animals. Pets can often identify strangers attempting to infiltrate a group, and locate secret passages. Animals can lead the way to new friends, and new enemies. In steampunk, alternate present, or in futuristic campaigns, pet translators may work and allow humans to understand pets' vocalizations. (A web search on "bowlingual" or "meowlingual" will reveal 2002 technology that was mass marketed!)

"Hi, I'm Elle Woods and this is Bruiser Woods"

-- *Legally Blonde*

There are three levels of intensity for which a person can care for a pet:

1. As a Friend or Loved One (Dependent, see p. B38). The character cares about the pet and it follows him freely. This is most common with dogs, as well as a few cats. Intensely trained animals, such as birds and horses, may follow a person willingly after their education is finished. If let loose, it will seek out its owner. Competent pets (with a value of over 75 character points) are indeed Allies (p. B23).
2. While in the proximity of its keeper, this pet may listen to instructions, but given the chance, it's gone. While not hostile to the owner, this pet must be kept on a leash or it will run away, not listening to instructions. One way to model this may be Ally (Unwilling) (p. CI19), or a variant for unwilling Dependents. Treat the dependent as one point value category smaller for cost purposes, the lowest being "0 or fewer." The behavior may be modeled using the "Wild Animals as Companions" section on p. BE102. If it escapes, it may seek a place of refuge, or perhaps attack the owner.
3. The creature is kept in a cage, and may or may not recognize its owner as friendly. This is less of a Dependent, and more of a Sense of Duty or Obsession of the owner (but not both). As 2) above, but it may only be able to follow a few instructions, and then only while in the cage.

The GM must decide how often the pet can reasonably show up in adventures; this will then be built into the Dependant/Ally value. A dog with a doggy door may find the hero at the scene of the crime. The ship may be taken

over while the party is away, and the hero should be worried about the pet. If the pet escapes, the owner is bound by the above disadvantages to seek to recover the creature as swiftly as possible, uninjured. They must also dissuade anyone else from taking violent action against the creature, unless the PC has a greater Duty/Sense of Duty in direct

Examples of "Ordinary" Pets

Source	Name	Species
<i>Alice in Wonderland</i>	Dinah	cat
<i>Discworld</i>	Greebo(DW185)	cat
<i>Harry Potter</i>	Arthur Weasley's Car	car
<i>Herbie the Love Bug</i>	Herbie	Volkswagon Beetle
<i>Lord of the Rings</i>	Bill	pony
<i>The Mummy</i>	Horus	hawk
<i>Nightmare before Christmas</i>	Zero	ghost dog
<i>Reboot</i>	Frisket	cyberspace watchdog
<i>Roughnecks</i>	Sparky	alien electric squirrel
<i>Star Trek: the Next Generation</i>	Spot	cat
<i>Tron</i>	Bit	bit 0/1
<i>Wizard of Oz</i>	Toto	dog

Examples of "Intelligent" Animals

<i>Flipper</i>	Flipper	dolphin
<i>Kiki's Delivery Service</i>	Jiji	cat
<i>Lassie</i>	Lassie	dog
<i>Littlest Hobo</i>	Hobo	dog
<i>Superman</i>	Krypto	Kryptonian dog

conflict to the Dependent/Obsession/Sense of Duty (pet) combination. As indicated in Dependent (see p. B38), there is a significant emotional tie to the target, and if something happens to them, then the progress of the player character can be hindered.

Special Care

"Where's my elephant?"
-- Bart Simpson, *The Simpsons*

Many modern pets have tattoos which identify their kennel and serial number. Cutting-edge technology involves short-range transponder implants (like those beginning to replace UPC codes in the United States). In the future, GPS may even be available to find the pets wherever they are.

Most pets cannot survive on human food alone. A successful roll against Animal Handling (appropriate)-6, Biochemistry-2, Survival (creatures' native terrain), Veterinary (appropriate specialty), Zoology, or Xenology (if appropriate) is required to identify what the pet would need. Pet-specific medicine may be hard to find away from population centers. Out in the wilds, smaller pets can also attract predators that would otherwise ignore humanoids.

Quarantine

"Friends, help! The Guinea pig tricked me!"
-- Dr. Zoidberg, *Futurama*

Commercial travelers between planets may have to show proof of immunizations for their pets with them. In low and ultra-tech societies, this is generally less of a problem for different reasons. In a low-tech society, "border officers" often don't care as long as the animal isn't obviously sick; all that may be required is to pay a toll or tax. In ultra-tech societies, the pets can get a proprietary version of Panimmunity (at increased cost). Panimmunity gives one an "active" immune system, which actively destroys any foreign organisms, thus preventing them from being carriers of diseases they are immune to.

In settings where magic is not uncommon, the Wealthy may be able to purchase collars enchanted with Resist Disease (G54) (wizard's cost of \$63,500). This could server to protect the pet, and perhaps to avoid legislation. Large centers may require all animals brought in be treated with Cure Disease, Resist Disease, or even Sterilize! Suspended Animation may be an alternative if the animal is to simply pass through.

Modern Australia has a one to four month quarantine on imported animals. In Britain, the quarantine could be up to six months if the animal does not have proper medical documentation. At borders, if the pets are refused entry (or are being held for a time), they may be held in a boarding kennel. This is an excellent tool for roleplaying. If the heroes are in the Capitol and hear about a fire at the boarding kennel at the border, they can be torn between Duty and Sense of Duty. Unfair kennels may institute changes in policy that can only be corrected in person. This is also a good place for a super-villain (or unrelated ninjas, or both!) to try to kidnap the mascot while the team is off on business; while not necessarily someone's pet, the loss of the animal should spark a reaction within anyone who has the Duty or Sense of Duty to (the team). Note that many hotels do not allow pets, and the ones that do often set their "pet-friendly" rooms as a subset of the smoking rooms.

Allergies

Cats and dogs can sense those that are uneasy around them and some even become extra "friendly" toward persons who are allergic to them. For great ideas on how to handle allergies check out the Pyramid article ["Allergies"](#) by Andrew J. Sheldon.

GURPS Statistics

"Today, we're going to teach poodles how to fly!"

-- Raoul, *UHF*

Advantages/Disadvantages

Reputation: (Keeper of _____): In a modern, western campaign, someone who is a keeper of a certain type of animal can easily have a certain positive reaction with others who keep the same kind. (i.e.: a kind of brotherhood of cat owners). Others may grant a general bonus if the animal in question is normally only owned by the social "elite", or requires unusually hard to gain permits (e.g.: Only the Crown can breed dragons, and nobles require a permit for each dragon). Mixed reactions will be gained by those known to hold "endangered" species in captivity. Owning some other kinds of pets can easily generate negative reputations, even if the pet is legal. Many people react negatively to the owner of a tarantula while the topic is relevant, even if they are not especially arachnophobic. A reputation as an owner of a particularly vicious animal should get a bonus to intimidation equal to the absolute value of the reputation to the affected party.

Pet as an excuse to gain advantages: There are some who have claimed to gain advantages while learning to care for pets. Some claim to have gained Combat Reflexes, High Pain Threshold, and Toughness from just being cat owners for 10 years. In a less serious campaign this may be a real way to gain such advantages. See *GURPS Goblins* pp. 65-67 for suggestions on how to gain advantages through "mistreatment."

Phobia

Some people take pets as a form of confrontational therapy. Others enjoy keeping animals about them that frighten others. Having a vicious-looking pit bull at one's side, or a tarantula on one's shoulder may count as a display of strength or bloodthirstiness (see Intimidation rules p. B246). Those with specific phobias must roll to resist them before rolling to resist intimidation attempts.

Term	Fear
Zoophobia	Animals in general
Ailurophobia	Cats
Cynophobia	Dogs (or rabies)
Herpetophobia	Reptiles
Ornithophobia	Birds
Ichthyophobia	Fish

For more phobias, please consult the Links section at the end.

Related, there is Brontophobia (see p. B36), which can be activated by medium or large dogs' barking. Animals that are self-cleaning (cats and rabbits) or well-groomed will keep someone with Rupophobia from reacting poorly. A Will roll would be needed before such a person could approach wild animals or even unkept farm animals.

"Then I get Fang." "Fine. Just so's you know, he's a ruddy coward."

-- Draco and Hagrid, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*

Skills

Rules for animals learning skills are covered on pp. BE118-119. The skills for the trainer/owner is Animal Handling(specialty). This allows a person to know the moods and tendencies of an animal, and can be used as an Influence skill when dealing with them. Animal Empathy or Beast Kin also help a person relate to the beasts. The only other generic animal skill is Veterinary(specialty), which gives a great bonus if one is familiar with the animal in addition to the optional specialization. This means that someone with 1/2 point in Veterinary(dogs) gets the skill at IQ+7 when working with their own dog, or a dog that "trusts" them.

Adventure Seeds

"If there's one thing a cat never gives, it's a straight answer."

-- The cat, *The Last Unicorn*

McGuffins

- The party is relaxing between adventures, taking one of the heroes' pets for a walk. (Alternately, it could be a Dependant's pet, or even just a valuable pet they are hired to walk.) In the middle, they are beset by ninjas/thugs, who eventually steal all the items of value that the group has with them . . . even the pets' collar! If interrogated, all they know is they were hired anonymously via a drop, and are to drop the valuables the team had in another drop. The temporary location of the group can be given, and the items returned if the place is raided before the scheduled drop. Meanwhile, the mastermind actually intended that the goons steal the pet itself! Unfortunately, the orders were incomplete or improperly decoded.
- A normally loyal Dependant('s) pet has run away.
 - As above, but it's in a forest/jungle area
 - As either above, but there's a reward out so there will be many treasure hunters about.
 - As above, but someone will kidnap the pet if they find it and hold it for ransom.
 - With any of the above, the person who first found it didn't know about the reward and gave the pet to their daughter, a little girl. She and the pet get along very well.
 - With any of the above, but the pet is valuable/ has stolen a valuable/irreplaceable object. Tasers or paralysis beams might damage it.
 - With any of the above, but (yet?) another party is trying to kill it for some sort of revenge.
- In a Supers/Atomic Horror: game, the mascot/Dependant('s) pet has developed super powers and is running amok! It thinks it is only playing but meanwhile is causing havoc.
 - As above, but a villain is taking the opportunity to strike at the opposite end of town.
 - As above, but another villain is simultaneously trying to control the creature.
 - As any of the above, but the powers were given intentionally, but the creature grew out of control
 - As any of the above, but this is not really the animal it is thought to be, it is merely an amplified clone (a popular alien trick).

So, when the ship is set to self-destruct and a slimy alien is killing everything in sight, please remember to take the cat along in the escape pod, too.

References

Pyramid Links

- "[The Noble Steed](#)" by Ann Dupuis
- "[Compleat Familiar](#)" by Anthony Jackson
- "[Allergies](#)" by Andrew J. Sheldon

Other Links

- A long list of Phobias -- <http://www.phobialist.com/>
- UK Dangerous Dogs Act -- <http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/welfare/domestic/dogs.htm>
- Bringing Pets:
 - To Britain -- <http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/quarantine/index.htm>
 - To Australia -- <http://www.aqis.gov.au>
 - Around the United States -- <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/oa/pubs/petravel.html>

Redefining Staves

by Owen K.C. Stephens

One of the most common fantasy tropes is the wizard and his staff. Images of gray-haired adepts carrying gnarled lengths of wood through which they perform mighty magics fill many *d20 System* player's heads when they sit down to make a character. Unfortunately, those using the standard *d20 System* fantasy rules are likely to be disappointed. Staves are among the most expensive magic items in the game, not likely to be available to characters before 8th or 9th level. Even worse, a staff can generally be used a maximum of 50 times, and it then becomes a worthless stick. This is hardly the mighty tool of archmages often presented in fantasy literature.

There are numerous simple alternatives that can be used to fix this problems. The special powers of rods, which can be as cheap as 3,000 gp and rarely have charges, can be moved to staves. Similarly the abilities granted by rings or wondrous magic items could be combined with offensive magic weapon enhancements (remembering the non-magical use of staves), to form useful wizard-friendly magic items that are both cheaper and longer lasting than standard *d20 System* staves.

There are two main drawbacks to these ideas. First, most players are well aware of which magic items do what, and will recognize any simple "retread" of existing abilities. This is fine for some players, but others may feel a lack of wonder or excitement at a staff that's nothing more than a standard magic item in another shape. Second, rods, rings, wondrous items and weapons can be used by anyone, and staves are traditionally spellcaster-only magic items. A staff that allows the wizard to turn invisible and fly may seem like a lot of fun, but it's not so impressive when the warrior can pick it up and use it as well. Again, this approach doesn't present permanent staves as something new and interesting for spellcasters only.

This article presents an alternative by presenting staves as items that do nothing on their own, but instead grant spellcasters access to additional spells they can cast using their own spell slots. Not only does this allow staves to be built at multiple power levels, including low-level characters, it tackles the common objection among *d20 System* wizards that spell preparations are too limiting. Since staves now grant access to additional spells, spellcasters become more flexible. Since this flexibility comes in the form of items, the classes aren't unbalanced, as other characters can gain similar benefits from their own items. The balance of power is maintained, though game play ends up with a different, and more traditional, feel.

This new ability is called spell access. A staff grants access to one or more spells, allowing a spellcaster who has these spells on his spell list to channel stored spell energy into the staff to cast the staff's spell. This works much like a cleric's ability to channel any prepared spell into a healing spell. Only spellcasters who have a given spell on their spell list (whether or not they know it themselves) can use spell access items, and the spell is cast at their level. The spellcaster must use a spell slot of equal or higher level to the stored spell to cast a spell from an item, and makes all decisions regarding the spell (target, area, etc.).

The question of how to price spell access items is a tricky one. All spell pricing begins by multiplying spell level by caster level, but we want the spell to be cast at the level of the character using the staff. Additionally while there are prices for gaining bonus spell castings, spells a certain number of times per day, and even permanent spells, there's nothing quite like spell access.

This article works on the assumption that a fair way to figure caster level price is to average the minimum caster level possible for the spell with 10.5 (average caster level of 1st-20th level, i.e. Non-epic, spellcasters). This tends to make staves somewhat pricey at low levels, and perhaps cheap at high levels, but that seems reasonable. Gaining access to new spells is more useful at lower levels, and less likely to be a big deal at higher levels.

Spell Level	Min. Caster Level	Averaged with 10.5	Final Price × (Average × spell level)
0 (.5)	1	5.75	2.875

1	1	5.75	5.75
2	3	6.75	13.5
3	5	7.75	23.25
4	7	8.75	35
5	9	9.57	48.75
6	11	10.75	64.5
7	13	11.75	82.25
8	15	12.75	102
9	17	13.75	123.75

Since a bonus spell casting costs a base price of 1,000 gp, but has a lower level multiple than our bonus spell access ability, it seems reasonable to use a base price of 500 gp for our new power. This results in the prices listed below. A GM who decides that bonus spell-access is worth more or less than this article assumes can alter any part of these formulas, to arrive at a new set of costs appropriate for his campaigns.

Bonus Spell Access Level	Base Cost
0	1,437.5 gp
1	2,875 gp
2	6,750 gp
3	11,625 gp
4	17,500 gp
5	24,375 gp
6	32,250 gp
7	41,125 gp
8	51,000 gp
9	61,875 gp

The rule of diminishing returns seems applicable here as well. Certainly having access to *fireball* without having to learn or prepare it is useful, but without additional castings per day having access to *fireball*, *fly*, *bull's strength* and *shield* isn't 4 times as helpful, as the caster may run out of spell slots. Matching the progression of traditional staves, it's assumed that the second most expensive spell is worth 75% as much, and all lesser spells 50% as much.

Assuming staves are the only spell access items allowed in a game, they can be created by anyone with the Craft Staff feat. If a GM wishes to make staves more common, he may opt to lower the level requirement for that feat to 9th, or even 5th level. Even with a spell access staff, a caster must have a spell's required material components and spend any experience points required. Spells with focuses can have the cost of the focus added into the staff, in which case no other focus is required.

Below are some sample staves using the spell access ability. Only a few examples are given, as such magic items are little more than a list of spells, and not difficult to develop.

Staves

Battle: A *battle staff* is made of hardwood, banded in iron or steel. Many are also magic weapons (though the cost of weapon enchantments on a *battle staff* are doubled). These staves are carried by warrior wizards to augment their flexibility in combat.

Battle staves give access to the following spells:

- *magic missile*
- *true strike*

Moderate divination, evocation; CL 5th; Create Staff, *magic missile*, *true strike*; Price 5,031.25 gp.

A *battle staff* that is also a +1 magic weapon costs 7,031.25, and a +2 *battle staff* costs 21,031.25

Fire: These staves are made of reddish wood covered with branded runes. They have a slightly charred smell to them. Most such staves are used by war-wizards, though clerics devoted to fire gods can also access some of their powers.

Fire staves give access to the following spells:

- *burning hands*
- *resist elements* (fire and cold only)
- *fireball*

Moderate abjuration, evocation; CL 7th; Create Staff, *burning hands, resist elements, fireball*; Price 18,125 gp.

Healing: *Staves of healing* are clerical items made of ivory, etched in silver, and generally covered in images of healing symbols and runes. Many are kept in churches, to ensure that the sick and injured can be treated, no matter what spells the priests there feel compelled to prepare. Because they are designed for clerics they do not include cure spells, which clerics can always access.

Staves of healing give access to the following spells:

- *detect poison*
- *remove paralysis*
- *remove blindness/deafness*
- *remove curse*
- *remove disease*
- *restoration*

Moderate abjuration, evocation; CL 11th; Create Staff, *remove curse, remove disease, restoration*; Price 110,533.25 gp.

Ice: An *ice staff* is made of white wood, often with strips of bark left clinging in snowflake patterns. These staves are used equally by druids and wizards, though most are created by druid masters for use by woodland guardians.

Ice staves give access to the following spells:

- *sleet storm*
- *ice storm*

Moderate evocation; CL 9th; Create Staff, *sleet storm, ice storm*; Price 26,218.25 gp.

Storms: A *staff of storms* is generally a gnarled shaft of oak or elm, twisted and rough. These potent magic items are held by powerful druids, masters of their own groves or powerful champions of the wilds.

Staves of storms give access to the following spells:

- *obscuring mist*
- *gust of wind*
- *call lightning*
- *control winds*
- *control weather*

Strong evocation; CL 15th; Create Staff, *control weather*; Price 68,595.75 gp.

Trollkiller: A *trollkiller staff* is carried by wizards who want to be prepared if ever attacked by regenerating creatures. Most are made of bone or ivory, and adorned with fetishes of small skulls or feathers.

Trollkiller staves give access to the following spells:

- *acid splash*
- *acid arrow (maximized)*

Moderate evocation; CL 13th; Create Staff, *acid arrow*, Maximize Spell feat; Price 33,328.13 gp.

Utility: These staves are made of common materials, mostly cheap woods though some are copper or bronze. They are carried by spellcasters of all types, though mostly only in cities and safe wildernesses. The staves allow spellcasters to cast common cantrips and orisons without having to prepare them, allowing them to prepare less commonly needed spells.

Utility staves give access to the following spells:

- *detect magic*
- *detect poison*
- *light*
- *read magic*

Moderate abjuration, evocation; CL 7th; Create Staff, *burning hands*, *resist elements*, *fireball*; Price 3953.13 gp.

Pyramid Review

Cthulhu Mash

Published by [Evil Polish Brothers](#)

Design and Graphics by David M. Niecikowski

Rules by John P. Niecikowski

Art by Donald Mickler

Boxed set: 16 geomorphic board tiles; four character cards, character stand-ups, and character plastic stands; 64 monster and generator tiles; 88 objects and traps; 80 health and sanity counters; four dice (2d6, 1d8, 1d10); rulebook (all but the rules in full color) \$30.00

Once upon a time, Chaosium's *Arkham Horror* was the only good way to get your Lovecraft fix in board game form. With *Cthulhu Mash* from Evil Polish Brothers, the mythos come to life once again.

A quartet of adventurers has come loose in time and space. The four antiheroes -- the 1920s gumshoe, the Arctic explorer, the mariner merchant, and the psychotherapist -- have all found themselves in a crazy pastiche of a world. Here, the Plateau of Leng sits next to the Mi-Go moon base, which in turn empties into the Miskatonic University Library. These areas are infested with gateways that are allowing the usual slate of Things Man Was Not Meant to Know out of their cages and into our world . . . and the next . . . and the next . . .

The object of the game is to visit each world (represented by individual tiles), close the gates, and kill any monsters that have been released.

The different characters you can play each have different powers or abilities that help them try to regain control of things. The mariner can parry attacks, and her albatross companion will scout the area. The psychotherapist can drug opponents and can memorize spells quickly and easily. At home in icy areas of the playing field, the explorer can blow up with dynamite anything that offends his sensibilities. And the private dick has a derringer to shoot anything she spots with her increased searching abilities. Their skills, move scores, and basic abilities also vary, and each character has a Health and Sanity (also called Mentality) score for use in combat or withstanding the mind-bending mythos. A character gets a certain number of actions, and these can be used to initiate attacks, use equipment or spells, or move.

Each character has a starting board keyed to their story background. From there, they may pass from one world (board) to another through gates on the edges of their boards. The boards have to match up (gate to gate, so you have a complete oval), so not every edge is passable. This forces adventurers to maneuver the boards; however, given the arrangement of half-ovals, you shouldn't have to worry much about not being able to get around. Even when you get to a board, there are plenty of crates and corners (or cells or teleporters or whatever characterizes that dimension) to get around or hide behind.

The boards are alive with tiles called generators, and through these the denizens of horrible other places pour into our world. Each generator is associated with a certain kind of creature: The Deep Ones come out of the Whirlpools, for example, and the Moon Beasts emerge from the Guard Cells. Dice are rolled each turn to see which generators spawn critters. Monsters come with abilities of their own, and may immobilize, drain, or just plain savage you depending on their tactics. Combat is your die roll vs. the creature's defense score. If you hit, you do a point of damage. Do enough damage and the aberration dies, otherwise you must use another action to do more damage (or get a better weapon).

The better you are at something, the bigger the die you get to use; the mariner gets a d8 in melee, but only a d6 for ranged attacks.

If you can fight your way through the monsters, you can attack to destroy the generator; eliminate enough of them to reach your "Power Up Kills" threshold and you get a power up that will boost your statistics. A destroyed generator also yields some objects of use to the players. These may be simple pieces of gear like nets or handcuffs; weapons such as the spectral razor or the cast-iron skillet; or weird artifacts like the Leng web shield or a magic tome. Books like the *Necronomicon* provide useful spells like Heal (for Health points) or Temporal Dust (for another chance at performing an action), but at the same time some of these may cost Sanity. The generator may also produce traps that, when flipped over, damage or slow the character. Depending on the game you choose to play, dead or insane characters may be out of play or they may respawn on their starting board. It's obvious the game was designed to resemble a video game in many respects.

There are a plethora of optional rules as well. Half-gates may allow one-way passage, monsters could use objects, and Sanity loss from creatures (of all things to make optional) can have temporary or lasting side effects (otherwise Mentality is drained only by spells or other tile effects).

The big drawback to *Cthulhu Mash* is the chaos -- the *Necronomicon* has nothing on this for lack of organization. Information and rules are split up almost wholly without reason throughout the book, and even if players understand things once they've read through them they won't be able to easily reference them during play. Add to this that the rulebook (like the box itself) is a tall, skinny thing that tries its best to snap shut on you and is almost impossible to flip through without it fighting back, and you have some fairly inaccessible rules. There are many types of tiles, several abilities for both characters and monsters, and a lot of subtleties to look out for -- lines of different colors on the board have different effects on movement, each board (heck, most everything) has its own special rules, and a different color of text on a tile may be used to make a one-use item stand apart from one that doesn't require an action.

If you're up to the challenge of deciphering the material, *Cthulhu Mash* is actually a pretty good game. It has a lot in common with the aforementioned *Arkham Horror*, but while both games have horrendously confusing rules, at least *Cthulhu Mash* makes sense once you make it to the other end of the tunnel. Play is challenging and entertaining, and the game has multiple modes of play (capture the flag, cooperative, head-to-head, and the engine works better than average as a solitaire game), plenty of potential for customization, compatibility with other releases in the Mash series (such as *Monster Mash*), and the inevitable scenario creation. Once you've gotten past their writing sins, the Evil Polish Brothers have created an entertaining pastime to fill the void left by *Arkham Horror*.

*Note: This game is a revised version of the company's release **Ultra Vilelence**.*

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Pax Gladius - Epic Swords & Sandals Adventure

Published by [Deep7](#)

Written by Andrew Kenrick with James Stubbs

Cover by Todd Downing

13-page electronic document; \$3.95

Pax Gladius - Epic Swords & Sandals Adventure is the latest *IPG* title released by Deep7, the games publisher that specializes in little games with a pick-up-and-play quality. The idea behind them is that each of their components fits exactly onto a single page -- one for the players and character generation, one for the rules of play, another for the GM, and then one for each of the game's scenarios (usually five or six per title). The range of *IPG* games to date covers a variety of genres that swing from the semi-historical, such as *Daisho: Samurai Adventure* and *Six Gun: The Game of the Western*, to those inspired by the movies, such as [Full Clip: Hong Kong Action RPG](#) and *Disaster!* Even then, the semi-historical *IPGs* each has a movie-like quality to them in their play and plotting.

It is into the semi-historical camp that *Pax Gladius* falls, being (as the title suggests) the *IPG* of Ancient Rome. Behind Todd Downing's excellent cover, the game is explained as being one of defiance, liberty, and dramatic speeches in the face of dangers such as deadly combat and thrilling chariot races. It is inspired by, and meant to be played in the vein of, films such as *Ben Hur*, *Spartacus*, and *Gladiator*. But since *Pax Gladius* is a *IPG*, it should be played without emulating their epic length, and more with a sense of their epic action.

As with previous *IPG* titles, changes to the game system are more cosmetic in nature rather than fundamental to reflect the genre. They amount to renaming the four core stats, the skills, and the secondary stats. Thus, the Body stat becomes Vigour, Charisma becomes Splendour, Craftiness is changed to Scheming, and Brains becomes Acumen. The skill changes are equally clear and obvious. One substantial change is the secondary stat, Popularity, which becomes Esteem and takes a more active role in the game. In a sense, a character's Esteem becomes a pool of hero or luck points that can be spent to inflict extra damage, gain extra Blood (the game's equivalent of hit points), increase Dodge skill, and gain the favor of the crowd. These rules are particular to the gladiatorial arena, and Esteem expended in this way can only be gained through victories on the sands of the circus, or (of course) successfully playing through adventures for the Glory of Rome. Eventually, gladiators can earn enough Esteem to win their own freedom.

Pax Gladius also changes the name and effect of its Background and Status Tables, which are used to determine a character's origins in a *IPG* game. Here the Background Table provides a character with his status, from Slave and Gladiator up through Freedman and Soldier to Equestrian and Senator. The Provenance Table replaces the Status Table, and this determines where a character is from within the Roman Empire: Rome, Greece, Britannia, Aegyptus, Gaul, and Germania. The rolls on these two tables provide a character with a series of bonuses to their skills and stats.

The new rules also allow for chariot racing, and these adhere to the *IPG* ethos of keep it simple and keep it fast. That said, a *Pax Gladius* GM is encouraged to refer to [The IPG Companion: A Toolkit For Deep7's Beer & Pretzels RPGs](#) should they want to either add more detail to their chariot races or model them using miniatures or toy soldiers.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

Pax Gladius is rounded out with a six-part epic adventure in which the characters have the opportunity to save Rome from being plunged into an unwanted war. Like the excellent [Dime Heroes RPG](#) before it, the scenarios in *Pax*

Gladivs form a mini-campaign, instead of the usual collection of one-shots. It opens with "The Iron Lion," which finds the characters in Rome on their way to the games and suddenly coming to the aid of Senator Veccirius, who is subject to an assassination attempt at the claws of the king of the beasts. Their success is enough to gain them the Senator's patronage, and in "Don't Look Down," they enter his service as bodyguards on a trip over the Alps into Southern Germania. There accompanied by his daughter, Cyrene, the Senator is to negotiate a peace treaty with a local tribe. Upon reaching the destination villa in "Unwelcome Guests," the army takes over protection of the senator and his daughter, and the local General, Activius, sends the party to investigate a local tribe whom he believes will disrupt the negotiations. This is when the characters get their first inkling that not all is as it seems; when they return to the villa, it is in flames, Veccirius is dead, and Cyrene is missing. The chase is on in "A Walk In The Woods," resulting in capture by barbarians in "Death In the Pit" and a climactic denouement with the villain of the piece in "Fort Eyrie."

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Overall, this mini-campaign is a solid affair, and should provide six good sessions of gaming. Yet it is not as pleasing as the campaigns given in *Dime Heroes* or its companion volume, *Jungle Adventures*; really, it lacks the flair, polish, and wit of the excellent [Buggin' RPG: The Tiny Game of Big Adventures](#). This does not mean that a gaming group cannot have fun playing *Pax Gladivs* -- as they should get out of it as much as they put in -- but rather that the GM will have to smooth over its slightly rough edges. Another distracting factor may be its lack of historical detail; however, as a game drawn from movies made about Ancient Rome, players are expected to have watched those rather than to have read Gaius Julius Caesar's *Gallic War: Conquest of Gaul* or *Twelve Caesars* by Suetonius. Of course, copies of either *GURPS Rome* or the [FVLMINATA: Armed With Lightning](#) RPG might prove useful should a GM want both background and game details. Indeed, the campaign given in *Pax Gladivs* could be run using either of those game systems.

It is a shame that the quality of this game does not quite match that of its nicely done cover. This, however, should not be enough of a reason to put off potential purchasers, as this *IPG* does exactly what it should: provide plenty of light, action-orientated adventure, and do so at an attractive price. Which only goes to prove that *Pax Gladivs - Epic Swords & Sandals Adventure* is another welcome addition to the *IPG* family.

--Matthew Pook

Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Dreamation, All I Ever Wanted . . .

"R076: In Nomine; 'The Kensington Codex' by Steven Marsh. You're all Malakim from the militant faction of Heaven. Your superiors have given you a simple job get the demon out of the kid with out harming the child. This should be simple if only the nasty critter would leave. . ."

There are certain dreams I have often enough that I consider them part of my nightmare repertoire. One of them is the classic where I forget I have a final exam in a college class, so I show up completely unprepared, not having the book, and an hour late. I'm also not wearing pants.

This was the first thing that came to mind when I saw the program schedule for [Double Exposure Inc.](#)'s Dreamation 2004 program booklet, the guide to the con for which I was graciously invited as a guest, along with fellow SJ Games associate and previous *Pyramid* wrangler, Scott Haring.

It was an intriguing blurb, and the title provided did, indeed, match up with my adventure's title. But -- as long-time *Pyramid* readers know -- [my adventure](#) had *nothing* to do with *In Nomine*, Malakim, or possessed children. Mind you, I was bemoaning the fact that I didn't bring my *In Nomine* book, since then I would have seriously considered doing an on-the-fly conversion of my *GURPS Cliffhangers* action-packed 1930's archeological adventure to the world of angels and demons.

Anyway, this was the greatest personal mishap that befell me in what was otherwise a fun and entertaining convention.

This was the second year in a row I was a guest at Dreamation, held in East Brunswick, New Jersey. Last year's memories are a bit hazy, owing to an inner ear problem that manifested while landing at Newark's airport, resulting in splitting skull pain that lasted the better part of a week. So it was with lump in my throat that I flew there again this year, waiting and hoping that my ear equilibrium would stabilize upon landing. It did. And there was much rejoicing.

It's always hard to codify these convention reports, since I would at least like to *pretend* that they are interesting to read. As such, I try to avoid excruciatingly detailed travelogues and go more for overall impressions of various aspects that caught my eye.

The Big Picture

Percentage-wise, there were more cute women at this gaming convention than I have seen at quite possibly any other gamerly gathering.

(I'm not even sure if it's politically correct to make such proclamations nowadays, but I noted it to one of the convention hosts, and she nodded emphatically and said I needed to report on this observation . . . all in the name of scientific and sociological research, of course. I also note that, if a jillion gamer guys flock to Dreamation in response to this, the percentages for the next con will be skewed significantly. *C'est la vie.*)

The convention was fairly small, all things considered; the last "official" number I heard was 671 attendees on Saturday, although that number may well have changed before the end. However, the chosen venue was well-suited for the gathering; the Brunswick Hilton had events spread out enough that I never felt claustrophobic, but it was compact enough that the event always felt bustling. The only significant drawback was that events were spread out over two floors; most of the action was on the main floor, but several important locations -- such as the RPGA and LARP headquarters, and the Staff Suite -- were on the floor above. This became especially awkward when the power went out for an hour, sending the middle third of the hotel -- including the elevators to the floor above -- into darkness. It was quite bizarre to see, from within the zone of darkness, active and bustling tables on either side of the blackout.

Forget what you may have heard on television or the movies; New Jerseyans are nice. Everyone -- staff, volunteers, attendees, hotel workers, mutant radioactive pigs -- was very pleasant, helpful, and . . . well, *nice*. The people who run this convention are clearly doing so out of love for the hobby, and that passion and enthusiasm showed.

The convention itself was fairly well-organized and tightly run; outside of the power outage -- which was eventually traced back to a faulty fire alarm -- there were almost no problems. (One volunteer noted there were no problems that I *saw* . . . which made me immediately envision a Black Ops team scurrying around, concealing catastrophes: "We have vomit on the CCG table! This is not a drill! Code Red! No witnesses!") Even the registration table -- the bane of many a convention -- seemed fairly smooth and trouble-free throughout the weekend.

Guests

First off, let me note that I have rarely seen a convention that has bent over backwards as much to ensure its guests were treated right, and *never* seen one where "guests" was so widely defined. Basically, anyone who helped with events for the show -- "important" people such as myself (*ha!*), staff, volunteers, and even all the GMs -- were entitled to visit the Staff Suite.

And what was contained within this mythical Suite?

Food.

Lots and lots of really good food.

Over the course of the weekend I ate chicken fresh out the roaster, turkey stroganoff, a chicken parmesan sandwich, in addition to more "normal" convention fare such as bagels and cereal.

Aaron Rosenberg, chief architect and bottle-washer of [Clockworks Games](#), noted this fact alone should be used as a selling point to attract more industry luminaries: "Don't you understand?!? They'll *feed* you!"

Even the "regular" convention-goers got access to the Con Suite, which contained round-the-clock drinks and snacks, plus daily "Baglemania" events in the morning and two evening sugar-fest events: Ice Cream Dreams and Chocolate Heaven.

Speaking of famous people, I got to spend one-to-one time at this convention with more Interesting Gaming Folks than I ever have at a con. As mentioned before, I finally got to meet Scott Haring, who was as much a gentleman in person as our online interactions. (This is even in spite of his delivering the most stinging zinger of the weekend: "Of course, it's still possible for a piece of writing to spell-check correctly, yet have the words be incorrect. We call those 'Pyramid articles.' ")

I also met the aforementioned Aaron Rosenberg, prolific creator behind and author of the book *Gamemastering Secrets* (which won an Origins Award despite my contribution). He's been a full-time freelancer for four-fifths of forever, and has accumulated much wisdom and knowledge of the inner workings of the game biz which I tapped mercilessly. He also brought his latest collaboration -- his adorable daughter Adara, who did a great job running the Clockworks table, especially given that she's only four months old. Aaron and I are both kindred spirits in the importance of character sheets to an RPG book, a topic about which I'll probably squeeze a column out of at some point soon. Should anyone meet Aaron, be sure to ask him about the "Don't Eat This!" marble anecdote.

I also got to meet some of the current crew of [West End Games](#): long-time Creative Director Nikola Vrtis and new WEG owner Eric Gibson. I didn't get to spend much time with Eric, although he seems to be a nice, smart guy who's eager to learn; he's also living the fantasy that I and some of my friends had speculated several times during college: "If I had a bunch of money, I'd buy the rights to *Torg* and . . ." Nikola is not (as I've always envisioned) a Russian expatriate on the lam from former KGB anti-gaming extremists, but is instead a fellow native-born emigrant of Michigan. (You can always tell the native Michiganders because they tell you where they're from using their hand: "The center of my palm is Lansing, and if you go southwest . . .") Nikola has an enthusiasm for the hobby and material

that is contagious; she's also one of the few minds I've met that seems comfortable writing, editing, and developing . . . all at the same time. I've been a big fan of West End Games for almost 20 years (at least since my beloved *Star Trek III* solo wargame set), and I wish the company's new incarnation all the best; I know I'm looking forward to the two upcoming products (one being the last compiled original "1.5" *Torg* rulebook later this year, the other being the all-new edition of *Torg* coming next year).

Games

Unfortunately, listed games from smaller companies seemed fairly under-attended at the con. Aaron and I had our game sessions scheduled at the same time, and both times we found ourselves looking at each other across our empty tables. I *did* have two people who attended my second session, but they both had *In Nomine* books in hand (despite putting up errata on the sign-in sheet), and only one of them seemed interested in playing a *GURPS Cliffhangers* adventure.

Fortunately, both sessions I was able to defect to other games after deciding that I was going to be short enough players. Thus I got to play a *Vampire* game (which was confusing but still pretty fun) and a *D6 Space* game, run by the aforementioned Nikola. The latter was a lot of fun, although I note that our group fell back on Universal Plan B -- running, shooting, and blowing stuff up -- in a record five minutes.

Finally, the group of us had a late-night impromptu "industry-insiders-only" *D6 Fantasy* adventure, again ran by the ever-busy Ms. Vrtis. This game helped reinforce my near-forgotten enjoyment of the *D6* system (most popularly seen in the original *Star Wars RPG*); anyone who's looking for an easy-to-teach-and-play game that's withstood the test of time may want to check out the current or upcoming incarnations of the *D6* line.

Secret Meetings Of The Hidden Masters (See also: Panels)

Finally, I was signed up to be on three late-night panels, where I would get to share my accumulated wit and wisdom with the teeming millions who would amass for our discussions.

At least, that was the plan. Unfortunately, the other con-goers had different plans, which did *not* involve their attending our panels. With the exception of the "What's Going on at SJ Games?" panel (where a few of our area Men In Black came out for additional reprogramming), none of the others had any attendees.

As a result, the other two panels transformed into industry-insider chat-fests. By far the most surreal was the "How To Break Into The Game Industry" panel; there were 10 people there . . . all of whom were *already* in the game industry. The topic quickly transformed to "How To Break *Out* Of The Game Industry."

I can't express how much fun it was to just chat with others in the biz for an hour or two each night; we made extreme insider jokes, fabricated rumors (most of which revolved around Clockworks Games buying various companies), and commiserated about various things that seem vitally important to us, but would no doubt bore the tears out of The Real World. I also learned a great deal about conventions and what makes them tick, thanks to the patience of Dreamation's PR Director and Hostess Extraordinaire Becca Badurina. In particular I'm fascinated by the relationship between demo folks, game companies, and cons; hopefully I'll get my act together soon and write a column about what I've learned.

In all, I was pleasantly surprised by my Dreamation experience. I was especially impressed by how accessible and open to suggestions the con organizers were (and not just from guests; I witnessed staff members chatting with many people about ideas to make things better next time). It lacks the size or depth of cons such as DragonCon, and events could definitely be a bit better attended (except the LARPs, which seemed quite bustling and well-organized). But the con had a lot of heart, and everyone who attended seemed to have a lot of fun; even an extra four-and-a-half hours stranded in airports (thanks to drizzling in Atlanta) did little to deter my enjoyment of the weekend. If this year's Dreamation is any indication, I can recommend it and other conventions run by Double Exposure, Inc. to those in the northeast part of the U.S. According to the program booklet, they'll be hosting Spring Gathering 2004 (April 23-25), DexCon 7 (July 14-18), and Southern Exposure (September 30-October 3).

And if you're willing to work a bit, they'll *feed* you!

--*Steven Marsh*

The Memory of Ruin

A Medieval Scenario Setting for *Ars Magica* and *GURPS* Part 1: The Lost Castle

by Neil Taylor & Phil Masters

*(Note: This scenario was originally written as part of the recently released **Ars Magica** supplement **Faerie Stories**, but was cut between the first and final drafts. It has been revised and expanded, and has had **GURPS** data added, for this publication. Many thanks to **Ars Magica** line editor David Chart for permission to do this, and for editorial input on early versions.)*

This article describes not so much a scenario or story as a *setting* -- specifically, a ruined castle, somewhere in medieval Europe (or some European-style fantasy land; parts of *GURPS Fantasy*'s Yrth might qualify), where history has left a supernatural legacy. It is suited to PC parties of moderate power, but they will need some magical ability or similar (and not just the ability to throw fireballs) to complete the exploration at all safely. Part 1, this week, deals with the more "material" aspects of the site; part 2, next week, covers the strange innermost secrets.

How PCs might discover this location is a matter for the GM and the campaign. *Ars Magica* characters may be exploring a wilderness area in search of vis; certainly, PCs in many games may simply go out in search of magical materials and secrets, or perhaps even a location for a new castle or wizard's tower. Alternatively, they might be a band of retainers, employed by a lord to help pacify some remote region and to explore its wilder corners. The GM/storyguide might trail clues across the characters' path (perhaps in the form of peasant gossip), and then rely on curiosity and greed to draw them on.

The wood wherein the castle lies has a reputation in surrounding villages for being haunted, and no one seems to venture there much. If characters seek to track down any details, all they get is tales of dangerous natural creatures, and perhaps the odd very minor supernatural monster. There may be hints of some kind of ruin deep in the wilderness, but no one can be found who will admit to having ventured there. In *Ars Magica* games, there are no reports of Hermetic activity in the area, and no recorded claims to vis sources.

GM/Storyguide's Background: Attack and Defense

In truth, there *used* to be human communities in these parts, but they collapsed a long time ago. This then-prosperous land was subject to raids by outland plunderers -- savage "barbarians." They could be called Vikings, except that the castle which features in this story has many features which date from after the Viking era. In a mythic or "Hollywood" game, everyone can happily ignore such anachronisms and say they were Norsemen; in a more realistic historically-based game, or one set in lands not subject to Viking attack, they can simply be defined as "raiders." The descriptions in this text give the key characters Norse-style names, and include one or two Scandinavian-style details; GMs are welcome to change these.

Tennent's Castle

These raiders were a brutal nuisance, and so a strong castle was built to protect a certain village and the surrounding lands, under the leadership of a heroic lord named Tennent. Then a raiding party lead by the fearsome Hrolf Wolfsgrim arrived in the area. Hrolf's men fought a number of minor engagements with the defenders, until they ended up at the castle itself, which seemed impregnable. For a while, they camped outside while the defenders smiled grimly down at them.

The Last Battle

But, one evening, a great storm came up. A wild figure was seen standing before the castle, taunting the defenders as the rain and lightning lashed down, and both sides sensed that sorcery was involved. One huge bolt of lightning struck the base of the keep with such force that the very ground gave way and slumped towards the river. The collapse tore away its foundations, the wall was breached, and half of the keep collapsed, killing many defenders. The raiders gleefully made their way up the rubble slope to the ruins, pouring in through the breach.

Then the two leaders met and fought directly, long and hard; likewise, their followers fought bitterly in the gathering darkness, blood and rain mixing to make the stones slick and treacherous.

The Fallen

The next day, the castle was a hollow ruin, only corpses lying within, raider and defender alike; even the two heroes had fallen, locked in their mutual fury. What few of the garrison had escaped now left the scene, as the castle could no longer be held effectively, and another raiding party was reportedly coming. Those new raiders fell upon the defenseless peasants of the area, so that they too fled. Soon, all was left abandoned.

Now, however, tales spread among folk in neighboring areas that the battle was not over, but that the ghosts of the warriors renewed their struggle every night, and the clamor of battle could be heard from within the ruins. No one wanted to return to the area, and eventually the ruins were forgotten.

Approaching the Castle

Explorers approaching the castle will find that themselves having to push their way through dense woodland, although there are a number of game trails. The woods are rich in deer and boar, actually drawn by a slight but definite magical aura of untamed, wild nature. In *Ars Magica* terms, within a mile or two of the castle, the woods have a faerie aura of 1 -- just a slight sense of oddity, some might say. In *GURPS* terms, there may be small areas of aspected mana (p.M94), giving +1 to effective skill in Animal and Plant college spells. Lengthy investigation *might* find the tracks of two major predators, described below as resident in the castle: the bear and the wyrm. (The wyrm also leaves blighted plants where it exhales.) In theory, a very long and careful search might find the ruins of the village that used to lie below the castle, and the remains of some other cottages nearby, but these have completely collapsed and become so overgrown that this search could take weeks, and in any case it would achieve little.

The Castle Today

The castle is long overgrown. Trees grow in the courtyard, and creepers cover the walls and much of the keep. What is left of the keep tower stands proud of the trees and can be seen from the shallow river valley below the castle, through which the visitors will find themselves moving. (Incidentally, the river broadens to form a shallow lake at one point; the explorers may have to skirt that.) The ditch that once formed a dry moat is now filled with brambles and thorn bushes. In *Ars Magica*, all of this has a magic aura of 1; in *GURPS*, spells such as Detect Magic and advantages such as Awareness or Second Sight will pick up a very faint but unmistakable sense of the supernatural.

The castle was built on a rocky outcrop, which unbeknownst to the builders was faulted and divided below ground. The part of the keep that still stands rests on a firm base; the part that fell rested on a second, smaller rock, which collapsed. The slumped ground now forms an uneven slope with boulders and dense scrub, making the climb up to the ruins difficult. The opened floors of the keep can clearly be seen by anyone approaching. The gatehouse still stands firm, although the wooden gate rotted and has been wrenched open.

GM/Storyguide Information

The crucial point here is that the castle ruins are no longer entirely of this world. Rather, the whole area has become a kind of portal to ghostly "spirit realms" where supernatural forces hold sway. In *Ars Magica* terms, a fairly complex, three level regio lies over the site. In *GURPS* terms, characters wandering round the castle may enter a series of "levels" of "outer spirit worlds" (*GURPS Spirits*, p.SPI25-6), each slightly less connected to mundane reality than the last. Visitors are likely to find themselves moving through different "levels" as they explore, at least until they come to understand the nature of things here. However, a powerful magical creature discovered this place long before them.

GMs/storyguides may also note at this point that, beyond the slope, in the woods, lie the remains of Lodric the Shaman. See part 2 for more on this.

Lower Floors



The Gatehouse

The castle's gatehouse has now been adopted as its lair by a bear which wandered in from the woods. When it first arrived at the castle, it somehow sensed that there might be something of interest to it here, and forced open the rotten wood of the gates, leaving impressive gouges from its claws. Once inside, it decided that this was an appealing "cave"; since then, the mystical aura of the place has led it to grow mighty, while instinct and its keen sense of smell have enabled it to avoid the wyrm.

There is a musty smell around this building, and those who know woodlands will recognize bear spoor. (*Ars Magica*: roll 6+ on Int+Hunt or Survival; *GURPS*: roll vs. Tracking at +1.) The lair contains piles of bracken and leaves as bedding, plus assorted bones of prey animals, droppings, etc.

Ars Magica: Bear of Virtue

Characteristics: Cun +3, Per +3, Str +5, Sta +5, Dex 0, Qik +1

Magic Might: 15

Size: +2

Personality Traits: Ferocious +3, Faithful +1

Attack	Init	Atk	Dfn	Dam	Fat
Maul	+7	+8	+4	+11	+5
Tackle	+7	+4	+1	+7*	+5

*Target must make a Str+Siz roll of 12+ to stay standing.

Soak: +15

Fatigue levels: OK, 0/0, -1/-1, -3, -5, Unconscious

Body levels: OK, 0/0, -1/-1, -3, -5, Incapacitated

Abilities: Athletics 3 (running), Awareness 4 (smell).

Ferocity: +1 (when seeking honey)

Powers:

Mighty Hug, PeCo 15, 0 points: if the bear grapples an opponent, it may crush him for +15 damage.

Vis: 3 Animal in heart.

For more detail, see p.32 of *The Medieval Bestiary*.

GURPS: Oversized Bear

ST: 27 **Move/Dodge:** 7/6 **Size:** 3*
DX: 13 **PD/DR:** 1/2 **Weight:** 1,200 lbs.

IQ: 5 **Damage:** 2d-2 cr*
HT: 14/25 **Reach:** C,1

Notes: This is a 3-hex animal when walking on all fours; when it rises onto its hind legs, it occupies 1 hex. The listed damage represents a paw swipe; the bear can also bite for the same amount of cutting damage at close range. European bears do not usually hug opponents, but this one has learned the trick as it grew; treat this as a grapple in close combat, which can be followed by a bite. Having absorbed power from its surroundings, it also has 4 levels of Magic Resistance. For more on bears, see *GURPS Bestiary*, p.BE8-9.

Characters who find the bear at home may be able to avoid confrontation by cautiously waiting for it to depart, or they might use stealth and skill to catch it asleep and defeat it easily -- or they might blunder into a hard fight. Conversely, if it is away from its lair when they first arrive, it may wander back at any time, and become irate to discover intruders. Fleeing from it into the spirit realms (see below) may be satisfying, but means that it will still be there when they depart, and probably still irritated.

GMs/storyguides can use the bear to advance or slow progress as needed -- either as a distraction, or to nudge the characters along.

Entering the Spirit Realms

The gatehouse is, of course, the main entrance to the castle. It *also* leads into the spirit lands. Anyone walking through the gatehouse in the mundane world, through the outer doors and then the inner doors, will by default enter a ghostly world, unless they specifically concentrate on remaining on the mundane level, or follow a guide who does so. Most animals will remain in the mundane world as they pass through, so a rider or someone following a beast will not enter the spirit lands.

Once they have entered the first "level" of the spirit lands, it should quickly be obvious that something strange has happened; apart from anything else, anyone looking back will see the gatehouse doors intact (and closed). For further details of what they may discover next, see part 2.

Alternatively, the GM/storyguide may determine that the portal to the ghostly realms only opens at certain times -- say, at midnight, or even only on the anniversary of the battle. Visitors could explore the castle, defeat its monstrous inhabitants, and perhaps even begin clearing it out for occupation, only to suffer a nasty shock later. In this case, whether or not the wyrm can usually shift to the spirit realm is likewise optional; it does give the creature a useful edge, and could provide a mystery and a hint which the later discovery of the spirit realms would explain.

The Open Keep

The scrub and brambles on the rubble slope grow up to the breach in the base of the keep. A character who scrambles up the slope can walk freely into the kitchen, climb up to the Great Hall, or scramble on into the courtyard.

The Kitchen

The chamber that makes up the ground floor, actually below the entrance level, was once the keep's storeroom and kitchen. The stairs from the kitchen are built into the stone walls and are still firm; the ceiling (that is, the floor above) is weak and near collapse. The smoke vent for the kitchen fire leads up through the walls, and joins the flue from the central fireplace within in the thick wall.

Unfortunately for explorers, a great wyrm has made its lair in here, slithering out at night to hunt in the woods. During the day, it is usually asleep in the darkest recesses of the kitchen; however, it has very keen senses, and will hear most activity and waken. There is a permanent foul stench from its breath (although the miasma is not actually poisonous). It will thus be a formidable threat in daylight -- and a group which chooses to remain around the ruins after nightfall will be in *very* serious danger. Its emanations have polluted the well in the courtyard and withered all the plants in that

area.

Ars Magica: Great Serpent (Land Wurm)

Characteristics: Cun +2, Per +2, Str +9, Sta +5, Dex +0, Qik +1

Magic Might: 20

Size: +4

Personality Traits: Cruel +3, Greedy +3

Attack	Init	Atk	Dfn	Dam	Fat
Bite	+8	+8	+3	+15*	+5
Tail Grab	+9	+7	+2	+13**	+5

*Poisonous bite: victim must roll Sta 9+ or lose 1 Fatigue level; in the next round roll 6+ or lose another Fatigue level; in the 3rd round roll 3+ or lose another.

**The Wurm will try to immobilize one opponent with its tail (see *Brawling Maneuvers*, *Ars Magica* p.169) while biting another; anyone immobilized will be bitten on the next round.

Soak: +20

Fatigue levels: OK, 0/0/0, -1/ -1, -3/-3, -5, Unconscious

Body levels: OK, 0/0/0, -1/ -1, -3/-3, -5, Incapacitated

Abilities: Athletics 3 (burst of speed), Awareness 3 (keen hearing), Hunt 2 (men)

Ferocity: 4 (when hunted)

Powers:

Poisonous Touch: MuAq 40, 0 points: the touch of this creature renders any water it comes in contact with unfit to sustain life, as per the spell *Vile Water of Sterility* (*Ars Magica* p.115, but target reduced to Individual).

Foul Breath: CrAu 10, 0 points: the breath of the serpent is like the spell *Stench of Twenty Corpses* (*Ars Magica* p.118). Those within 10 paces must roll Sta 6+ or act with a -3 penalty on all rolls. Anyone who botches the roll vomits and is incapacitated for (10-Sta) rounds.

Breath of the Basilisk, PeCo 40, 5 points: the Serpent can expel a cloud of poison, roughly 10 paces long by 3 paces wide. Those within the cloud take +20 damage (Armor only offers half protection).

Vis: 2 Animal in body, 2 Perdo in fangs.

GURPS: Medium-Sized Legged Worm

ST: 44 **Move/Dodge:** 6/7 **Size:** 10

DX: 13 **PD/DR:** 3/4 **Weight:** 3,000 lbs.

IQ: 13 **Damage:** 2d+1 cut

HT: 15/48 **Reach:** C,1

Notes: The worm can breath a cloud of poison; treat this as two levels of the Venom advantage (p.CI71), with the corrosive option, the "Cloud of Mist" enhancement, and 5 levels of the "Costs Fatigue" limitation. (This poison also withers plants, poisons wells, and so on.) It also has the advantages Alertness +2, Awareness 1, Extra Legs (4), High Pain Threshold, Immunity to Disease, Immunity to Poison, Magic Resistance 4, Nictating Membrane 2, Night Vision, Temperature Tolerance 6 (2 times HT at bottom of range, 4 times HT at top), and Unaging. Of course, it also has the disadvantages associated with its horizontal posture and lack of functional hands. It can do the listed damage with either claws or teeth, depending on what is convenient at the time. Its IQ reflects its perceptiveness and evil cunning; despite this practical intelligence, it is essentially animalistic. It may manage some clever tactics, but it has no real strategy, and it will flee from pain, chase after food, and so on. It will usually breath one or two clouds of poison at the start of any fight, but as this tires it slightly, and it enjoys maiming foes, it tends to close quickly.

The wurm is a slim, sinuous beast, some 30' long, with short clawless legs. Its scales are black, with an oily sheen. It can navigate the familiar basement area even in complete darkness; furthermore, as a magical native of the area, it can see between adjacent spirit-realm levels, and freely shift between them, although it doesn't normally move beyond the first, ghost-haunted "level." (Its magical power renders it immune to the ghosts' attacks.) It is cunning enough to use

shifts between levels for tactical advantage, moving secretly and invisibly before shifting back and attacking by surprise.

The Courtyard

Characters can enter the courtyard from the rubble slope; the keep wall is fallen, so one can also walk into the keep storeroom and kitchen. Trees and shrubs now fill most of the space, except around the well; the wyrm has rendered the water oily and foul, and what little vegetation struggles to grow nearby is warped and twisted. Trees overhang the walls, and creepers cover the stonework, making them easy to climb.

The courtyard once held stables for cavalry horses, sheltered cattle in emergencies, and provided a workspace. There were a number of wooden and stone buildings against the walls, but these were torched by the raiders; what didn't burn has rotted away.

A narrow staircase leads up the side of the keep to the great hall. The keep door stands, and has some strength left in it: it can be forced open by brute strength (*Ars Magica*: combined Str roll 12+; *GURPS* total ST 30), or broken down.

Upper Floors



The Great Hall

The hall of the keep is two stories (20') high, and had a wooden gallery around the upper portion. As well as providing space for entertainers, this provided access to arrow slits in the outer walls.

Half the outer hall fell when the keep side collapsed; characters can now just scramble in over the rubble. The doors out to the inner courtyard still stand -- the invaders entered through the gaping hole in the walls!

The floor is treacherously rotten, as rain comes in through the roof, and drips over and through the boards of the upper and lower floors. Anyone walking across may collapse a portion. (There are stone pillars beneath, so the floor will not all fall at one time.) An agile character may be able to leap aside; in *Ars Magica*, make a Qik+Athletics roll of 9+ (6+ if the character's advance is cautious and prepared), in *GURPS* make a roll against DX-2 or Acrobatics (DX or Acrobatics+2 if the character's advance is cautious and prepared). Otherwise, the character plummets into the lower levels. The gallery timbers, and the stairs leading to it, are also rotten.

A stone staircase within the wall leads down to the kitchen (the wyrm's lair); another lies behind a stout door and leads down through the wall (beyond the kitchen, and not communicating with it) to the cellar, which is cut into the solid rock. A third staircase spirals up through the walls to the upper floors. The rotten floor must be crossed to reach these.

A large fireplace has a smoke flue leading up through the wall; higher up, it joins the flue from the kitchen. A few chairs, benches and the great tables still remain, along with other non-portable or low-value items. Any portable goods were removed by the survivors when the keep was abandoned.

The Cellar (Below the Kitchens)

A small chamber at the base of the staircase from the Great Hall has two doors of stout oak. The wood has swollen and jammed. One door opens to a passage which leads to the crypt, the other to the cells.

The Crypt: Bones of past inhabitants were interred down here. The place feels solemn; there is Christian imagery carved into the walls, and statues of local saints in niches. In *Ars Magica*, there is a dominion aura 2; in *GURPS*, appropriate spells or advantages may detect a subtle sense of lingering holiness, and priests may even receive a *small*

bonus to supernatural powers.

The Cells: Four tiny cells (5' square) held prisoners; a fifth, larger (5' by 10') cell was used for other purposes (e.g. interrogation).

The Treasure Chamber: One of the blocks of the stone facing of the chamber pivots into the wall. The secret chamber beyond held the castle's most precious valuables. Any silver has corroded away in the contaminated damp which runs down the walls, but some gold coins and bars remain, to the value of perhaps 15 pounds (1.5 lbs weight of gold) in *Ars Magica*, or \$1,000 in *GURPS*.

The Upper Floor Chambers

The floorboards on the upper levels are even more precarious than those below; there are gaping holes in places. These living areas were divide by curtains and light partitions; these are in *very* poor condition. There are abandoned traces of occupation -- bedrolls and chests of old clothing (some left gaping as departing people took the good stuff). The stairs in the walls lead down and up; a doorway connects through to the outer tower.

The Lord and his lady had a chamber up here, the solarium, while the rest of the upper chamber provided space for the knights and privileged among the troops; the rest slept in the Great Hall.

The Roof

On the roof, there are crenellations, and three remaining towers (10' across) at the corners. (Originally there were towers at all four corners.)

Two supernaturally large owls have a nest up here, inside one of the corner towers, now covered in bird lime and owl pellets. They have raised chicks in the past, but none are present just now.

Ars Magica: Great Owls

Characteristics: Cun +2, Per +3, Str 0, Sta 0, Dex +1, Qik +1

Magic Might: 10

Size: -1

Personality Traits: Secretive +2

Attack	Init	Atk	Dfn	Dam	Fat
Beak/Talon	+5	+5	+6	+1	+0

Soak: +3

Fatigue levels: OK, -1, -3, -5, Unconscious

Body levels: OK, -1, -3, -5, Incapacitated

Abilities: Athletics 4 (flying), Awareness 3 (seeking prey), Hunt 3 (swooping on prey), Stealth 5 (at night)

Ferocity: 4 (those lost at night)

Powers:

Night Vision: +4 to Per when using vision at night.

Vis: 2 pawns Intellego in the eyes.

GURPS: Giant Owls

ST: 12 **Move/Dodge:** 12/6 **Size:** 1

DX: 14 **PD/DR:** 1/1 **Weight:** 100 lbs.

IQ: 4 **Damage:** 1d-1 cut

HT: 12 **Reach:** C

Notes: As nocturnal hunters, these creatures have Night Vision and Stealth-14. Their sight and hearing are both excellent; all sense rolls are at 14. Their move rate assumes that they are flying; on the ground, their Move and Dodge are both reduced to 2.

These owls are fairly dangerous in a fight, and prone to defend their nest and each other, but are basically just animals, and will flee rather than fighting to the death. They like shiny things, and have accumulated a number of trinkets: shiny stones, bright feathers, and a curious ring, which is made of iron, free of rust, and bears a design of rowan leaves.

Ars Magica: Roll Herbalism 3+, Faerie Lore or Legend Lore 5+, Survival 7+, or Area Lore 9+ to recognize these leaves. The ring has non-Hermetic magical powers against the Fae: add +5 to Penetration and +2 to Natural Resistance when opposing faeries. Also, any Fae nearby will feel a great irritation at its presence, much worse than normal iron: they will treat the bearer as having Faerie Enmity (-6 reactions, extending to all companions). Treat the ring as having MuVi 20 powers for the purposes of investigation in the laboratory.

GURPS: Roll vs. Herbalist at -1 or Naturalist to recognize the leaves. If the wearer uses magic (including other magic item effects) against faerie beings, they make any resistance rolls required at -4, while any faerie using magic or spell-like powers against the wearer makes any required rolls at -2, *and* the wearer makes any resistance rolls at +2. However, any faeries nearby will feel a great irritation at the presence of the ring (much worse than they may feel at, say, normal iron): they will react to the bearer and all his companions at -5.

Next Week . . .

Part 2 of this article will describe the spirit realms into which our heroes must venture to discover the remaining secrets and treasures of the lost castle.

Joys of a Good Vendetta

Alternate Views of Enemies in *GURPS*

by Daniel Phillips

So, your party is full of people with checkered pasts who are busily leaving a trail of bodies (and enemies) in their wake. You, as GM, are discovering that everyone has an arch-nemesis who wants one of your valiant questers (or your ignoble thieves) dead. What to do?

These incessant battles seem to be detracting from the adventure, leaving little time for a plot, but rewarding the deadly players with 40 extra points for killing their enemy goes against the very core of a good GM's being. Likewise, forbidding your friends from taking an enemy, thus robbing you of a chance to mete out punishment and pain, as any GM should, and cheating yourself of the potential shot in the arm to bolster a lagging campaign, is unnatural.

What is a GM, an agent of chaos, the harbinger of ills to do?

First, you must remember three very important things when designing and playing an enemy:

Avoid the god complex. (or, "**Blood makes the grass grow. Kill, kill,kill!**") Many GM's think they must crush the insignificant fools who would dare oppose them, and so design an enemy that can dazzle and destroy their foes with ease, on the first encounter. Such enemy carries with them the blessings and aid of the god of their world, and a nigh-unbeatable collection of combat skills. There is no need for this! Everyone knows you can throw enough brute force at the party to crush it utterly. The GM is half-referee, half-storyteller, half-tactician, half-mediator, and 100% god in his world.

Instead of creating the ultimate warrior, make an intelligent, crafty, interesting, and -- yes -- formidable opponent that you can rely on to make your game fascinating for many games to come. This brings us to the second point.

Avoid the Last Battle. (or, "**Hello. My Name is Inigo Montoya. You killed my father. Prepare to die.**") You may not plan it, but inevitably, there will be a reckoning between foe and player. What will happen? Who will die? The answer is that no one must die. An enemy is as much a true disadvantage as blindness, and to allow even the most resourceful, creative player the opportunity for 10 to 40 free points for one kill is simply unfair. Certainly battle is likely, and death possible, but always there must be the possibility that either party member, or the foe, may escape. If the enemy fails, perhaps he has an ally who will take up his cause, or perhaps he does enough damage to force a physical disadvantage upon his foe. In a high tech world, or a magical campaign, the second option seems to pose a temporary inconvenience at best. It might be better avoided. You may also allow your friends to buy off the disadvantage, but I am yet to find a player who wished to do so.

What is my motivation? (or "**There can be only one!**") Enemies are people too. Vicious, bloodthirsty, and often ill-tempered; all in all, not that different from the party! They may wish the death of their sworn enemy, or their intent may be to ruin the player's life first. They may harass and interfere with them at all turns, hunting them down. Not every enemy encounter must be an assassination attempt. Perhaps the deadly assassin, not wishing to provoke a fight in which he is outnumbered by the party 7 to 1, simply sits down and has a "friendly" drink with his nemesis in a tavern. He may be content to frighten him for now, knowing he's safe because the authorities would intervene on his behalf should a fight start. Perhaps he poisons his foe's drink, or a flunky does it in the kitchen; perhaps not. There's only one way to know for certain, and to avoid becoming predictable, and that's by throwing it into the realm of chance.

Here are some optional rules to use in order to get the most out of your vendettas. First, as per *GURPS Basic* rules for enemy appearance frequency, the GM will roll to see whether an enemy will appear during this game session. If so, the GM will roll once more, on the table listed below, to determine the nature of the enemy's appearance.

Die Roll	Enemy	Appearance Type	Incidental Interaction	Intentions	IQ Roll
3	Direct	Confrontational	Collateral Damage	Combative	Yes
4	Direct	Discreet	Collateral Damage	Damaging	No
5	Direct	Confrontational	Immediate Group	Combative	Yes
6	Direct	Discreet	Immediate Group	Damaging	Yes/No
7	Direct	Confrontational	None	Deadly	No
8	Direct	Discreet	None	Deadly	No
9	Direct	Conversational	None	Warning	Yes
10	Direct	Visual	None	Ominous	No
11	Indirect	Visual	None	Ominous	No
12	Indirect	Conversational	None	Warning	Yes
13	Indirect	Discreet	None	Deadly	No
14	Indirect	Confrontational	None	Deadly	No
15	Indirect	Discreet	Immediate Group	Damaging	Yes/No
16	Indirect	Confrontational	Immediate Group	Combative	Yes
17	Indirect	Discreet	Collateral Damage	Damaging	No
18	Indirect	Confrontational	Collateral Damage	Combative	Yes

The Enemy column dictates whether the player's enemy will act personally (direct) or will send some one he has hired or influenced (indirect) to do his dirty work. The Appearance Type column shows the type of appearance the enemy will make. On a confrontational roll, the enemy or his agent will seek a fight, or make a direct assault of some sort upon the character. On a Discreet Roll, it will be an assassination type attack, such as poisoning, a sniper attack, or similar tactics. Conversational appearances simply mean that the situation is not right for any sort of combat, so the enemy merely lets his presence be known by directly speaking to and warning the player that he's there. On a Visual appearance, the player spots the enemy, but is not certain if he himself was seen.

Incidental Interaction is simply how many people are affected by the appearance. Collateral Damage means that anyone and anything in the vicinity is affected by the enemy's attack. Immediate Group means that the entire party, and any others in the general area, are at risk. None means no one is at risk other than the character who is the enemy's target. Only during Visual or Conversational encounters is there no danger. And a Discreet encounter may pose as Conversational or Visual. After all, what better time to poison a person than when you're sitting, drinking with them?

The Intentions column describes the purpose of the encounter. Combative encounters are those in which the player will need to take active measures to stay alive. Damaging encounters are those which, if sense rolls, IQ rolls, or resistance rolls are missed, and the player doesn't guess in what form the inevitable attack will come, the person attacked will be hurt, and possibly killed. Deadly encounters are those in which there will be no interference (back alley duels, kidnappings, etc.) and the confrontation will be only between arch-enemies. Warnings consist of threats and bluffs. No one is injured unless the player initiates it, and circumstances are stacked to discourage conflict, (Such as, the presence of police officers, soldiers, guards, etc.) Ominous encounters are when the player is made aware of his enemy's presence. He cannot know if this is the extent of the encounter or not for the remainder of the game session, though he will remain on guard.

The IQ Roll is made by anyone injured in the battle, in order to tell who the intended target was. If there is an attack in a tavern, for example, and a 3 is rolled, then after the attack is over, the GM rolls one roll for the average IQ of the NPCs in the tavern. If the IQ roll is made, the player who was the intended target is at minuses to his reaction by any patron equal to how much the IQ roll succeeded by. If any NPCs are in the party, an IQ roll must be made for each of them as well. If the enemy is a secret kept by the player, the other members of the party may roll as well. (If it is not a secret, then no roll is necessary.) This is the case on a roll of 6 or 15...the attack was discreet, but effects the entire party. IQ rolls are only made if the party is unaware of the fact that one of their number has an enemy. Once the enemy's appearance has been determined, the GM must roll against the enemy IQ, to determine if the enemy, or one of his hirelings, spies out their intended victim successfully. On a success, the attack/meeting proceeds normally. On a failure, the enemy has temporarily mistaken someone else for the player, and any Discreet attacks that do not cause collateral damage will automatically miss. Any secondary attacks the GM may initiate, however, will be at the correct target: the enemy has realized his mistake.

After the battle, if the chart indicates an IQ roll is required, the NPCs who have been affected, or have heard the conversation, must make a reaction roll (one roll for the entire mob) and the player is at minuses equal to how much the IQ roll succeeds by. If the IQ roll fails, (one for the entire mob) then no reaction roll is required.

Example

Benny the Blade has an enemy, Sammy the Shiv, who appears on a dice roll of 6-. At the start of game play, the GM rolls a 6, thus insuring that Sammy will appear. The GM then rolls against the enemy encounter chart, rolling a 3. The encounter will be combative, cause a great deal of collateral damage, and require others present to make a die roll vs. IQ to realize that Benny was the intended victim.

The GM allows the game to proceed normally, until Benny the Blade, and the rest of the party, Two Ton Tommy, and Louie the Loser, enter a restaurant on the 30th floor of a skyscraper where they had been sent to fetch a package.

While they are waiting, the GM requires hearing rolls, which all make, and turn towards the plate glass windows in time to see Sammy the Shiv behind the stick of a helicopter, aiming its guns at them.

There is mass bedlam, as they all duck behind tables, as Sammy opens fire, wrecking the place. Sammy failed his IQ roll, so he first takes out a waiter he thought was Benny, before returning his guns on his arch-enemy. Benny dodges most of the bullets, is hit by several, which, luckily for him, hit him in the chest and are absorbed by his bullet-proof vest.

Sammy escapes, as Tommy and Louie pull out their pistols and return fire, at which point the GM rolls against the patrons in the restaurants' IQ, and fails. No one knows why he attacked, or who he was after, another lucky break for Benny! The restaurant patrons are very angry, and would love to get their hands on the intended target of the attack. Nonchalantly, the trio claim their package and beat a hasty retreat, another job completed.

After-Action Reviews

by Ryan P. Macklin

Often, Special Forces and covert operations/espionage games operate with the idea that the end of the mission or getting home in one piece is the climax of the game, perhaps with a little debriefing. Most of the time that is where the game ends; gamers usually don't want to reenact their boring real-life desk jobs by writing reports. However, writing an After-Action Review can be fun, as the players are documenting the events of a particular mission, their exploits and craftiness, as well as giving their take on how the mission went down.

The content and purpose of an After-Action Review (AAR for short) is sketched out in *GURPS Special Ops*, page 99. That section also includes the type of information that is generally contained in one, so you may wish to refer to it in order to learn the sort of details to include. The focus of this article is on how to use player-written AARs in a game.

Functions of an After-Action Review

An AAR has several uses: Collecting intelligence to assist with related operations, aiding in the success of similar operations in the future, and evaluating the performance of the team, both collectively and individually. These are the reasons why the characters of the game world would write them. However, when engaging your players in this activity, there are other in-game and out-of-game reasons for them:

Gives a feel for down time. The bulk of many special operations game sessions is planning before the mission or action during the mission, especially when the GM has to incorporate the various tactics the players use into the game, such as splitting up, doing recon, or performing specialty tasks (setting up a sniping position, perhaps, or wiring a bridge with explosives). Doing things like writing reports, having lengthy debriefings, and going to get some chow and shut eye are often off-camera. Writing an AAR can give more of a feel for the game world and lend a bit of realism -- characters have to justify their actions, and they have a life outside of dodging explosions and gunfire.

Records a story for posterity. Players and GMs may look back fondly at the reviews from a Black Ops dinosaur hunt campaign when stumbling upon them months or years later. Perhaps they may decide to run a sequel or a spin-off, or just enjoy passing them around for old time's sake.

Allow for subtle secret communication. If you have one person playing a character whose true identity or purpose is a secret to the rest of the party, he could write up a review for his Secret Masters after each mission. Having written reviews the player hands to his superiors can also help determine what information he feeds them, rather than relying on memory or on assumptions about what the character tells. In addition, the character can deliberately leave out information and the GM will know to not feed those facts to the NPC superiors, such as omitting the location of a party member that the operative is growing attached to.

Gives opportunity to keep secrets from superiors. If the operatives decide that they need to keep a portion of a mission a secret -- such as not reporting that the Thing Lurking In The Shadows slaughtered half the team in fear that they would be locked away as murderous psychotics -- then the players can roleplay that in their reviews, and the GM knows to only include any information in the reviews in his mental "what the superiors know" checklist.

Props for a later game. Written reviews can be used as props when the GM plays a superior who wants to question the characters about an inconsistent story. This can help add drama or tension if the players are trying to keep an aspect of the mission secret. What if one of the agents in the "secrets" situation decides not to hold to the pact? Alternatively, a new campaign or different game can involve a mission to rescue an operative by including parts of his reviews in the Operation Order. In this case, holding onto past AARs is good for future game fodder.

Settling disputes between characters. When a mission doesn't go as planned, the characters and their superiors will look to see what went wrong and who, if anyone, is to blame. Rather than waiting until the debriefing, sometimes

arguments will take place in the middle of a game, such as when the commander gives an order to retreat. An AAR gives the character the ability to voice his disagreement with the order to his superiors while still following orders. It also allows the character to state why he disobeyed orders if necessary. A well-written and well-reasoned AAR could affect the superiors' judgment upon that character -- the commander's superiors could reason that the order was ill-advised, and may forgive the character for disobeying the order.

Settling disputes between players. Tactician players can sometimes get into heated arguments about the position of their characters and the situation they are in when something goes wrong. If Agent Zulu argues about Agent Rice's poor decision to fire a snap shot at an escaped prisoner running right next to Zulu, and an argument breaks out about distances from each character, skill scores, and firing penalties, it's up to the GM to get that resolved so the game can move on. Telling the players to remember it for the AAR (and to remember to keep it in character) can help resolve that argument for the time being without making either player feel like he has no say in the matter.

How to use After-Action Reviews in your game

First, decide if you want the reviews to be optional or mandatory. In general, optional is the best way to go if you want to introduce the idea to your group and don't want to penalize anyone who might not be interested or feels daunted by the idea. Mandatory is appropriate if you want to heavily involve players in the downtime of a character or if you have a behind-the-scenes plot you want the players to report about, such as the existence of an alien conspiracy.

If you use AARs as an optional part of the game, you might entice players with a small reward, such as a character point or two to spend on skills. This will initially motivate players to write reviews, and then seeing the AAR's effects in action might continue that motivation. If a player does not write one, then assume his character wrote one, but give it no special benefit or penalty.

If you are planning to have AARs as a mandatory part of the game, you will want to talk to your group and make sure they are comfortable with the idea. Many gamers use gaming as a retreat from school or work, and adding a "homework" factor into the gaming experience could be unpleasant for some people, so you should make sure their reports have an impact on the game that they can feel, above and beyond character point awards.

Once you incorporate AARs into your gaming, you must decide what to do with them. There are a few things to consider:

What format do you want the reviews in? You should decide whether or not you want to set a strict format for the documents. A simple narrative essay is easy for some people to write, particularly those who are not used to writing under strict guidelines. Others will prefer to follow a template and insert information accordingly. If you decide on a required format, you should provide the players with a blank copy and maybe an example AAR to help them.

How much access do the other players and characters have to another operative's review? In some cases, especially if you are involving your players in secret subplots, you will not want to show the reviews to the other players -- both they and their characters are in the dark, unless a player specifically shows the others, either in or out of character. In cases like this, it is quite possible that the character would distribute false AARs to other team members, to sow confusion or to cover up something.

At other times, you may wish to show the players what everyone has written, to give them ideas for future reviews and to let them know how others viewed the adventure. You should make it clear whether this is in-character knowledge or not. If you decide it is not in-character knowledge, be sure you aren't putting a burden on your group by feeding them too much information they aren't able to act on.

How will you reward your players? A small character point or experience point award can be a fun enticement, especially to get things started. Other possible rewards include promotions or decorations for characters who have their exploits written about (especially by other characters), or add to the group's reputation with colleagues and favor with superiors. Such advancement could be used to activate subplots, such as special high-profile missions or access to experimental gear. ("Did you hear about how Team Six handled that operation in Brazil? They might be able to help

test out the X-220!") Good individual and team rewards make the experience worthwhile, and may cause the players to put more effort into future reviews.

One thing to keep in mind when rewarding players is the content of the review, not the player's writing skill. Unless you want to treat it as such, this is not an English class. Many people may be able to play characters well but lack strong writing skills. While it is fine to reward players who go over the top in reviews, just as they do in the actual game session, remember to not discount those who are making serious efforts to also play along.

Other ways to do AARs

The idea of an After-Action Review can be easily molded to fit other campaigns. In a World War II infantry campaign, characters could be writing letters home to family and friends, instead of or in addition to AARs. In this case, they wouldn't be rewarded by superiors for what they write, but it would further their character immersion, and they may be able to get special rewards such as Mom's Homemade Cookies (which could be useful for bartering) or just a good feeling hearing that your brother is alive and well after his plane was shot down in the Pacific (which could give the character +1 to Will rolls for morale).

A horror or mystery game could involve people writing in journals, sharing the information and trying to uncover a crime. This is especially useful for tying together two or more separate groups running in one meta-campaign -- such as tracking down a mysterious cult and sharing the information with each other from different parts of the world.

Another idea is to change the format of the After-Action Review into a news article. In a pulp-era UFO chasing campaign, players could be from a fringe press that publishes articles on strange phenomena. Players could write articles after their adventure, and there would be a definite reward in the form of payment if the article is published. The opportunity to play a grizzled scheming editor like Spider-Man-nemesis J. J. Jameson can be fun for players or GMs. This sort of format lends itself to immersing the player in the character's day-to-day professional life, rather than just a series of adventures they are called to go on. Having articles published could lead to fame and fortune, or the wrong kind of attention from the wrong kind of people.

An After-Action Review is not suited for every campaign, such as epic fantasy games, where the heroes continue from one day to the next on their quest rather than returning home and writing reports for their superiors (especially when some of those characters may not even be literate). Nor is it suited for every group. However, there is a lot of fun to be had with this additional layer of gaming, and a campaign can be greatly enriched with After-Action Reviews.

Figureheads of Wondrous Power

Seafaring Magic Items for the *d20 System*

by Steve Honeywell

An average ship has many distinct parts, but perhaps no part is more distinguishing than the figurehead. The figurehead helps give the ship its personality and helps define it to others who see it. Figureheads are more than simply a decorative piece of sculpture hanging on the front of the ship; they are, for lack of a better term, the central element of a ship's personality. Like a good hood ornament can complete a stylish automobile, the right figurehead makes a ship truly distinctive. While the figurehead is not important to the overall workings of the ship, having the right appearance and making the right statement can make all the difference.

If enchanted, a ship's figurehead becomes a much more integral part of the whole. A magical effect placed on a figurehead affects either the entire ship or all of the rightful occupants of the ship. A ship can have only one figurehead at a time, and the magic on the figurehead works only while it is attached to a ship. Adding or removing a figurehead to a ship requires a Profession: Shipwright or Craft: Shipbuilding check with a DC of 15. Actually creating the figurehead requires a Craft: Shipbuilding or Craft: Woodworking check with a DC of 20, although any finely-carved figurehead can be enchanted.

Because the magic that most figureheads are imbued with covers a substantial amount of area (an entire ship and all of its contents and passengers), the caster level required to make this items is significantly higher than for similar, smaller items. The following samples are but an example of the possibilities that can be explored with enchanted figureheads.

Blessed Figurehead

This item effectively confers the benefits of a *bless* spell to all rightful occupants of the ship. These effects last only so long as the person is on the ship in question, and disappear as soon as he leaves the ship. This item is most useful for defending the ship from boarders, since the benefit is not conferred on anyone who does not have a right to be on the ship. Usually, *blessed figureheads* are carved in the shape of an angelic creature holding either the holy symbol of the creator or brandishing a large sword.

Caster Level: 8th

Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, *bless*

Market Price: 12,500gp

Figurehead of Lesser Avoidance

This figurehead is favored by captains who wish to remain anonymous. Many military ships feature figureheads of this nature, allowing them to move through the water without being located by enemies. Any ship featuring this item cannot be viewed through any form of magical scrying, although it can still be seen normally. Anyone attempting to scry the ship, any of its crew or passengers, or any items on the ship must succeed at a caster level check against a DC of 20.

Figureheads of lesser avoidance tend to be of blindfolded or otherwise sightless creatures.

Caster Level: 12th

Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, *nondetection*

Market Price: 50,000gp

Figurehead of Greater Avoidance

Much more powerful than the weaker model, the *figurehead of greater avoidance* has all of the powers and abilities of the lesser version. Additionally, once per day, the entire ship, its crew, passengers and all effects can be made

completely undetectable. When activated, the entire ship is protected by the effects of a *sequester* spell, making it completely invisible to any form of magical scrying, divination, or even the naked eye. Anyone attempting to scry the ship or anything on the ship must succeed at a caster level check against a DC of 25. More impressively, the ship also leaves no visible wake. Naturally, there is a danger of collision in busy waters, and docking is tricky. This effect lasts for an hour, but can be dismissed at any time. These figureheads are favored by smugglers and pirates, and are similar in appearance to *figureheads of lesser avoidance*.

Caster Level: 19th

Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, *sequester*, *pass without trace*

Market Price: 100,000gp

Figurehead of Clear Sailing

This item is useful for all ships, and commonly appears on military vessels and on merchant ships carrying extremely valuable cargoes. The *figurehead of clear sailing* allows the possessor to affect the severity of storms in the immediate area surrounding the ship. With this item, the strength of prevailing winds can be reduced up to 25mph. While this generally won't save a ship caught in a hurricane, it will prevent the ship from being buffeted by severe storms. The *figurehead of clear sailing* cannot be used to change wind direction or produce wind to move a calmed vessel. These devices are usually carved to look like birds or other winged figures.

Caster Level: 15th

Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, *control weather*

Market Price: 60,000gp

Figurehead of Etherealness

As the name of this item implies, when activated, the *figurehead of etherealness* allows the ship and its contents to move temporarily to the Ethereal Plane. This device can be used for up to 10 minutes per day. These 10 minutes do not need to be consecutive. *Figureheads of etherealness* can be carved in any fashion, but tend to look like hooded or ghostly figures.

Caster Level: 19th

Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, *ethereal jaunt*

Market Price: 100,000gp

Figurehead of Fear

Favored by pirates and some military vessels, the *figurehead of fear* only appears on ships that see a lot of combat. Up to three times per day, this figurehead casts *fear* with a save DC of 17. Crew and passengers on the ship with this device are immune to the fear effect. Virtually all *figureheads of fear* are carved in the shape of demonic or devilish beings.

Caster Level: 12th

Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, *fear*

Market Price: 25,000gp

Figurehead of Fire Protection

Fire is one of the most devastating things that can happen on a ship. This device absorbs the first 12 points of fire damage to the ship, contents, and occupants every round. This does not stack with other forms of fire resistance. While this will not prevent the ship from catching fire if caught in a devastating attack (red dragon breath, *fireball*, etc.), it will prevent most normal fires from igniting or spreading. Most of these devices are carved in the shape of elemental fire creatures like salamanders.

Caster Level: 9th

Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, *resist elements*

Market Price: 15,000gp

Figurehead of Flame

As mentioned above, fire is particularly deadly onboard an oceangoing vessel. For military ships looking to reduce enemy numbers quickly or pirate vessels wishing to eliminate evidence of their crimes, the *figurehead of flame* is a wise choice. Once per day, this figurehead can unleash a gout of flame equivalent to that of a young red dragon, which does 6d10. While creatures in the path of the flame are entitled to a saving throw (DC 19) for half damage, anything flammable, including other ships and their sails, will almost certainly catch fire. Virtually all of these devices are crafted to look like red dragons.

Caster Level: 12th

Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, *fireball*

Market Price: 20,000gp

Figurehead of Speed

Another figurehead favored by smugglers, criminals, and military vessels, the *figurehead of speed* allows the possessor to temporarily double the speed of his ship. This effect can be invoked once per day and lasts 1 hour, but can be dismissed at any time. This device is usually used for discouraging pursuit or for catching up with vessels being pursued. *Figureheads of speed* have no particular look, and many are carved to resemble other magical figureheads.

Caster Level: 12th

Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, *haste*, *expeditious retreat*

Market Price: 20,000gp

Figurehead of Trade

This item is a boon for merchants, and it is generally found on merchant vessels. The owner of the ship gains an effective +5 on all Bluff, Diplomacy, and Profession: Merchant checks made within sight of the vessel. On the ship itself, the bonus for these skills raises to +10. The *figurehead of trade* usually features a woman holding a merchant's scale.

Caster Level: 10th

Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, creator must have 5 ranks of Profession: Merchant

Market Price: 17,500gp

Figurehead of Undead Power

Favored by necromancers and leaders of undead navies, the *figurehead of undead power* grants turn resistance +2 to all undead creatures on and within 100 feet of the ship. This stacks with any turn resistance already possessed by the undead in question. Most of these items are of skeletal or mummified figures.

Caster Level: 10th

Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, creator must be able to channel negative energy

Market Price: 10,000gp

Figurehead of Wholeness

The *figurehead of wholeness* is frequently spotted on military vessels as well as ships that must frequently travel in dangerous waters. Three times per day, the magic of this figurehead can be invoked. Each use repairs the most serious damage on the ship's hull or masts, completely patching the largest hole or break in the craft. A broken mast always takes precedence over repairs to the ship's hull, but the majority of the mast must be present for the spell to take effect. Only one whole or damaged area is repaired at a time, so a series of small holes require several applications of this figurehead. Additionally, the magic will not repair fire damage, and cannot repair damaged sails. These items have no particular special appearance.

Caster Level: 12th

Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, *make whole*

Market Price: 25,000gp

Pyramid Review

Portable Adventures

Set 01: Lair of the Rat-King

Set 02: 8th Grade

Published by [Third World Games](#)

Designed by Dan Smith with Michael Nickoloff

Graphic Design by Dan Smith

60 full-color cards, rule sheet, & four six-sided dice; \$12.95

Described as "The Multi Genre Card Game System For 2-4 Players," *Portable Adventures* is another release from Third World Games, who also publish the [The Testimony of Jacob Hollow](#) and [Battle of the Bands - The Rock & Roll Card Game!](#) Like the latter, *Portable Adventures* is designed by the artist Dan Smith, best known for illustrating supplements such as *GURPS Cthulhupunk* and the long running "Bruno" cartoon, both for Steve Jackson Games. The concept behind *Portable Adventures* is simple: purchase one set and this provides the rules and experience to play any of the other sets, each of which explores a different genre. Further, any set can be combined with another in a number of different ways. Currently there are two sets available, *Set 01: Lair of the Rat-King* sends groups of adventurers underground to fight the invasion of a Ratling Horde, while *Set 02: 8th Grade*, deals with life in, well, the 8th Grade.

Portable Adventures is for two and four players 13 years and up -- about the right age to get the most out of *Set 02: 8th Grade!* Each set consists of a deck of 60 cards, an 11 by 8½-inch rules sheet and four six-sided dice -- one for each player. The deck consists of:

- Four ME Character cards (the equivalent of player characters, one for each player)
- 11 Character cards (NPCs used as group members or as reinforcements during an adventure)
- 13 Stuff cards (equipment such as magic items, weapons, or treasures)
- 13 Encounter cards
- 11 Event cards
- Eight Adventure cards

All of the cards are full-color and attractively illustrated and designed by Dan Smith, invariably to an amusing effect. For example, the game has the Human, Urk, Dwarph, Moo, Mawws, and Pfairy races instead of ordinary Humans, Dwarves, Elves, Orcs, Minotaurs, Mice, and Fairies.

The aim of the game is to acquire as many Adventure Points (AP) as possible. These can be gained by completing adventures or by grabbing one of the several special cards that can award a player more AP. This is done by adding characters to go with the basic ME Character each player starts the game with, equipping them with Stuff and making the group strong enough to deal with the Adventures.

There are four rough classes in the game: Warriors (red), Priests (purple), Rogues (green), and Wizards (blue), plus a general follower class (tan); however these do not play a major role in the game, except that most of the game's Stuff cards are color-coded and thus can be used only by some Characters. For example, the red/green Bow & Arrows Stuff card can be used by Warriors and Rogues, but not Priests or Wizards, whereas the Sleepy spell Stuff card can be used by Priests and Wizards but not by Warriors or Rogues. Many cards can also be flipped, either through activating an ability (all ME Characters can be flipped to discard their player's hand of cards and refresh it by drawing up to four cards), or from the effect of another character's ability. For example, Gnuurgh the Urk has a special way with the girls

-- "MR. G LOVES THE LADIES" -- and when his player discards a card from their hand, he can attempt to flip any female character in play. Some Characters lack a Character Point (CP) value when flipped; this is a measure of their strength throughout the game, and when this happens, such a character is discarded along with his Stuff. Worse still, some Characters can have negative Character Point value when flipped, while others have a higher value. Some Stuff cards are also flipped when used, while others are discarded after use. Many Characters also have a Die face on their card, this is important in determining who take part in Adventure Rounds.

Event cards can be played on single Characters or upon a group as a whole. Examples include "Better Pay!," with which a non-ME Character can be poached from another group and added to another group; "Visit Village," which sends a group to the safety of the village where they safe from any opponent's cards; "The Familiar," which increases a Character's a CP value or if given to a Wizard character, awards the group an AP bonus; and "The Dragon!" which the target group must fight and win more AP, or lose all of their Stuff!

From their starting ME Character and a hand of five cards, players take turns during which they can conduct a single action. This can be adding a Character to any group -- up to maximum of four in a two-player game, but an unlimited number if there are more players; adding or replacing a Stuff card on any Character in play; play an Event card on any Character or Group in play; play an Adventure card or discard up to three cards in their hand to un-flip an equal number of cards. Play proceeds around the table until somebody plays an Adventure Card on his turn, and then the game enters the Adventure Round.

The adventures include "The Laughing Ass Tavern" and "Blackmist Swamp," but some of the Adventure Cards are related to the theme or genre of the game. Thus in *Set 01: Lair of the Rat-King*, those that relate to the Ratling invasion are "Undercity Caverns," "The Hidden Nest," and "The Lair of the Rat King." Most of the Adventure Cards award two AP, though the latter Adventure Card awards a total of four AP. Any player can participate in an Adventure Round; those that do so can augment their groups with reinforcement Character cards that are discarded after the end of the Adventure, with Stuff cards, or activate a Stuff card that requires a die roll. Alternatively, they can play an Encounter card on another group. These represent things that happen as part of the Adventure, and include "Coward," which prevents a single Character from participating in the Adventure; "Wounded!," which flips a target Character; and "Squeecker! The Henchrat," the appearance of which imposes a penalty upon the roll to see who wins the Adventure card. Once everyone has played the cards they want, each player rolls a die and their results compared with the Die faces shown on the characters of all opponents. Should there be a match, those characters are flipped and then everyone adds their die rolls to the combined CP value of their remaining Characters and their Stuff. The highest total rolled wins the Adventure Card and adds it to their total, with some Adventure Cards allowing a player to rifle through the discard pile for a Stuff card to add to their group. The first player to gain seven Adventure Points wins a game, or possesses the most Adventure Points after the last card has been drawn.

In play, *Portable Adventures* is quite fun and not as complex as it sounds, nor as the rules read. They go for brevity over depth, which is not so much of a problem for the experienced or dedicated gamer; however, the lack of explanation and full examples may somewhat daunting for the casual player. Yet actually playing the game makes everything far more transparent and obvious in how it really works. This is helped by the simplicity of the instructions given on the cards, which lend themselves to strategies that are easy to grasp. They are not always so easily enacted, as there is a strong element of luck that can send the player in the strongest position tumbling to the back of the pack. Fortunes can change from one turn to the next, and any player so knocked back will have to rebuild his group.

At first only being able to play one card per turn seemed very limited, but this is actually quite a speedy process. The game does slow down slightly in later turns, especially when one player becomes dominant and another has been forced to rebuild. One problem we did come across when playing *Set 01: Lair of the Rat-King* was that of players not being able to play any card from their hand on their turn. There was no clear answer to this given in the rules and we allowed a player to draw and discard a card as an alternative, since the only option -- that of flipping the ME character to discard their hand and draw four fresh cards -- only serves to penalize the player for drawing a bad hand.

With both releases for *Portable Adventures* in hand, we tried them in numerical order with *Set 01: Lair of the Rat-King* being played first, followed by *Set 02: 8th Grade*. Of the two, we found the latter to be more fun, as it is obvious that the designer has had the opportunity to develop the concept, adding a greater degree of interaction between the

various cards. It also contains a streak of sly humor that pokes fun at school life and politics, the effect of which is to make *Set 02: 8th Grade* more appealing than *Set 01: Lair of the Rat-King* and its more obvious humor. *Set 02: 8th Grade* is the *Portable Adventures* game that we come back to as a nicely contained 20-minute-or-so game. Since there is obvious similarity between each game and thus their rules, there is a lot of repeated material between the sheets for *Set 01: Lair of the Rat-King* and *Set 02: 8th Grade*, complete with the same kind of brevity problems in the writing. The problem of not having a card or option to play did not come up with *Set 02: 8th Grade*.

Of course, having both sets opens up an interesting range of options through the combination of both decks of cards! The "Multiverse" option simply combines the two decks, while "Conjunction Of The Planes" brings the two decks together when a "Trigger Card" -- marked with an asterisk in the lower left hand corner -- is played. At this point, play continues with the second (previously unused) deck, so a bunch of quasi-medieval adventurers could suddenly find themselves in the school halls, or a bunch of 8th Graders find themselves having to deal with a Ratling horde. Genres are set against each other in "On The Borderlands," with players drawing and playing from their own deck against the decks of their opponents. This is at the moment is only a two-player option, as there only the two sets for *Portable Adventures* currently available. It is also possible to create and design decks much in the manner of other Collectible Card Games, but again this is an option for the dedicated gamer. Of course, with only two sets currently available this is a rather limited alternative.

Of the two, *Set 02: 8th Grade* is the far more enjoyable to play, but both are clearly well designed. They do feel similar in nature to Steve Jackson Games' *Munchkin* line of games, but without the same degree of absurdity and with more depth and complexity. That each of the *Portable Adventures* line comes self-contained with dice enough for every player, along with the cards and rules, is a pleasingly professional touch, meaning that it can be got out and played without the need to hunt down any other components. Although the rules do need developing such they are easier to understand, the ease of play does offset this problem once they are grasped. And once done so, either set of *Portable Adventures* should offer a diverting half-hour or so worth of gaming, with both *Set 01: Lair of the Rat-King* and *Set 02: 8th Grade* providing a greater depth and range of possibilities in their combination that will appeal to the dedicated gamer.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

d20 Menace Manual

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Designed by J.D. Wiker, Eric Cagle, Matthew Sernett, Christopher Perkins

Art & Graphics by Robert Raper, Cynthia Fliege, Dave Johnson, Kalman Andrasofszky, Jason Alexander, Joachim Barrum, Ted Bargeon, Langdon Foss, Frazer Irving, Karl Kersch, Chester Lawrence, Kagan McLeod, Raven Mimura, Mikael Noguchi, Dean Ormston, Jake Parker, Zak Plucinski, Scott Schomburg, Joel Thomas, Jonathon Wayshak, Sam Wood, Rob Lazzaretti, & Dennis Kauth

224-page full-color hardcover; \$34.95

It seems to have taken Wizards of the Coast a while to get around to a volume devoted to encounters for *d20 Modern*. There have been books on developing the settings for that game, but the *d20 Menace Manual* may fill some voids by adding some faces and creatures to it.

Not that this is merely a Modern *Monster Manual* with another alliterative title. It's split into three sections: creatures, characters, and factions. Actually, it's four sections if you include the introduction, which is mostly a "how to use this book" piece, or five if you include the last page and its CR rankings for the different beasts.

The creatures section describes -- what else? -- creatures. Most of these are just animals, real or imagined, that might attack or meaningfully interact with the player characters. Real ones include fairly straightforward choices, such as chimpanzees, hippopotami, or monitor lizards. Most of the fanciful ones are new, but some are culled from other Wizards books, such as the thought eater from the *Psionics Handbook* or the Tyrannosaur from the *Monster Manual*. Others are reimagined for the new *d20 Modern* environment, such as the doppelganger; it becomes the star doppelganger, a more disgusting abomination that consumes its double's flesh.

Some of the offerings start to feel a little repetitive. There seem to be quite a few amorphous creatures that rise up out of something mankind has dumped. There are monsters made of garbage, not to be confused with the sewer sludge, which in turn should not be mistaken for the toxic sludge.

The section isn't just critters, though. Fans of previous Wizards of the Coast works may recognize the alien Fraal as they attempt to . . . well, that would be telling. They -- and their technology -- sit next to creatures of Earth legend like Sasquatch, the mothmen, rods, and sea serpents.

The characters chapter describes several people the group might run into during an adventure. You get the firefighter, the black marketer, the animal handler, and all of them come with a low-, medium-, and high-level versions to accommodate PCs of varying levels. The problem of repetition isn't as pronounced in this chapter as it is in the gooey-bodied creatures segment, but there's still some hair-splitting. You get an attorney and a lawyer; a security guard and a security specialist (one could see the different roles they might fill, but the inclusion of high and low levels erases

many of the differences); and the cultists, clergy, and Vatican investigators might have been better off as a base entry with options for tailoring it for specific roles.

After the generic faces in the crowd are covered, there are some more fully realized heroic GM characters -- "heroic" here meaning they don't wet their pants when the bullets start flying, because few of them are nice folks. Most of these "name" characters are presented in bands, all united by a common cause or belief. Barret's Crew is a bunch of high-tech thieves who love a challenge, while the more streetwise Cleaning Crew is a host of thugs looking to break a few limbs. There are also a few stray ideas on how to bring important characters to life, including a chart with some "hooks" for identifying a new face.

The last chapter is all about factions -- those full organizations with an agenda of some sort to follow. This is also a mix of the real and the fanciful. Real-world groups like the CIA and the FBI are set alongside somewhat less plausible groups like the United Nations Elite Security Unit, which sees all its problems as nails in need of hammering -- they're ready for the New World Order, when society teeters on collapse and the biggest bully on the block takes charge.

There's an Al-Qaeda-like bloc called Al-Jambiya, bent purely on murdering Americans. They have operatives everywhere, and unlike some of their real-world inspirations they're prepared to act without a lot of posturing. Crimson Scorpion held together when the Soviet Union fell, and now they're back to take over the world -- even if that means letting it literally destroy itself and then coming out of hiding to collect what's left. A ridiculous cult called the Six-Fingered Hand serves all the GM's evil religious sect needs, and mad scientists (though they don't call themselves that) abound in the surprisingly homicidal Nautilus Club.

While most of these entries are worthwhile and don't pound the GM with too many obvious suggestions, the chapter contains several DC lists for use with skill rolls on Knowledge, Research, and such when investigating the factions. These methods differ, as do their results, but not enough to justify separate lists for each. They could have been combined or streamlined for brevity's sake, leaving quite a bit more space. Each group has a sample member or an important figure that represents it, and some have handy little maps that can be used as described or stolen for other campaign moments (though two of them, sadly, are ships -- the duplications continue). These diagrams are sharp, and there are no quibbles with the rest of the artwork, even those pieces that go heavy on the stylization (oozes certainly don't need to look any more fluid).

The book isn't dull and it has useful stuff by the truckload, but the *d20 Menace Manual's* failing may be in its title. To be sure, there's a good bit of menace here. Some of the entries have it out for the PCs, and there are plots aplenty to keep things running in your Modern game. The book contains almost as much in the way of friendlies as it does opponents, and some of the stuff here just isn't likely to show up in the course of a game anyway (when was the last time your game group was imperiled by the recording industry?).

There's a random, scattershot feel to the material. It might be more accurate to say it's a compilation of odds and ends that neatly plug the holes in a GM's sessions. He'll be able to come back to it for quick NPCs, useful maps, and comparative values for threats he makes up out of whole cloth. Anyone looking for a utile, general-purpose supplement to flesh out their backgrounds will find it invaluable, but those seeking to torment their players with a pantheon of new, ugly horrors is liable to find the price tag the most threatening thing about it.

--Andy Vetromile

Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



My Wounded Pride Takes Three Months To Heal

Like many GMs, I consider myself having succeeded in a particularly nasty encounter when the Bad Guys have been dealt with, and the Good Guys are broken, battered, and bruised but emerging victorious. Players seem to like this as well (at least the players I've gamed with); clawing back from potential defeat is *fun*. And not too long ago I even gave some advice for those looking to find the sweet spot in putting their players [on the ropes](#).

Unfortunately there's a slight problem with this mindset, at least in an on-going campaign: Broken, battered, and bruised heroes take a while to heal. While inflicting a broken bone on a death-defying adventurer may be a great adventure obstacle, in a remotely realistic campaign it might take three months for that injury to heal. And many other wounds would require a fair bit of healing, rehabilitation, or just plain luck to recover from.

I thought about this recently as I recently purchased and devoured the Season Two boxed set of *The Shield*, easily one of the most compelling television programs I've ever seen.

[MILD SPOILER ALERT!]

In an early episode in the season, the show's antihero Vic Mackey is shot at the show's climax. He and the drug-dealer he had been following shot each other, and the two of them struggled with their own wounds while trying to figure out how to deal with their adversary.

Anyway, Vic emerges victorious (and since the show revolves around him, I don't think I'm giving anything away here), and is brought to a hospital to be patched up. The end of this episode stresses the seriousness of his wound, and the next episode deals with the social repercussions of his being shot.

And then the this development is dropped.

I mean, in a later episode he sort of winces as he sits in a chair once or twice, but otherwise they never mention the fact that he'd been near-fatally shot in the recent past. Given that much of the series deals with long-term implications and consequences of actions, this was a fairly glaring oversight.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

This is a fairly common phenomenon; for example, the hyper-trained-but-still-human Batman seems to lose at least a pint of blood every other night, mutters often about one of his ribs getting broken, and suffers enough injuries that the whole "millionaire playboy" façade should be nigh-impossible to keep. ("These bruises, cuts, and extensive bandages? Errr . . . In hindsight, I suppose asking Alfred to build a mansion entirely out staircases, strobe lights, and roller-skates *was* a mistake . . .") Even my fave Indiana Jones seems to recover *awfully* quickly for someone who periodically gets the tar beaten out of him.

It's a completely understandable phenomenon from the creators' point of view; after all, you don't want your hero to be completely out of commission while he recovers. Unfortunately, much like [death](#), once you lessen the impact of broken bones and blood loss, it's really difficult to get that emotional impact back.

So what's a PC-pummeling GM to do?

Well, here are some tips I've used in my various games. There isn't One Right Answer that can be used universally -- and all these ideas won't work for all campaigns -- they should at least give you some ideas for managing your mangling.

Think carefully before seriously injuring a character. This is perhaps the most obvious piece of advice, but it bears repeating; the heroes can't become accustomed to crippling injuries if they aren't common. There are plenty of ways that the Good Guys can get knocked around that *shouldn't* result in a trip to the emergency room after the adventure is

done.

Unfortunately, a lot of games don't have "non-injuries" as an option; it's assumed that if someone makes contact and deals a flesh-injuring wound, then . . . well, flesh was injured. (Duh.) Although this makes a great deal of logical sense, it isn't necessarily conducive to keeping the heroes from looking like stuck pigs at the end of an adventure.

There are a number of ways around this. Probably the easiest is to modify what "damage" is. For example, the original *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* system defined Hit Points not as actual physical damage, but as an amalgam of skill, luck, and experience, in addition to the amount of bodily punishment someone can take. As a result, the loss of Hit Points didn't represent wound after wound, but rather the depletion of the luck and skill that has enabled the hero to stay alive. (Of course, if message boards and the fan community are any indication, I may be the only person in the universe who actually *liked* that justification . . .)

Anyway, the general application can be swiped for most games. If you skew the results of injury so that, say, the first half of "damage" dealt to the heroes doesn't represent actual injury but instead minor scuffs that show the *possibility* of future damage. Thus a *GURPS* character might have 12 hit points; the first six of those might not represent actual "damage" but the general light bruising and tussled hair that makes heroes seem more heroic . . . and only the *last* six points of damage represent "real" injury. This allows heroes to escape minor threats without emerging in a body cast, and makes encounters that dip below that "scuff threshold" seem more dangerous. (This also simulates many action movies and television shows better; the heroes can face minor threats and not be worried about losing two pints of blood from otherwise minor wounds.)

Some games already simulate minor versus major injuries in various ways, but adding another layer can be a good way to tweak a game to simulate certain game conventions.

Give lots of time between adventures. If you'd like a game to remain realistic while still inflicting serious injuries on the heroes, the solution might be as simple as making sure there's a lot of time between adventures (or at least combat-intensive ones). That way heroes can receive life-threatening injuries and have enough R&R to be back up to fighting speed. To return to the *Indiana Jones* series, the long stretches of time between his adventures mean that he can be beaten to a pulp (HAH!), and still be healed up in time for his next globe-trotting adventure.

In more proactive campaigns, heroes might use rehabilitation and recovery to advance their goals or pursue long-term leads. For example, a pulp-conspiracy game might consist of months (and sessions) of research, investigation, and character interaction, punctuated by rare-but-exciting life-threatening encounters.

The biggest problem with this method, of course, is that many games are difficult to structure so that long healing periods between adventures are possible. After all, if a gaming group meets every week and spends every other session advancing the timeline by three months, before long it's chronologically a cyberpunk game. Likewise a 1930s pulp-era game could only have 40 adventures if the entire decade was used in three-month increments. There are a few ways around this. You can make sure the game is pushed back far enough in time to give some breathing room . . . say, starting the "modern-day" conspiracy campaign in 1980. You could hand-wave and say the timeline never advances beyond the vague era of the game (although that seems counterproductive to the desires of making a more realistic world). Or the gaming group could realize that the campaign is going to be a finite series and plan accordingly; there's nothing that says a pulp campaign *has* to be planned to go on forever.

Have more than one character per player. If each player is playing, say, three or four members of the Globe-Roaming Ultra-Natural Team, then if one or two is in traction for a few months then the rest of the team can continue to have adventures. Although not all players are comfortable juggling multiple characters at a time, it can be a great option for certain campaigns.

If preternatural healing is available, make it hurt. Many games hand-wave away serious injury by making various quick-healing methods available. If someone can cure that bullet-wound with Transmute Lead to Nanites, then it makes debilitating injuries much less serious; anything that doesn't kill the hero gets patched up by the convenient healer.

Presuming the game requires such healing methods to retain its flavor, one of the simple things the GM can do is merely state -- and emphasize -- that this healing removes the problem of time from healing, but not the physical discomfort. Healing is uncomfortable; cells regenerate, bones re-knit themselves, skin itches madly. With good players, it can be enough to emphasize the distress of unnatural healing to make the original injury more noteworthy. If you strike a nerve with the players, you can inflict serious injury on their characters, knowing that -- even if they *can* heal up quickly -- they still won't be happy about it.

Finally, make injuries have repercussions. Although this is an obvious idea, it's rarely implemented in most of the campaigns I've been part of. If a player has both legs broken by Smash-Man, then -- even after he heals -- he's probably likely to retain lasting mementos of that encounter: perhaps scars, slight weakness on stairs, walking with a limp or cane, or something similar. This doesn't mean you need to remind each player of every injury ever, nor does it need to be detrimental in game effects. (That limp can merely be part of the hero's charm, and disappear or be glossed over when life-threatening action starts.) But encouraging everyone to make reference to previous serious injuries can help to emphasize that they did, indeed, survive before . . . and are all the more heroic for it.

Pushing PCs to the edge is a tried-and-true GM technique. And although the dice may be willing, the facts of injury may be less so. But with a few tweaks and some forethought, you can knock the heroes down, let them get back up, and they'll still be appreciative of the fact they were down. Although they'll still probably want insurance.

--*Steven Marsh*

The Memory of Ruin

A Medieval Scenario Setting for *Ars Magica* and *GURPS* Part 2: The Spirit Realms

by Neil Taylor & Phil Masters

(Part 1 of this scenario, [last week](#), described the relatively mundane setting -- a lost castle, deep in the forest, now imbued with wild but subtle magics and infested with monsters. However, to complete their exploration of the site, bold visitors must confront even stranger phenomena.)

As described in Part 1, characters can enter the first level of the regio/spirit world, the "Ghost Level," through the gatehouse. They can leave by returning out through the gatehouse, *or* by walking through the breach in the walls. From the breach, walking *outwards* returns anyone to the mundane world, but circling close to the walls and back to the gatehouse enables them to reenter, and then walk on into the next level, the "Bone Level." Repeating the process again, opening and closing the outer doors and then the inner doors as one goes, follows a natural path into the last, "innermost" level. Once again, by default, such visitors will come out into the innermost level unless they concentrate on remaining on the current level (or follow a guide who goes through before them).

The Place of Ghosts

The first level has a magical aura of 2 in *Ars Magica*, or slightly aspected mana giving +1 to Necromantic and Illusion/Creation spells in *GURPS*. This is a realm of unquiet dead, in the traditional form of intangible spirits reenacting their deaths.

The Keep and the Howling Ghosts

The castle looks much the same on this level as in the mundane world, showing the signs of the battle and the subsequent stripping of its contents, save that it has not become overgrown. It simply lies bare and empty. The well in the outer courtyard is still polluted by the wyrm (see Part 1), which visits this "level" regularly.

The ghosts, the spirits of those who died in the battle, remain here, forgetting their past but bound to the place. They appear as poorly formed remnants, howling like the wind, draped in shrouds, with their bodies trailing off and disappearing below the waist. They are stark white save for their dark hollowed eyes and mouths. Meeting them may be worth a fright check or similar, if characters are unused to such supernatural terrors.

If living beings come close, the ghosts will turn on them, and try to drain the life out of them; see below for the relevant game mechanics. They have to grapple to accomplish this, but only one ghost can grapple any human-sized opponent at a time, and they will break away in temporary confusion if their powers do not work against a particular opponent. Thus, they will likely end up flocking around anyone with magic resistance, while individuals grapple anyone without. They are dangerous to characters with no supernatural defenses, but competent use of magic or "priestly powers" can defeat them.

They have lost most of their minds, and cannot reason. They have some limited memory of the battle, and that they must continue to fight it; if undisturbed, they reenact it as best they can. If anyone wishes to lay these ghosts to rest, their bones are in the inner regio, and may be given a proper funeral there. Alternatively, they will be released (or fade away) if the innermost regio is cleared of magical power; see below.

Note that no number is given for the dead warriors, here or elsewhere; GMs/storyguides can set this to suit their party size, or simply assume that there are more than enough to make the players adopt some tactic other than destroying every single one of them, even if they have some attacks suited to this. In all cases, though, the numbers on each "level" must be the same.

Ars Magica: Howling Ghosts

Characteristics: Int -5, Per 0, Pre 0, Com -3, Str n/a, Sta n/a, Dex +3, Qik +5

Magic Might: 10

Size: 0

Personality Traits: Frustrated +3

Weapon/Attack	Init	Atk	Dfn	Dam	Fat
Touch/Grapple	+10	+8	+10	*	n/a

* Does no physical damage, but causes magical harm; see *Powers* below.

Soak: n/a (cannot be harmed physically)

Body levels: OK, Destroyed

Powers:

Horrible Grasp, PeCo 15, 1 point: If the ghost successfully grapples, its touch acts like *Grip Of The Choking Hand* (*Ars Magica*, p.127) -- the victim loses a Fatigue level, and must roll Sta 6+ each subsequent round of grappling or the effect continues and another Fatigue level is lost.

Insubstantial: the ghosts have no bodily form, and can only be harmed by magic. Likewise, they cannot be parried (as they pass straight through arms and armor), but must be dodged.

Vis: none.

Notes: The ghosts have no bodily form and cannot be harmed by physical weapons or spells causing physical damage (such as Fire), nor does Corpus affect them. They can be harmed by Mentem spells, including improvised spells using Mentem as the Art but Corpus guidelines for effect. If a way is found to damage them, they are very easily destroyed. The spell *Lay to Rest the Haunting Spirit* is especially effective, given their low Might -- and if reduced to Touch range, even a spontaneous spell is likely to destroy one.

GURPS: Howling Ghosts

ST: 12 **Move/Dodge:** 5/5 **Size:** 1

DX: 12 **PD/DR:** 0/0 **Weight:** n/a

IQ: 6 **Damage:** see below

HT: 8/2 **Reach:** C

Notes: These are similar to Mindless Spirits (p.SPI36), with the Spirit Form advantage (p.SPI33- 36), but without most of the powers this normally grants, or any real volition. They are immune to physical assault, but their minds, while reduced to mere fragments, are fully present in this realm, and can be affected by magic, psionics, etc.; unlike most Mindless Spirits, they are *not* invulnerable to mind control (although they are Single-Minded, and cannot undertake much in the way of other actions even if controlled), and they are of course also susceptible to spirit-related magic. While they cannot attack physically, they have a power similar to the Steal Strength spell. To use this, they must successfully grapple the victim; then, on each round, roll a quick contest between an effective "skill" of 14 and the victim's HT; the victim's Fatigue is then reduced by the amount by which the ghost won the contest. If Fatigue reaches 0, the victim falls unconscious and the ghost can start to drain Hit Points similarly, stopping only when the victim is dead. Parrying or blocking doesn't work against the ghosts' attacks, as they can pass right through a sword or shield; they must be dodged. Likewise, once one has "grappled" a victim, only destroying it can make it let go. However, these are quite supernaturally feeble entities; their effective "skill" with this power is reduced by *three times* any Magic Resistance possessed by the victim, and they are quite easily magically destroyed.

The Place of Bones

The second level has a magical aura of 3 in *Ars Magica*, or aspected mana giving +3 to Necromantic college spells in *GURPS*. This is a realm where the dead, although all too visibly slain, reenact their deaths in physical form. Their flesh has failed them, but still they struggle on.

Note that, on this level, going back through the gatehouse returns one to the first level, walking outwards from the breach takes one direct to the mundane world, while circling the walls and back through the gatehouse enables one to enter the third and highest spirit-realm level.

Them Bones

The castle here shows the battle in progress. Warriors are everywhere, fighting for eternity. They stand guard in the gatehouse, and defend the core of the tower; the invaders have taken the Outer Courtyard and the lower parts of the keep. The battle rages within the tower and in the inner courtyard.

These warriors take the form of rotted skeletons; once again, GMs/storyguides may require characters to test for fear or morale problems if they are unused to meeting undead, although after a confrontation with the ghosts, such physical opponents might almost come as a relief. They wear some armor (mostly steel scale half-armor in *Ars Magica*, heavy leather in *GURPS*); the defenders wear ragged cloaks and fight with sword (longsword in *Ars Magica*, broadsword in *GURPS*) and round/small shield, the raiders bear wolf skins and fight with battleaxe/great axe or axe and round/small shield. All of their equipment (except for some magic items possessed by their leaders) has been ravaged by time, and is now only sustained by the magic of the place; if removed from the castle, bones, wood, leather, and metal will all crumble into decay.

They are preoccupied with fighting each other, ignoring mortals moving carefully between them; however, if a mortal should attack any of them, or obstruct their reenactment of their deaths, all the skeletons nearby will turn on these interlopers, fighting until they are destroyed or their opponents disabled. They re-form after a few minutes if destroyed, resuming their battling with each other.

Ars Magica: Skeleton Warriors

Characteristics: Cun -4, Per -2, Pre n/a, Com n/a, Str +3, Sta +3, Dex 0, Qik 0

Magic Might: 5

Size: 0

Personality Traits: Mindless Combativeness +6.

Weapon/Attack	Init	Atk	Dfn	Dam	Fat
Brawling (fist)	+5	+4	+4	+3	n/a
Longsword and shield	+7	+7	+12	+7	n/a
Axe and shield	+7	+7	+10	+9	n/a
Battleaxe	+9	+7	+7	+13	n/a

Soak: +15 (+20 vs. puncturing damage)

Body levels: OK, Destroyed

Abilities: Athletics 1 (run), Awareness 3 (alertness), Brawl 3 (fist), Great Weapon 5 (battleaxe) *or* Weapon and Shield 5 (round shield)

Powers:

Mindlessness: The skeletons are immune to mind-affecting magics, having nothing to affect.

Equipment: steel scale half-armor, weapons as noted above, cloak or wolf-skin.

Encumbrance: -1

Vis: none.

GURPS: Skeleton Warriors

ST: 9 **Move/Dodge:** 6/6 **Size:** 1
DX: 12 **PD/DR:** 2/2* **Weight:** 100 lbs
IQ: 8 **Damage:** by weapon
HT: 10 **Reach:** by weapon

Notes: These are essentially mindless beings; their IQ is used only for sense rolls and the like. They fight until destroyed, and ignore mind-affecting magics, physical or mental stunning, and so on. Their PD and DR come from the armor they still wear, and the PD does not include the bonus granted by the shields some of them carry; they have an additional DR 2 against missiles, beams, and impaling attacks, thanks to their skeletal forms, and the last do no bonus damage against them -- nor do they bleed or have vital organs to injure. (See *GURPS Undead* for more on all this.) They have effective skill 12 in Brawling and with their weapons and shields.

Some heroes of the battle remain among the fighters. They wear chainmail; the defending knights are cloaked and fighting with longsword/thrusting broadsword and kite/medium shield, the raiding berserkers are in wolf skins with axe and round/small shield or with battleaxe/great axe.

Ars Magica: Skeleton "Heroes"

Characteristics: Cun 0, Per +2, Pre n/a, Com n/a, Str +4, Sta +4, Dex 0, Qik 0

Magic Might: 15

Size: +1

Personality Traits: Mindless Combativeness +6.

Weapon/Attack	Init	Atk	Dfn	Dam	Fat
Brawling (fist)	+7	+6	+6	+4	n/a
Longsword and shield	+9	+9	+15	+8	n/a
Axe and shield	+9	+9	+12	+10	n/a
Battleaxe	+12	+10	+14	+16	n/a

Soak: +17 (+22 vs. puncturing damage)

Body levels: OK, -1, Destroyed

Abilities: Athletics 3 (run), Awareness 3 (alertness), Brawl 5 (fist), Great Weapon 7 (battleaxe) *or* Weapon and Shield 7 (round or kite shield)

Powers:

Mindlessness: The skeletons are immune to mind-affecting magics, having nothing to affect.

Equipment: chainmail half-armor, weapons as noted above, cloak or wolf-skin.

Encumbrance: -1

Vis: none.

GURPS: Skeleton "Heroes"

ST: 10 **Move/Dodge:** 6/6 **Size:** 1
DX: 13 **PD/DR:** 3/4* **Weight:** 120 lbs.
IQ: 8 **Damage:** by weapon
HT: 11 **Reach:** by weapon

Notes: The notes above for the skeleton warriors also apply here. Note that the PD and DR listed are for chainmail, and are reduced vs. impaling weapons; however, they do get the additional DR 2 against missiles, beams, and impaling attacks. Again, the PD does not include the bonus granted by the shields some of them carry. All combat skills for these skeletons are at 14.

Outside the base of the Keep, the two skeletal leaders are locked in their personal duel. Tennent bears the magic sword "Keenest," and wears full armor (chainmail in *Ars Magica*, scale in *GURPS*) and carries a kite/medium shield, while Hrolf wears chainmail, ornate (magical) gold bracers on his arms, and the remains of his wolf skin cloak, and wields a battleaxe/great axe.

Ars Magica: Tennent

Characteristics: Int 0, Per +2, Pre n/a, Com n/a, Str +5, Sta +4, Dex +3, Qik 0

Magic Might: 20

Size: +1

Personality Traits: Mindless Combativeness +6

Weapon/Attack	Init	Atk	Dfn	Dam	Fat
Brawling (fist)	+7	+9	+5	+6	n/a
Longsword and shield	+9	+12	+14	+12	n/a

(Note: Tennent's skeleton retains just enough battle instinct to use his sword's special power occasionally when it is to his advantage.)

Soak: +22 (+27 vs. puncturing damage)

Body levels: OK, 0, -1, Destroyed

Abilities: Athletics 4 (run), Awareness 5 (alertness), Brawl 6 (Fist), Weapon and Shield 7 (kite shield)

Powers:

Mindlessness: The skeleton is immune to mind-affecting magics, having nothing to affect.

Equipment: cloak, full chain, magic sword, kite shield

Encumbrance: -2

Vis: 4 Corpus, in his skull.

Ars Magica: Hrolf Wolfsgrim

Characteristics: Int 0, Per +2, Pre n/a, Com n/a, Str +5, Sta +5, Dex +3, Qik +5

Magic Might: 20

Size: +1

Personality Traits: Mindless Combativeness +6

Weapon/Attack	Init	Atk	Dfn	Dam	Fat
Brawling (fist)	+13	+10	+11	+6	n/a
Battleaxe	+18	+14	+15	+16	n/a

Soak: +17 (+22 vs. puncturing damage)

Fatigue levels: n/a.

Body levels: OK, 0, -1, Destroyed

Abilities: Athletics 4 (run), Awareness 5 (alertness), Brawl 6 (fist), Great Weapon 7 (battleaxe)

Powers:

Mindlessness: The skeleton is immune to mind-affecting magics, having nothing to affect.

Equipment: wolf skins, chainmail, magic bracers, battleaxe.

Encumbrance: 0

Vis: 4 Corpus, in his skull.

GURPS: Tennent

ST: 13 **Move/Dodge:** 6/6

Size: 1

DX: 14 **PD/DR:** 6/4

Weight: 130 lbs.

IQ: 8 **Damage:** 2d+1 cut or 1d+3 imp (broadsword)

HT: 11 Reach: 1 (broadsword)

GURPS: Hrolf Wolfsgrim

ST: 17 Move/Dodge: 7/7 Size: 1
DX: 16 PD/DR: 3/6 Weight: 130 lbs.
IQ: 8 Damage: 3d+2 cut (great axe)
HT: 12 Reach: 1,2 (great axe)

Notes: The remarks above on the other skeletons also apply here, of course. Tennent's skeleton retains just enough battle instinct to use his sword's special power (see below) occasionally when it is to his advantage, while the attributes listed for Hrolf include the bonuses from his magic bracers. Tennent's PD comes from his shield and armor, and his DR is also from his armor. Hrolf's PD and DR come from his armor and bracers; as the former is chainmail, both numbers should be reduced against impaling attacks. Both skeletons get the additional DR 2 against missiles, beams, and impaling attacks. Treat each of them as having all combat skills at 16.

The enchantments on the leaders' magical items mean that these *can* be removed from the scene and used (or investigated in a magical laboratory).

"Keenest": In *Ars Magica*, this longsword gives +1 to Init, Atk, and Dfn, and +2 Dam, and a ReTe 10 effect "Deflect A Single Attack" which enables it to make one automatically successful parry on any round in which it is not used to attack (touch range, unlimited uses). This and the enhancements together represent a level 15 enchantment, which are close enough to Hermetic in style to be quite easy to analyze in a Hermetic laboratory. In *GURPS*, it is a thrusting broadsword which gives +1 to all attack, parry, and damage rolls, and +5 to one parry roll on any round in which it is not used to attack.

Gold Bracers: These are for heroes only. *Ars Magica:* Only work for those with both Str and Sta positive, and then give +4 Soak and increase Str to +4 (or by +1 if it is already +4 or higher). This enchantment is an old pagan working, otherwise similar to the level 25 spell *Gift of the Bear's Fortitude*, but any attempts to investigate such a non-Hermetic effect in the laboratory must beat double its level, i.e. 50. *GURPS:* Only work for those with ST and HT both 12+, giving +3 ST and +2 DR.

Rest and Requiem

Each Howling ghost in the outer regio corresponds to a fighting skeleton in this regio, though you would be hard put to count or compare them. However, their fates are permanently entwined.

A skeleton which is disabled and then given proper burial rites of some kind will stay buried. In addition, its spirit (trapped on the lower level) will also be freed and depart for its final destination. Similarly, if a Howling Ghost is laid to rest or dispelled by magic, then the corresponding skeleton will fall inert and decay away.

The Rubble Slope and Lodric

One other thing may be seen at this level, although it is not immediately obvious. During the battle, Lodric, the raiders' "shaman," stood out beyond the slope and called down the lightning. If the raiders were Norsemen, Lodric may have been a *Seithmathr*, a transvestite Norse witch; see the *Ars Magica* supplement *Ultima Thule*, p.63. Otherwise, he can be seen as a hedge-magician with a talent for elemental spells -- in *Ars Magica* terms, a Spirit Master specializing in elementals (see *Hedge Magic*, pp.44-49), in *GURPS*, a wizard with a talent for the Elemental colleges. The warriors rushed in to battle, while he stayed, calling to the winds -- but he was then struck and killed by an arrow from the castle. He fell, and dropped his amulet. In the mundane world, his bones rest in the same place beyond the slope. The spot lies outside the limits of the castle's strange effects, but can be seen from within; anyone who takes the time to look will see a strangely robed figure standing, evidently waving and chanting, then being struck down and collapsing to dust. After a few moments, the dust will reform and repeat the scene.

Returning to the mundane world, an alert observer could locate the same spot (GMs/storyguides might demand a few dice rolls). Lodric's bones have been partly buried, and partly covered by leaf litter, but are easily exposed.

However, Lodric, as a mystic, was not entirely discomfited by his sudden death. Unlike the other ghosts, he is neither tied to this place nor insane, but can come and go freely on the spirit plane. Only the image of his body is bound to reenact his death. He keeps an "eye" on his mortal remains, as he would not like to have his grave desecrated. He and his allied spirit can move between the regiones and the mundane world, and *will* attack anyone who defiles his bones. He *might* tolerate someone who merely took the amulet while treating his bones with respect, or downright friendly to someone who provided a proper funeral; he knows he can no longer use the amulet. This is at the GM/storyguide's option, however; at the very least, he should be played as proud and strange.

Ars Magica: Lodric

Characteristics: Int +3, Per +2, Pre +1, Com +2, Str n/a, Sta n/a, Dex +1, Qik +3

Magic Might: 30

Size: 0

Confidence: 3

Virtues and Flaws: "Ghost"

Personality Traits: Proud +3, Vengeful +2

Weapons/Attacks: none

Soak: n/a

Body levels: OK, 0, -1, -3, -5, Destroyed

Abilities: Awareness 4 (search), Bargain 6 (spirits), Charm 4 (spirits), Legend Lore 6 (elementals), Magic Sensitivity 5 (spirits), Occult Lore 5 (elementals), Second Sight 6 (spirits)

Powers:

Possession, ReMe 40, 3 points: Lodric can take over the bodies of the living. The victim can resist with a roll of Magic Resistance, Might, or Sta+5 against a target of 15+.

Call the Howling Doom, ReMe 40, 4 points: Lodric has power over less self-aware spirits, especially in the vicinity of his place of death. He can call Howling Ghosts from the castle; if so called, they can leave the castle bounds and magically travel to him (though they cannot otherwise leave the regio). They remain for one hour, after which Lodric may expend 1 Might to extend their service by another hour (and so on).

Insubstantial: Ghosts have no bodily form, and can only be harmed by magic.

Vis: 6 Mentem, in his spirit form.

Notes: This treatment assumes that Lodric was an elemental; it might be varied a little to reflect a specific cultural background for the character. He had a variety of useful abilities in life, but these are irrelevant in death. However he was strong-willed and close to the spirit world; he retains most of his free will, and substantial power. As an insubstantial ghost, he has no bodily form and cannot be harmed by physical weapons or spells causing physical damage (such as Fire), nor does Corpus affect him. He can be harmed by Mentem spells, including improvised spells using Mentem as the Art but Corpus guidelines for effect. If attacked so, he is much stronger than the flimsy spirits in the castle regiones, and has normal body levels for this purpose. His Allied Spirit still accompanies him, now as a free-willed ghostly (female) cat. She has a Magic Might of 20, and can become visible temporarily (no Might cost, just concentrate), but has no real powers any more.

GURPS: Lodric

ST: 11/40 **Move/Dodge:** 6/6 **Size:** 1

DX: 12 **PD/DR:** 0/0 **Weight:** n/a

IQ: 13 **Damage:** n/a

HT: 12 **Reach:** C

Notes: Lodric has the Spirit Form advantage (p.SPI35), much like the Howling Ghosts (see above), but much more free will and sanity, and he has adapted to this state quite well. Amongst other things, he has full use of all standard spirit

abilities *except* Poltergeist and Materialization, and an Unlimited Lifespan (see pp.SPI33-5). However, unlike the Howling Ghosts, he cannot drain life energy. He *can* summons Howling Ghosts from the castle to serve him; by taking a round of concentration and spending a point of fatigue, he can cause 1d ghosts to appear instantly at his side (the only way that any of them can leave the castle itself); he can do this as often as he likes, until all the ghosts are destroyed or laid to rest, and they can remain for up to an hour, after which he can immediately summons them again if he chooses.

The Amulet: Lodric's amulet is shaped like a miniature silver war-hammer (actually Thor's hammer, assuming a Norse background). He called it the *Amulet of Storm's Vengeance*. Once per day, during a Storm, the wielder may recite a chant to strike down his enemies, and summon a bolt of Lightning from the sky. In *Ars Magica* terms, this is a CrAu 35 effect; in *GURPS*, treat it as a Lightning spell, but doing 5d damage and with Acc +6, no 1/2D range and Max 200, but only usable in the open air during a storm. Lodric's ghost knows the chant; otherwise, it might be discovered by magical research. (In *Ars Magica*, treat this as a CrAu 35 effect comparable to *Incantation of the Lightning*, but due to its non-Hermetic nature, *double* the lab total required for successful research; in *GURPS*, learning the chant will require three successful castings of Analyze Magic, resisted by an effective skill of 20, and if the item successfully resists, that caster gets *no* further attempts, *ever* -- although a team of casters can pool their efforts to build up the three successes between them.)

The Place of Memory

The last, "deepest" or "highest" spiritual level has a magical aura of 5 in *Ars Magica*, or a mana level one higher than the surrounding countryside in *GURPS*. Here, the images of men still walk as men, and the Castle has not decayed nor been abandoned. As before, going back through the gatehouse returns one to the previous level, and walking outwards from the breach takes one direct to the mundane world -- but circling the walls and coming back through the gatehouse leaves one still on the same level.

Dreams of Time and Place

Depending on where one stands, one can see and even participate in various scenes from the castle's last days. The castle itself appears in full glory, as the *ideal* of a castle, not just the historical actuality. Flags and pennants fly from the turrets, and knights wear bright surcoats and tabards.

In the Great Hall of the keep, the breach is recent. It is dark, and stormy, and the rain plummets down; lightning flashes in the distance. The defenders react to the new breach with horror, and turn to it, replaying the first moments after it was made.

Up on the second floor of the Tower, the images continue with "life" as normal, unaware of what is about to happen. Sir Tennent and his knights sit with their ladies, while the men feast in their hall. The storm rages; the raiders can be seen scowling outside the stout walls.

Beyond those walls, the witch stands surrounded by warriors as he shrieks with glee at the results of his chants. He brandishes his *Amulet of the Storm's Vengeance*, which gleams and reflects the lightning, or perhaps flashes from within in synchrony with the Lightning strokes.

In the courtyard, the raiders have just rushed through the breach from outside, and been engaged by the defenders. Hrolf and Tennent stand aside from the others, fighting a personal duel. Tennent's sword flashes brightly, and Hrolf's golden bracers gleam.

These images of men reenact stages of the battle, but are largely unaware of what has happened -- they do not know what is happening elsewhere in the castle, nor of the centuries that have passed. It is perfectly possible to talk to them (in their native languages), but they are no more tangible than illusions, and even if they are told of their state, they will dismiss or forget what they hear after a few moments.

This level should serve mostly as a source of clues to matters in the outer levels -- especially regarding the bracers and sword, the amulet, and so on. The images do *not* vanish if their bones are laid to rest or their ghosts are exorcised, and nor are they vulnerable to spells or powers which work against normal spirits; they are essentially the memories of the original people, not their spirits, and exist in a kind of timeless state. Magic (or psionics) will find no actual minds to read or influence.

Afterwards

Having explored all the mysteries of the castle and defeated its threats, a party may be able to exploit it, even if they do not choose to settle here.

Ars Magica: Vis Harvesting

Hard-headed Hermetic wizards may eventually be able to determine that this place could be raided and stripped of all its magic, causing a cessation of all activity within the castle, or, more subtly, its magic could be harvested annually.

Primarily, the various scenes noted above can yield Mentem vis if the images found on the third, "innermost" level of the regio are somehow carefully captured. The images of Hrolf and Tennent fighting are worth one pawn *each*, as are each of the other full scenes, for a grand total of five pawns. A MuIm 20 spell with requisites of Rego and Vim should "capture" the scene, in the form of shimmering light; if this is cast on a crystal, the Vis might remain bound there.

If the whole castle is "strip-mined," by magi carefully and methodically capturing every image, and testing all the spirits, stones, shadows, nooks, and crannies for traces of power, over a period of a week or so, it yields 25 pawns of Mentem vis. That will leave the place as a hollow ruin with a rapidly fading magic aura and vanishing regio, notable only for the slight (and itself probably fading) faerie influence in the surrounding woods. (Of course, the wizards will probably have had to destroy or dispel a lot of the castle's creatures and phenomena first anyway.) Conversely, if the scenes are "captured" as described above, it will provide an annual yield of five pawns of Mentem vis, indefinitely.

GURPS: Mana Harvesting

In addition to the various items and treasures to be found round the site, GMs may reward methodical wizard PCs by permitting them to extract portable power from this highly magical location. Methodical use of spells such as Detect Magic or Mage Sight around the "innermost" level of the spirit realms will eventually locate five seemingly unremarkable objects which actually had some subtle significance to the people who died in the great battle -- a dagger dropped by Hrolf in the death duel, the goblet from which Tennent drank his last toast with his knights, the banner which flew from the keep, the bow which was used to slay Lodric, and the helm worn by the first berserker through the breach and cloven by a defender's sword. Approached by someone aware of their nature, these items will prove solid and material, and can be removed from the castle. Each will then serve as a one-use 10 point powerstone. Removing any of them will weaken the bonds which keep the haunting active, so that it will fade within decades or years; if they are all removed, the ghosts and spirits, and access to the spirit realms, will vanish within a few months.

(Note also that the monsters encountered in part 1 were somewhat supernatural, and had been living in a magical area for some years; their bodies may incorporate useful mana organs, or provide valuable ingredients for enchantments. See *GURPS Fantasy Bestiary*, p.FB113.)

Wizards with long-term plans may prefer to keep the place intact, ensuring themselves access to the higher mana of the "innermost" level. It is also possible that some of the ghosts will sense any desecration of their former possessions, and return to haunt the individuals responsible, even if their bones have been laid to rest. Handling the details of this is left to the GM.

The Kiss

by Steven Marsh

*"Thus from my lips, by thine my sin is purg'd."
"Then have my lips the sin that they have took?"
"Sin from my lips? O trespass sweetly urg'd!
Give me my sin again."
--William Shakespeare, *Romeo & Juliet*, I:v*

In the general case, the kiss is one of the oldest and most common expressions of intimacy known to mankind. Even practitioners of the world's oldest profession know the power of the kiss, and some charge additionally for that extra intimacy, or forgo it as a possibility altogether. In the specific case, The Kiss embodies all the potential, closeness, and trust of its lower-cased counterpart, only amplified by an utmost degree.

Where it came from and how it came to be, nobody knows. However, The Kiss is a source of great power, unknown anywhere else. One who has been Kissed is one who possesses abilities far removed from normal men . . . abilities that can be given up as easily as they were received.

Those who know of The Kiss' existence debate even its true nature; is it a physical object transferred from one person to another, a spiritual component that crosses a linked bridge of intimacy, a mystical construct that crosses from one to another, or some combination of all of these?

Regardless of what it is, The Kiss is a source of power that is sought by many, possessed by one, and fully understood by none.

Rules of The Kiss

Despite the unusual properties of The Kiss, those who have been entangled in its story know -- or learn quickly -- of certain rules that govern its existence. However, none of this knowledge is intrinsic, and must either be instructed by someone more learned in its ways (usually the Kisser), or learned through trial and error.

The Kiss is power. Although he may not realize why, whoever possesses The Kiss is exhilarated and invigorated, and has access to great power. The emotional height of this Kiss is obvious and sensed immediately by the recipient; many people describe it as the butterfly-heart palpitations of a person's first intimate kiss, only more so. Although the powers it gives are not immediately obvious, they are usually discovered quickly enough; all that is necessary is for The Kissed to contemplate a desire to tap its energy (even a mental "I wish I could . . ." longing is enough), so it's usually easy for most who have been Kissed to stumble across its abilities. This is especially true given the euphoria of the Kiss' exhilaration; those who are new to the experience may find their minds racing in a thousand directions, all filled with the kinds of emotions and random thoughts which accompany that first encounter with love. (See "But What Does It Do?," below, for more information on its actual powers.)

The Kiss is irrevocably tied to the act of kissing. Whoever possesses The Kiss may retain it as long as he wants, free to take advantage of the powers as much or as little as he would like. (Even the effects of the euphoria, like any strong emotion, can be ultimately suppressed by a determined person.) However, at the moment the holder chooses to kiss another person in any way, The Kiss is transferred to the person so kissed. The Kiss does not care what kind of kiss it uses as its medium: romantic, torrid, familial, friendly, or any other type can transfer The Kiss to another. Gender does not preclude transferal; a father's goodnight kiss on his son's forehead would transfer The Kiss as readily as a wedding embrace. The Kiss will transfer automatically upon kissing, and this transferal cannot be avoided by either party (although, of course, the holder of The Kiss can choose not to kiss anyone else).

The Kiss can *only* be transferred as a conscious decision to kiss another person; there is no other way a living person

can transfer The Kiss to another, nor can he be compelled or forced to give it up. Thus if the holder is possessed, mind controlled, or under the influence of powerful drugs, The Kiss will not be transferred, nor will forcing the holder's lips to make contact with another transfer it. Although it's theoretical that less affecting drugs such as alcohol can influence someone into Kissing another, usually the holder of The Kiss knows exactly what would be given up by embracing someone else, and will not take such decisions lightly.

However, the holder of The Kiss *can* be directly or indirectly coerced (such as having a gun put to his or a loved one's head), or tricked into giving up The Kiss, perhaps by being seduced, or duped by someone disguised as a loved one. Likewise the holder of The Kiss can use his lips in other ways without fear of "accidentally" transferring it, such as to bite someone or administer CPR. (From a game standpoint, transferring The Kiss requires the person to make a conscious decision along the lines of, "I give _____ a kiss . . ." Of course, any players who try to get around even these meager restrictions by arguing semantics -- "I press my lips against hers in an intimate way, but I'm not kissing her . . ." -- deserve to be fed to piranha.)

Having possessed The Kiss is no preclusion to receiving it again. In fact, some people theorize this is one reason The Kiss exists. In a way, possessing it is inherently lonely, since the holder knows he possesses a unique force; however, if two people (or more!) mutually trust each other enough to share The Kiss back and forth, nothing prevents them from doing so. Couples have reported that the cyclical sensations of this circuit are intensely satisfying. Of course, after such sessions are over, only one of such a pairing can retain The Kiss afterwards . . .

The Kiss is unique. All evidence points to the fact that there is only one instance of The Kiss in the whole world, and any attempts to duplicate, replicate, or otherwise get around this limitation are doomed to failure. In the event of ludicrous or contrived situations -- "I kiss Lois' and Lana's fingers at the same time" -- go with the first name uttered or pick a name randomly.

Upon death, The Kiss reverts to the previous holder. Thus if Maria gives The Kiss to Tony, and Tony is captured by a power-crazed gang and killed after he wouldn't give it up, The Kiss would revert back to Maria (who, because of the energy and euphoria, would almost certainly know she had received The Kiss again). This is a fairly unknown property, and it's entirely possible for someone to regain The Kiss yet not be aware this means the person he had Kissed is now demised. Note that death is the only exception to the normal means of the Kiss' transferal; the Kissed cannot "will" it to revert to the previous holder, although (if he is aware of this property) he could theoretically take his own life.

If the previous holder of The Kiss is also dead, then it transfers to the holder before that . . . and so on, backwards, until it resettles in a living prior recipient of The Kiss.

But What Does It *Do*?

Astute readers will no doubt realize that The Kiss is merely a plot device, and has no intrinsic abilities beyond those to make -- and extend -- an interesting story. In addition, since it can apply to many eras and genres, tying it down here would only weaken its effects as a Macguffin.

However, for those looking for more guidance, here are some ideas for designing The Kiss' effects to heighten its storytelling potential.

Regardless of what it does, The Kiss' abilities should (if at all possible) be unique in the game world. One of its themes revolves around the loneliness of having been Kissed, and the responsibility that follows; in a world where the Psychic Institute can tap the brains' powers in six weeks, who cares that The Kiss can bestow Telepathy as well? GMs should likewise resist the temptation to introduce multiple Kisses; doing so would almost invariably force plots to a point where they converge. ("Wow! We encountered a unique effect just like this *last* week!") If a unique effect not possible -- for example, in an

But How Could It Possibly . . .

The Kiss' rule about transferring to the previous holder in the event of the Kissed's death may not make sense depending on where, exactly, the GM determines its powers come from and how they manifest. This clause primarily exists for game justification and balance; given the violent nature of many RPGs, it would seem a shame to be rid of a unique plot element because a trigger-happy PC managed to blow away the

established Supers world -- then The Kiss should at least do something different from other established effects. Thus in our Psychic Institute world, maybe anti-psi powers have no effect on the recipient of The Kiss; even if it *did* bestow humdrum Telepathy, it would be very different.

The Kiss should be fairly powerful, but not *too* powerful. Giving it the right power level for a campaign is fairly tricky; in general, it should give powers that put the Kissed apart from humanity, but not so far removed that he would be immune to attempts by humanity to incapacitate or control him. In most campaign worlds, getting shot should still be a concern. This gives the recipient cause to keep the nature of The Kiss a secret, and also helps keep its abilities under control should one of the PCs receive it.

The Kiss should not have any other adverse effects. It is, at its core, a fairly optimistic concept; the recipient is given great powers by whoever honored and trusted him, and he in turn has the ability to express honor and trust upon someone else. Like many things involving love, this doesn't mean this trust can't be violated; however, the complications and difficulties that arise from The Kiss should come from the human psyche, not some Cursed Death Plague side effects.

The Kiss should be exhilarating but mildly alienating. This is usually accomplished by the power effects being unique (being given the power to fly in a world where no one else can would be thrilling), but GMs can also emphasize this by noting how alive and energized the recipient feels.

Some possibilities include:

- **Science Fiction:** The Kiss utilizes highly personalized but adaptable nanotechnology; the act of kissing another transfers the nanites and activates a mental trigger which redefines the nanotech's target. The Kiss could bestow rapid healing, increased bodily control and energy reservoirs, and heightened senses or information processing.
- **Fantasy:** The Kiss is almost certainly magical in nature, and can be used to introduce any kind of unique school or type of magic to a campaign world. Of course, the GM should probably work to ensure these powers are at least somewhat tied together thematically; emotion, love, or energy magics would all be logical, but a selection of random cold-based spells would probably not be.
- **Horror:** In a horrific campaign, The Kiss might give crystal clarity or heightened perception, making him a much more effective combatant -- and target -- in the unseen war. The Kissed might become immune to the mind-shattering effects of Things Man Was Not Meant To Know . . . or, perhaps even better (from a plot standpoint), The Kiss makes the recipient immune to the effects of exposure to madness while possessing the Kiss, but the madness itself lingers. Although not horrific itself, this can make the implications of The Kiss even greater for the recipient; can you receive The Kiss, knowing that you are damning someone to give up their sanity in the process? Can you give The Kiss to another, knowing that you may be sacrificing your mind in the process?
- **Pulp:** The Kiss is mystical in nature, and should be tied to some far-off exotic locale or historical/spiritual event. Ideally it is the sole mystical campaign element from that region, so that its uniqueness is doubly ensured. Chi or other energy-based effects can easily be introduced using

holder of The Kiss. (For that matter, it's also not dramatically satisfying if the possessor of this one-of-a-kind aspect is hit by a train.)

In a game where transferal to the previous recipient doesn't make either logical or thematic sense, such as in the nanotechnology example (see below), the GM should pick some other way that The Kiss can remain in play after the demise of the holder. Some possibilities include:

- Upon cessation of brain and heart activity, The Kiss may transfer to the person who next has physical contact with the body. (The GM should consider the implications of this one carefully; a conspiracy of serial super-powered funeral directors is a hard sell for most games.)
- Upon death, The Kiss transfers to the next person who touches the body that had previous possession of The Kiss. (Again, in the nanotech option this might represent The Kiss reverting to a previous instruction set once it transfers to a new host.)
- The Kiss might transfer to the next person or situation that most embodies the reason for The Kiss' existence. Thus if The Kiss is a manifestation of the power of spontaneous human contact, then it might reform from new at the very next instance that is the case (say, an airport meeting half a world away of reunited lovers),

The Kiss as a justification.

- **Supers:** In a Supers world, ideally The Kiss is of an energy type completely unique to the rest of the campaign. Thus it might be the only source of "True Magic" in an otherwise science-heavy universe, or it might tap into a long-lost civilization's energy or spiritual reservoir. Regardless, its effects are best manifested as fairly low-powered but *weird*. In a world where most heroes manifest as Spandex-clad musclemen, perhaps The Kissed is a Steve Ditko-esque manifestation of swirling colored lights and other-dimensional waves of energy; regardless, it should be clear that The Kissed is playing by a different set of rules. (This is especially important if it's difficult to fabricate actual unique game effects.) The Kiss also makes a great "origin" story for a character; possessing The Kiss then becomes a modified vow of chastity, with a great deal of plot possibility if the character forgoes that vow, either in the name of love or to help someone by giving him the power he possesses.

Adventure Seeds

- Even in a world full of super-powered individuals, the guardians of Janustown are considered unique. Although they have never been seen together, the public has always assumed that Dr. Day and Nyght were in some way tied to each other. Their powers are very similar, and they just *look* like they would make a good couple. However, the Guardian Duo (as the press dubbed them) disappeared from the public scene two weeks ago, and a woman with very similar powers has appeared, dubbing herself Twilight and causing a crime wave of epic proportions. Where did she come from, what happened to the Duo, and why has university professor Pat Daye been so insistent in trying to enlist the PCs' help in bringing Twilight to justice?
- In a modern-day campaign, the heroes need to infiltrate a commune compound to retrieve information from one of the cult's occupants. However, despite his proclamations of "free love," the cult's self-styled Holy Emperor of All, Dietre Avrase, maintains a tight hold over the occupants. And what is the Blessed Embrace that is rumored to circulate throughout the community that Avrase claims will keep him and his compound safe from outsiders?
- In a science fiction game, the heroes manage to track down someone rumored to have unique powers vital to solving a galactic problem. The voyage to the source of the problem is problematic, however, as she is standoffish, aloof, and generally unpleasant to be around. However, a pirate attack on the heroes' vessel seems to change everything; an errant blast strikes her and she slumps over, grievously injured. Why, then, does she choose that moment to try to get one of the adventurers to kiss her? And, assuming he does so, what happens after they save the galaxy and she awakens from her coma?

or it might reform at the next big embodiment of that concept (such as the embrace of an earthquake victim's family after he had been buried alive for eight days and presumed dead. This possibility is, admittedly, even more illogical than transferring to the previous holder, but might make sense for some campaigns; in the case of the "big embodiment" option, it might also give characters new avenues to hunt for clues as to The Kiss' current location.

Regardless, the GM should still leave possibilities for a holder of The Kiss to be incapacitated and unable to transfer it, at least for a long while (such as The Kissed being in a coma); many PCs can grow frustrated if there is no possibility to ever be rid of a plot device.

AucHaus Item #48274113: Six Things I Stole From Cupid

by Alice Turow

Bidding begins at: **\$0.01**

Seller: [Ondlam](#) [A- Seller, 3w Active]

7 days, 13:41 Left

I have found myself in a situation where I am seeking to sell several one-of-a-kind artifacts. Although I am not the original owner, all items are in good condition. (In fact, unless otherwise noted, I have used each item only once.) All items are also guaranteed to work in the manner specified; bidders are encouraged to read carefully.

You are bidding on the following items:

Take-Back Pinkie Ring

This is, admittedly, a rather plain-looking ring, consisting of a plain pewter band inset with a garnet. It is intended to be worn on the pinkie, but should be able to be resized if so desired. If worn by someone in a relationship, this item will enable the wearer to rewind up to 15 seconds of time by rubbing the stone. This only works in situations directly involving interactions with the other partner in a relationship; however, if not used to take back long-distance interactions (such as a phone call), all that seems to be required is for the partner to be within one's line of sight.

So, as a completely hypothetical example, if the wearer were to refer to one's partner as an unmentionable body part in the middle of an argument at an expensive Italian restaurant, the Take-Back Pinkie Ring would enable the wearer to take back the unfortunate comment and try again. In fact, the ring can be rubbed multiple times to take incremental steps backwards in time.

Although the item no longer works for me, I have confirmed that it works for others. This item is not in the best of shape, and bears abrasion and scuff marks; presumably a previous wearer rubbed it vigorously on more than one occasion. I would recommend any buyer not grow to rely on this product overly much.

If the person is not in a relationship, the pinkie ring will do nothing when worn. When worn by someone in a relationship, the ring will work a total number of times equal to the length of the relationship in months; thus donning it on the anniversary of a two-year relationship would give it 24 charges. It always starts with a minimum of one charge, even if the relationship is less than one month old. This item can never be recharged or used again for the same relationship, although the number of charges would reset if worn again by someone in a new relationship. Complications are most likely to arise from this item if the wearer grows to rely on its abilities overly much; taking for granted the ability to correct one's mistakes can have disastrous consequences.

Chastity Anklet

This unisex anklet has the luster of 24-karat gold, although I am uncertain of its actual composition since it is not

marked in any way. It is made up of attractive but understated miniature chain links, shaped into loops; it resembles a tiny boat anchor chain. It is surprisingly adaptable, and should fit any ankle snugly but comfortably. (It could also be worn as a bracelet, if desired.) Anyone who receives the anklet as a gift and then wears it will not have any amorous desires toward anyone other than the giver. That person will also not have any desire to remove it, although it can be removed by others (probably against the protestations of the wearer); if this is done, the effects are dispelled, and the former wearer should be able to piece together what transpired if he was exposed to anyone toward whom he would normally feel attraction. In this case, since the anklet is then possessed by the recipient, he would be free to give it to another, with the new owner feeling the effects as normal. **If you are the winner of this auction, you are strongly encouraged not to wear the anklet yourself.**

This item does not create any romantic feelings in another toward the giver; it merely ensures that the wearer cannot feel any such feelings toward anyone else. If the chastity anklet is given to someone who will never naturally feel any desire toward the giver, then the likely outcome is that the recipient will never feel passionate love toward anyone.

Vacation Potion

Many couples complain they don't have enough time to "get away from it all"; this concoction seeks to rectify that situation. Stored in a tequila bottle, this elixir is best served with salt and a wedge of lime. When consumed, drinkers are transported to . . . Well, I am uncertain. I believe it to be some kind of alternate dimension, but it could be some kind of vivid dream state, or something else I can't figure out. Regardless, it feels entirely real for the participants. The locale visited needs be agreed upon beforehand; a group shout of "Let's go to Cancun!" is enough to do the trick. This elixir requires at least two people to define a location; if six people each consume an ounce, and three declare they want to go to the orbital space station, two decide they want to go to Hawaii, and one wants to go to Antarctica, then five will get to share a vacation and one will be left behind.

Regardless of how it works, the vacation world is wonderful. Everyone is polite, it never rains unless you want it to, and the experience is completely relaxing. It must be seen to be believed.

Each fluid ounce consumed will result in a one-day vacation, which lasts for one hour in the real world. The potion can be consumed in half-ounce increments for a half-day. The drink takes five minutes to take effect, so multiple doses consumed in that time can result in an extended vacation. The bottle seems to stay at its quarter-full state, at least as long as it is merely consumed from. (The bottle was previously just over half full, but an incident resulted in it being knocked over; apparently portions spilled in this way to not replenish.)

In honesty I am reluctant to part with this item. However, I would prefer to sell all these items as a set.

Consumers of this potion are not actually transported anywhere, physically. Instead, the bodies enter a death-like coma for the duration of the experience, while the minds partake of their "vacation." Drinking this elixir alone -- or without a location partner -- will send him into a coma for the duration without the benefit of a voyage.

*GMs looking for a "twist" on this idea might decide that people visit the alternate locale, but not with each other; they only **think** they've been with their partner or vacation-mates. Instead, each person under the liquid's effect is in a separate reality, linked by idealized experiences and manifestations of each other in the separate realities. This enhances the pleasurable "vacationing" effect; thus a partner's bothersome snoring would be eliminated, and if he was unwilling to go snowboarding on his own, the alternate manifestation might be willing. (Likewise that partner who didn't like snowboarding would probably do something enjoyable to him with his partner in his other-world vacation.) This enhances the relaxing effects of traveling elsewhere, but could lead to incongruities; while the broad strokes of the shared vacation will match up, specific details probably won't. In this*

version, obviously the more people who enter into a shared world will result in more discrepancies.

Regardless of which interpretation is used, a shared vacation world might be a good way to introduce any kind of other-worldly plot or complication, such as [Love Potion Number Pi](#).

Happiest Days Picture Frame Set

This beautiful matching set of silver picture frames is intended for a couple in a relationship, one frame belonging to each partner. (One person in a relationship can give it to the other, or the pair can be given to the couple by an outside source.) However, the frames are not intended to house pictures the recipients choose themselves. Instead, they display a professional-quality "photograph," each depicting the moment the owning partner considers to be the happiest in the relationship. The image can change instantly, to reflect new opinions of the owner, although it seems that the frames never change images when they could be observed in any way. Please note that one of these frames will require a new front pane of glass, owing to an incident involving a wall.

"Thinking Of You" Heart Candies

This is a box of tiny candy hearts; although the box is seemingly made of cardboard, it is surprisingly strong and seems capable of withstanding normal wear and tear in a coat pocket or purse. If eaten as normal, the candy hearts will bear messages regularly found on edible hearts of this sort: "I LOVE YOU," or "KISSES TO YOU." However, if you give this box of candy to another, you will be able to project messages to the recipient, through the candy. The recipient will know when he has a candy message, and the act of tapping a candy out of the box seems to be what brings the note into existence. Messages are limited to two lines, each composed of up to six letters (all capital), numbers, or spaces. The recipient can take as long as he likes to get the message, although the box can only store one message at a time. The sender can choose to send longer messages through multiple candies, but has no way of knowing if earlier messages have been received, and must pause what feels like an appropriate amount of time before sending the next part, or else run the risk of "overwriting" an earlier piece of the message. Thus "CALL MOM" or "PICK UP MEG" are viable messages, as is "MEET 4 DINNER" "AT LOUIES" "BY EIGHT." Although the box is small, it seems to hold an inordinate number of candies.

*In addition, any sufficiently strong thought from the giver directed at the bearer of the box will also trigger a candy message. Alternatively, GMs might consider that **any** sufficiently strong emotion from the giver will trigger a message, regardless of its target. In either case, the giver may find himself needing to explain candy hearts such as "TAKE IT OFF," "GO TO HELL," or "SHUTUP ALREADY."*

The "No, You Said" CD

The "No, You Said" CD is black on its read side and red on top, with large yellow letters exclaiming, "NO, YOU SAID . . ." It contains an audio record of everything you and your significant other have ever said to each other. Tracks are organized by date and conversation. It is continuously updating, and will add new conversations as soon as they are ended. (In a particularly heated exchange it is usually possible to say, "This conversation is **over!**" to force it to update; information useful to the exchange can thus be retrieved and played back.)

In addition, the act of holding the CD will give the person a feeling as to where the information is on it, greatly speeding up most searches. The CD's audio quality is great, and will accurately record all audio conversations both people in a relationship were part of, including those over the phone.

The CD only works for the two people in a committed relationship, although either person may tap its information.

The "No, You Said" CD only seems to attune itself to one relationship at a time, and the act of ending the union is enough to render it blank. However, if a new relationship is established -- or the old one given another chance -- then the CD fills retroactively, including all the conversations that were on there previously in the case of renewed relationships.

*All attempts to copy either the CD or information off the CD will meet in failure; audio tapes refuse to pick it up, computers cannot read it, and so on. The CD **can** be played for other people directly. However, this might prove awkward, since the "No, You Said" CD has logical reason for existing as it does.*

Of course, this concept can work with various other media; video tapes or DVDs, a book of knowledge, etc. Regardless, it might be, in fact, a part -- or an edited revision -- of the [permanent record](#).

* * *

Thank you for considering these items for purchase. Payment will be accepted in any form imaginable, and is not -- strictly speaking -- necessary. I cannot tell you how much I look forward to the successful completion of this auction.

Put Out the Lights: *Othello*

*"If thou dost slander her and torture me,
Never pray more; abandon all remorse;
On horror's head horrors accumulate;
Do deeds to make heaven weep, all earth amaz'd;
For nothing canst thou to damnation add
Greater than that."*

-- William Shakespeare, *Othello*, III:iii:416-421

It's [Valentine's Day](#) again, which means the spirit of romance once more stalks the land. We've seen Shakespeare conjure that spirit for [combustive astrology](#) and for the [death-struggle of the gods](#). This year, love's horrors accumulate on the head of *Othello*, who "loved not wisely, but too well." Blow out the candle, and let your eye get adjusted to the dark.

*"Little of this great world can I speak,
More than pertains to feats of broil and battle;
And therefore little shall I grace my cause
In speaking for myself. Yet, by your gracious patience,
I will a round unvarnish'd tale deliver
Of my whole course of love; what drugs, what charms,
What conjuration, and what mighty magic,
For such proceeding I am charg'd withal,
I won his daughter."*

-- William Shakespeare, *Othello*, I:iii:100-108

In Venice, the soldiers Iago and Roderigo are both affronted by the general Othello, a converted Moor. Othello has passed over Iago for promotion in favor of Cassio, and has eloped with Roderigo's beloved, Desdemona. Iago talks Roderigo into revealing the tryst to Desdemona's father, Brabantio, who reacts by charging Othello with sorcerous seduction. However, not only does Desdemona proclaim herself truly in love with Othello, the Venetian Senate needs Othello to take over the war against the Turks; Brabantio's complaint is dismissed, and the Duke of Venice orders everyone to Cyprus. Othello, appointed governor of Cyprus, is delayed by a storm (which conveniently wrecks the Turkish invasion), leaving Iago and Roderigo time to plot against him. Iago gets Cassio into a drunken brawl with Roderigo, destroying Cassio's reputation and career. He then manipulates Cassio into pleading with Desdemona for reinstatement, while hinting to Othello that Cassio's new closeness with Desdemona is the cover for an adulterous affair.

Desdemona, meanwhile, has dropped a handkerchief given her by Othello; her maidservant Emilia (conveniently, Iago's wife) gives it to Iago, who plants it in Cassio's rooms; Cassio then gives it to his slut, Bianca. Iago then tells Othello of Cassio's lust for Desdemona, and of seeing him with Desdemona's handkerchief. When Desdemona next pleads Cassio's case, Othello flies into a jealous rage, especially when she cannot produce the handkerchief. When Bianca returns the handkerchief to Cassio as Othello watches from hiding, Othello vows to kill Desdemona while Iago kills Cassio. Iago tries to get Roderigo to do the deed, but Roderigo only wounds Cassio; Iago then kills Roderigo to conceal his schemes. Othello meanwhile smothers Desdemona with a pillow; her death shocks Emilia into revealing the truth. Although Iago kills Emilia, his cover stories collapse and he is arrested; Othello kills himself in remorse, pleading that the truth be told after his death.

*"Whoe'er he be that in this foul proceeding
Hath thus beguil'd your daughter of herself
And you of her, the bloody book of law
You shall yourself read in the bitter letter
After your own sense."*

-- William Shakespeare, *Othello*, I:iii:77-81

Shakespeare probably wrote *Othello* in 1603, to flatter the newly crowned King James I of England, who fancied himself an expert on the Turkish wars. It apparently worked, since *Othello* debuted at court for All Saints' Day in 1604, despite the tricky name of the scheming villain Iago -- Spanish for "James." (The many hints in the play of Iago's homosexuality also apparently flew by the effeminate new king.) Shakespeare made up all the names in the play except Desdemona, which he took from his source, Giambattista Giraldi Cinthio's 1565 *Hecatommithi*, a collection of traveler's tales supposedly told on shipboard after the sack of Rome in 1527. In Cinthio's original story, "the Moor" (possibly based on a historical Venetian captain, Christophoro Moro) and Alfiero (the Iago character) murder Desdemona together and then pull down the ceiling to make it look like an accident; Alfiero's motive is pure sexual jealousy. "Desdemona" is a Greek pun; her name is *dis-daimon*, an "unlucky spirit." Similar classical allusions fill Cinthio's tale (which has elements of Odysseus and Penelope within it) and, interestingly, Shakespeare's play. For Othello's African background, Shakespeare cribs from Pliny and Leo Africanus; Iago swears "By Janus!" -- an odd oath for a Christian, even a two-faced one.

*"'Tis true; there's magic in the web of it;
A sibyl, that had number'd in the world
The sun to course two hundred compasses,
In her prophetic fury sew'd the work;
The worms were hallow'd that did breed the silk,
And it was dy'd in mummy which the skilful
Conserv'd of maidens' hearts."*

-- William Shakespeare, *Othello*, III:iv:72-78

But not, perhaps, for a magician. Iago's trickery and lies (Mercurian -- Hermetic -- actions), his words and symbols, have a strong magical feel to them even before we hear him boast to himself of his "medicine" or "poison" or "elixir" or "mineral" or "pestilence." He recapitulates (and explicitly endorses, to Rogerio, Cassio, and Othello in turn) the path of the magus: to dare, to will, to know, and throughout to keep silent. He brags of somehow causing Othello's epileptic fit in Act IV, a fit associated (in both Shakespeare's London and the Moor's "Ethiopia") with the *malocchio*, the evil eye. Given Shakespeare's explicit choice of the name, the connection to "I" for "Iago" is not impossible, especially since Iago knows enough about the evil eye to utter charms against it ("God bless the mark!") and to steal the handkerchief ("a darling like your precious eye") that contains magical power over a husband's eye. Sure enough, only after the handkerchief vanishes does Othello fall into his fit; only after the theft does Iago, Medusalike, turn Othello's "heart to stone," and Othello turn his own hateful eye upon Desdemona ("You are fatal then/When your eyes roll so"). The handkerchief indeed has "magic in the web of it," it binds Desdemona to Othello, then protects their love, and then betrays them both to their deaths. It becomes the Web of Fate, woven by the [Three Sisters](#) who (in some versions of the story) have only one eye between them: Iago's?

"It is Othello's pleasure, our noble and valiant general, that, upon certain tidings now arrived, importing the mere perdition of the Turkish fleet, every man put himself into triumph; some to dance, some to make bonfires, each man to what sport and revels his addiction leads him; for, besides these beneficial news, it is the celebration of his nuptial. So much was his pleasure should be proclaimed. All offices are open, and there is full liberty of feasting from this present hour of five till the bell have told eleven."

-- William Shakespeare, *Othello*, II:ii:1-7

But why does Iago turn on Othello's marriage, after safely disposing of Cassio in a drunken brawl? Coleridge (who knew something of horror himself) called it "motiveless malignity." But perhaps Iago intends to connect Cassio and Desdemona in ritual, as well as gossip? One can read the action as Iago's attempt to replicate Egyptian mystery casting Othello as jealous Set (the dark, foreign god), Desdemona as the virgin-whore Isis ("a pearl" for whom the stormy seas make way), and Cassio (who suffers damage of "a mortal kind" but returns Easter Sunday morning with only a wound to his "leg") as Osiris. Perhaps Iago intends to step in at the crisis, and replace either Set or Osiris with himself (Hermetic Thoth? Horus of the Hawk's Eye?); perhaps simply staging the death ritual (on the night before Easter, by the song cues) is enough.

Whatever the reason, Iago intends it from the beginning; the first scene sets in motion a ritual exposure (to the Eye) and destruction of Othello's marriage. This ritual, very common in early modern Europe, is the charivari (which becomes the "shivaree" in Cajun Louisiana). The actors of charivari (which, like [Shakespearean drama](#), connects the street masque of Carnival to the [Dionysian](#) sacred revel) make a disturbance outside the marriage house until the groom and bride emerge, display themselves sexually, and feed them. (Charivari survives in modern America in the glass-banging for a kiss at the reception and the sabotage or vandalism of the honeymoon car.) Iago and Roderigo make charivari outside Brabantio's house to force Desdemona and Othello to reveal their marriage; then, in Cyprus, Cassio and Roderigo's brawl is a more violent charivari on Othello's "nuptial" celebration night.

Some theorists, examining the play's timing as an eternal Carnival, hint that Othello and Desdemona are unable to consummate their marriage (since the dawning of Lent would forbid it), leaving Desdemona "chaste as Dian" and her sheets unspotted and thus (eerily) suitable for a shroud. Where [Richard II](#) is an "un-crowning" play, *Othello* becomes an "un-marrying" play, a kind of Black Mass of marriage in which lovers become strangers and jealousy replaces courtship. It ends in human sacrifice ("Thou makest me call what I intend to do/A murder, which I had thought a sacrifice") as horrific, parodic consummation in the marriage bed, on the "wedding sheets." Significantly, the [usual alchemical resonances](#) in Shakespeare are tragically (and violently) reversed -- the alchemical marriage of nigredo (often represented by an "Ethiopian" or Moor in alchemical art) and albedo already exists at the beginning of the play; the Great Work has already begun offstage. Their sublime union is cloven by the Mercurian figure of Iago; rather than gold and perfection, the result is baseness, death, and chaos.

*"O, insupportable! O heavy hour!
Methinks it should be now a huge eclipse
Of sun and moon, and that the affrighted globe
Should yawn at alteration."
-- William Shakespeare, Othello, V:ii:119-122*

Iago has unleashed powerful spirits, both alcoholic (when he destroys Cassio with wine) and psychic, when he awakens Othello's fiery, murderous, selfish nature. His words (his "medicine" or "mineral") have split the athanor (or the atom) that is Othello's marriage, unleashing a wave of murder and destruction that finally even silences him. As we have seen [before](#), the first step in such sorcery is the unhinging of time. Not only does Shakespeare telescope the drama into an impossible "three days" (triplicity again, this time echoing the Osiris-Christ story), but he sets music and story cues against each other, hints that time in Cyprus is not "continue," and has Iago boast of using "dilatatory time" to work his mischief. Suddenly the destruction of Cassio makes sense -- Cassio, himself, as an "arithmetician" embodies time. He'll "watch the horologe a double set" -- until Iago gets him drunk, that is, and destroys "the just equinox" within him. That done, Iago's way is clear to steal the Web of Fate, splinter the marriage of opposites, and abort the Great Work of creation by eating away at Othello's love. "When I love thee not," Othello promises Desdemona, "Chaos is come again." Like [King Lear](#), the play contains the seeds of Chaos, for altering the "affrighted globe" and creating the "very error of the moon." For whatever reason -- or motiveless malignity -- Shakespeare gave a royal Iago the power to unmake the world. And that year, he retired from the stage, content to watch the plays with his clear, unwavering Eye.

Pyramid Pick

Film Frenzy: Action Movie Edition

Published by [Comic Images](#)

Written by Tom Lauria, Chris Lauria, Tom Gilliano, & Colin Merlo

Designed & Developed by Colin Merlo, Chris Lauria, Tom Lauria, Tom Gilliano, TCT Productions, Mike Crenshaw, & Shoe Shine Studios, Inc.

Art & Graphics by Chris Lauria, Tom Gilliano, & Neil Vokes

120 full-color cards; \$19.95

When *Die Hard* premiered in theaters, it broke the mold for action movies and reinvented the genre. A film no one was sure about turned out to be a smash hit. It's nice to see that happen again with Comic Images' *Film Frenzy: Action Movie Edition*.

The object of the game is to score the most points by playing cards that match the action on-screen.

Players have a hand of five cards, plus one Rewind card and a Pause card. The game starts when the dealer, who controls the remote, hits play, and it doesn't stop until the film ends. As the movie unfolds, players play their cards and announce them by title when they see an action or situation in the movie that matches. The card is placed in front of that player. The more common the action is, the fewer points it is worth, and conversely the rare occurrences score more.

At the common end of the scale are moments like Hand Gun; it's only worth one point, and there are plenty of them so the table will fill with them when the gunfire starts. There's only one Doomsday Device, in the movie and on the cards, so it's worth nine. Some cards have special bonuses that make them worth more; you get an extra point for Hand Gun if the actor is using two of them or if the weapon is equipped with a silencer.

The cards hit all of the movie clichés. You can score points if something blows up or catches fire; if the villain explains his plans or uses foul language; or if someone gets tossed through a window, off a precipice, or onto some pointy scenery. The regular cast of characters fits in as well: the Corrupt Official, the Streetwise pimps and junkies, and the Long Haired Guy all net points when they show up. For every card you play, you draw another into your hand.

Some of the cards have a red border, and these can cancel other specific cards. Most are thematically linked, so the Heavy Weapons card can cancel the effects of Machine Gun, and Trench Coats will stop Risqué. The Rewind Card allows you to play a card that applies to a situation that arose earlier in the film, before you had the card available in hand. Pause is one of two ways to stop the film or get rid of unwanted cards; when used, the dealer must pause the film. Each player takes turns discarding however many of their cards they like and replacing them. Then the movie resumes.

If the deck runs out, game play halts while the cards are reshuffled and dealt anew. The deck will be exhausted at least a couple of times during the show depending on how many players join in and the flick's running time. Any cards played up to now are tallied, the resulting scores written down, and the cards returned to the deck for the shuffle.

What looks like a truly dull exercise when you open the box and read the rules -- watch a movie, play a matching card

-- turns out to be engaging and exciting. There's a sort of gestalt working here, where the interactivity makes the game greater than the sum of its parts. There's plenty of calling things out without the competitive and argumentative rush to be first. If you've never seen the selected movie before, it adds tension as you hope for just the right scene. If you have seen it, you have to gauge how long to keep the cards in your hand: "I know that car chase is coming up, but the bar fight is next and if I don't use Pause to switch out cards, I won't have any decent cards." In a mixed group, the two sides can even out, and there are always the red-bordered counter-cards in case someone pulls ahead -- though that's tough to do in the thick of the action.

The cards are illustrated by Neil Vokes ("Spider-Man"), and have bright, colorful, and sometimes amusing illustrations. The cards are easy to read at a glance, though the bonuses will make you peer a little more closely. These parts aren't critical in the heat of play, though, so there will be plenty of time for them during the end-of-deck shuffle. There is something else on each card: an Easter egg all but buried in plain sight . . .

Film Frenzy is one of those rare finds: a game that puts enjoyment over the rules and succeeds by adroitly meshing the two. "Action Movie Edition" suggests this is the first release in what will no doubt be a very popular series.

--*Andy Vetromile*

Pyramid Review

Naughty & Dice: An Adult Gamer's Guide to Sexual Situations

Published by [Sabledrake Enterprises](#)

Written by Christine & Tim Morgan

Illustrated by Frederick K. T. Andersson, Laura Bayless, Allison L. Cassel "Gabriel Moonshadow," J. "Kythera" Contreras, Jayne "Jala" DePaolo, Christi Smith Hayden, Peta "Chaypeta" Hewitt, Jim Milligan, Jamie "Hinode" Pancy, Kayce Sizer, Terence, Jamie "Lynnwood" Thatcher, Teresa Troxell, Dara "Weirdlet" Williamson, & David Wong

104-page b&w softcover; \$19.95

Editor's note: While not explicit, this review does talk about . . . well, sex, particularly within the context of an RPG. If such topics are not your cup of tea, I'd recommend skipping it.

Just when you think that there is never going to be a book about sex and sexual situations that can add that certain friction to your roleplaying game, two come along in the same year. The one that got all the press was the *Book of Erotic Fantasy*, causing no little furor as its release turned the nature of the *d20 System* license upside-down, while the second was released with nothing like the fanfare nor the controversy. *Naughty & Dice: An Adult Gamer's Guide to Sexual Situations* comes from the writing team of Christine and Tim Morgan, the former known for her works of fiction such as *The MageLore* and *The ElfLore Trilogies*, and the Origins-Award-nominated short story, "Dawn of the Living-Impaired" from Eden Studios' *The Book of All Flesh*.

Naughty & Dice: An Adult Gamer's Guide to Sexual Situations comes in a cover that pokes fun at its subject matter, having been done so as to look as if it is wrapped in torn brown paper. It is clearly marked with the words "FOR MATURE EYES ONLY" and "CENSORED," and makes the claims that it is "Putting the 'R' in RPG!" and is also, "The Most Exhaustively Playtested Sourcebook Ever!" The actual front cover, the one hidden by all that faux brown paper, is reproduced fully in the book's frontispiece, depicting an amply built gamer rolling the dice for the characters on the board below. It sets the tone for the rest of the book, being a not-unattractive piece with just a slight nod to the chainmail bikini school of art, but is far from being either prurient or salacious. While there is the occasional bare nipple or two on show, this is as far as all but one of the many illustrations go in their explicitness. No worse then, than the half-time entertainment at the Superbowl, and probably more tasteful. At their worst, the illustrations in *Naughty & Dice* are merely suggestive, erotic rather than explicit. Not so the writing, which instead takes a calm and measured approach to its provocative subject.

That subject is (of course) sex, something that is rarely discussed in roleplaying games, or indeed comes up in the average campaign. Which is a shame, as the subject of romance does arise, and once romance rears its head, then sex cannot be far behind -- unless, of course, that game is *Pendragon*. Explanations as to why sex is not part of gaming can be boiled down to a number of reasons, mainly due to the once youthful age, and once wholly masculine nature of the average gaming group. Another reason is our society's attitude toward both games and roleplaying games, their

supposedly being not for an adult audience and should therefore have no reason to include sexual content. But demographically, the average gaming group is aging and maturing, and more commonly containing a greater number of female gamers than ever before. Thus an argument could be put forward that a supplement such as *Naughty & Dice* fills a certain void in the gaming market. Not that games have avoided the subject all together, ranging from the dreaded sex-change card drawn from *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons'* "Deck of Many Things," and the hedonistic goddess, Dlamélish, the Green-Eyed Lady of Fleshly Joys, from *Empire of the Petal Throne* to the "Mr. Studd Sexual Implant" cyberware of *Cyberpunk 2020*, but no single supplement has addressed sex as a whole.

After the necessary warning that both its contents and their use are for mature participating gamers only, *Naughty & Dice* gets on with being a gaming supplement. It does this in as generic a manner as is possible; the nearest it gets to actual game stats are in the OGL compliant appendix. That said, it is none too difficult to map the contents of the rest of the book on to other generic or universal game systems, such as *FUDGE*, *GURPS*, or the *Hero System*. It defines a new attribute, Sexuality, calculated as the average of Health and Charisma scores, and from this both a character's responsiveness to sexual situation and their ability with sexual skills can be determined.

Instead of advantages and disadvantages, *Naughty & Dice* has "Turn-Ons" and "Turn-Offs." These cover both the biological -- High Sperm Count, Barren, and Social Disease (four such are detailed, from Syphilis to HIV/AIDS), and the social or romantic -- Allure, Nice Guy/Girl Syndrome and Wedding Vows. Where most other RPGs might go so far as to include the Sex Appeal or Seduction skills, this supplement provides 24! These are divided between those that relate directly to the act and the art of sex, to the sex industry and medical side of sexuality. There is even a note on how to use the kiss as a combat maneuver! All of this can be used in conjunction with any character or with the book's various archetypes that run from the Bad Boy and Pimp to the Good Girl and the Soiled Dove.

The chapter on "Sex Support" discusses tools and aphrodisiacs and also exposes the lies behind the most common form of Spam delivered to e-mail inboxes daily. Another details the consequences of sex -- pregnancy -- and how to prevent it. After giving a straight explanation of the facts of sex, *Naughty & Dice* begins to get away from that with chapters on the folklore, the mythology, and the history of sex. These are each interesting reads, going around the world and back again, before coming right up to date with the effects of the HIV/AIDS virus.

The book moves further away from the given facts and more into fantasy, with a slew of spells and magical items. Both are described without the need for statistics, but are these still easy enough for any GM to assign, whatever the game system. The major gaming genres are explored chapter by chapter: cyberware and advanced technology, sex, aliens, and hybrids for Science Fiction; the usual races plus Dragons, Minotaurs, and other theriomorphs (part-human/part-beast) are discussed under Fantasy; and vampires, werewolves, incubi, and succubi are in the chapter on Horror and the paranormal.

A sample sexually charged faith is taken from Christine Morgan's own fantasy novels. Talopea is the goddess of pleasure, with a dislike of those who misuse or deny the act of sex. With a love of the body beautiful, this faith also has a hatred of the undead, as death is anathema to them. Not only does the worship of Talopea make use of several of the sex spells and sex skills given earlier, a cleric class of its own in the OGL Conversion Appendix also supports it. Both this class and the chapter on Talopea are likely to be the least useful of the material given in *Naughty & Dice*. As examples they work fairly well, but the goddess is unlikely to be used as anything other than a faith to be encountered, and the cleric class itself will be a radically brave choice for most players.

The OGL Conversion Appendix also contains two NPC classes, the Don Juan/Demi-Monde class and the Hedonist. These are suited to more roleplaying-orientated campaigns, while the Femme Fatale Prestige Class may turn out to be a welcome addition to many a campaign. It is unfortunate that she is only described in fantasy terms, but it should little effort to adapt to other times and genres. The appendix also includes several new feats, of which "A Great Night Out" and "Wrangle Invitation" are nice additions to any game. The spells given earlier are here given stats. The second appendix contains the book's bibliography, including a number of website URLs, and these should provide more detail should a referee so desire.

Rounding out *Naughty & Dice* is a collection of expanded story seeds ready for the referee to develop. These come from a variety of different periods from our history, from the Sultan's Harem and Victorian England to Regency

London and the Wild West, but pride of place goes to "Castle Spank." Inspired directly by issue #14 of John Kovalic's *Dork Tower*, this describes what could be the worst imaginings of Matt's mind and is as salacious as this supplement gets. There is, unfortunately, no mention of "Spanky Goths."

Naughty & Dice is an interesting read, not just in the main text, but also in its quotes and fiction. The former are found throughout the book, and come from sources as diverse as Angie Dickinson, Geoffrey Chaucer, Mae West, Jane Austen, Steve Martin, and Mark Twain. While the quotes add a pithy quality to the book, the pieces of fiction that preface each chapter prove to be entertaining. Particularly good are those of an atypical trio of adventurers -- a light-fingered gambler, an Orc hating fighter, and an Elf Lothario -- as they pay a visit to a tavern. These are used to highlight the chapter's forthcoming contents, culminating in a rotten twist for the Lothario. The switches back and forth between in- and out-of-game conversations are deftly done, the latter serving to relate the player reactions to the events of the game. It is in these pieces of fiction that the book comes closest to ribald humor, but really they should raise no more than a smile.

What this supplement does not deliver is depth, and nor should it. Rather, such depth should come from the players and referee alike within their game, but only as long as they are comfortable with the nature of said game. This is one of the strengths of the book; it makes what could be a titillating or embarrassing subject into a comfortable and interesting read. Ultimately, *Naughty & Dice: An Adult Gamer's Guide to Sexual Situations* provides a broad overview of its subject, with just enough information to both get the referee started and pointed in the right direction should they want to know more.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Pick

The Outcaste (for Exalted RPG)

Published by [White Wolf Publishing](#)

Written by R. Sean Borgstrom, Eric Brennan, Genevieve Cogman, & Scott Taylor

160-page b&w softcover; \$22.99

White Wolf's recent releases for its *Exalted* line have all been of exceptionally high quality, and *The Outcaste* continues this trend. But while *Aspectbook: Air* and *Kingdom of Halta* were both only 96 pages, *The Outcaste* weighs in at 160 pages for only a few dollars more.

More important than its price or page-count, however, is the book's content. The bulk of *The Outcaste* is spent describing three vastly different societies of Dragon-Blooded (or Terrestrial Exalted), ranging from the highly militarized Seventh Legion of Lookshy to the pirates of Eos and Ossissa, and the simultaneously deluded and immortal brigands who make up the Forest Witches. While all the book's material is specifically geared toward enriching *Exalted's* highly developed world, pieces of the setting material could definitely be adapted for use in other games, though doing so would likely alter the tone of a campaign dramatically.

This is because all the societies described in *The Outcaste* are dependent on or shaped by powerful magic, though the form that it takes differs in each case. The military of Lookshy and the Seventh Legion depends on the extensive use of magical equipment, ranging from giant robot suits, to aerial battleships and transports, to a vast array of magical weapons and armor intended for use by both its mortal foot soldiers and their exalted commanders. The pirate captains Eos and Ossissa maintain their fleet by sailing beyond the edge of the world to the courts of the Fae, where they can gain anything they desire at the risk of becoming storybook caricatures of themselves. And the Forest Witches are the strangest of all; so strange, in fact, that to attempt to describe their society in detail would be to do its intricacies a disservice. Suffice it to say that they take part in a communal delusion which ensures their survival in the minds of their comrades even if they should fall in battle, and if they can steal enough artifacts, that delusion will become self-sustaining, and they will never need to deal with the real world again.

The Lookshy section is one of the best parts of the book, describing the Seventh Legion's force structures, unit composition, equipment, tactics, and troop readiness in considerable detail. The city itself is mapped (a relative rarity in *Exalted* supplements), and the description of the city's culture gives a good sense of what life is like for the city's helots and citizens, as well as visitors and its exalted overlords. The city's political relations with the world-spanning empire of the Realm and its neighbors in the Scavenger Lands are well detailed, as are its gods and several incidents in its recent history, but those looking for a complete history of the city and the Seventh Legion are referred to the section on Lookshy in the *Scavenger Sons* supplement. Descriptions and statistics for all the artifacts and pieces of gear that the Seventh Legion is likely to use in the field are included as well, though Warstrider stats and most of the spells used by Lookshy's sorcerer-engineers are only to be found in the *Book of 3 Circles*. This need for other books is not a drawback, however; for a storyteller planning to run a campaign set in Lookshy, *Scavenger Sons* is essential, while *The Book of 3 Circles* is necessary if anyone wants to play a sorcerer.

The chapter on Eos and Ossissa, while interesting, is probably the most limited of all the book's sections, as it focuses on a single group of pirates, their vendetta against the mercantile Guild, and their home base in the chaos of Wyld. As in the Forest Witches chapter, its major NPCs (Eos and Ossissa) are given stats, and a number of Charms and spells specific to the nautical setting are included. While the specifics of Eos and Ossissa's operation are well laid-out, most groups will have to mine this section for ideas instead of using it in their game, as its details are really only useful for

those who want to play Dragon-Blooded pirates.

The Forest Witches section, like that on Eos and Ossissa, is unlikely to be of direct use to most play groups, but it drips with ideas that could become the core of a campaign. The wood the witches live in is alive, and provides for all their needs so long as their spirit is periodically offered a beautiful sacrifice, which first it cossets and then eventually kills. The mist enshrouding the wood is inhabited by strange and alien beings called numina, and the PCs can join their number, so long as they are willing to leave behind their humanity to become something else. The dead live on in Atsiluth Eternal -- a city so perfect that none of them care that it only exists in a dream -- while the living reincarnate themselves as the children of nearby rulers, regaining their powers and most of their memories as they grow older, until at last they can control or destroy the countries they inhabit from within. The few Charms provided are only appropriate to a Forest Witches game, but it hardly matters, since the chapter contains so many fascinating ideas.

The final section of the book is the one likely to be the most useful to many play groups, as it details the lives of those born Outcaste in the Realm or in the various directions of the Threshold. Relatively short compared to the book's other sections, the chapter provides an overview of how patrician Dragon-Bloods are auctioned off to the Realm's Great Houses, while those born of common stock are given over to either the Imperial Legions or a life of contemplation and martial arts training in the Immaculate Order. The lives of Dragon-Blooded in the Threshold are only given a few pages, but as those pages are chock full of plot hooks, there's little to complain about.

All in all, *Exalted: The Outcaste* is a very impressive supplement, and certainly one of the best written sourcebooks yet released for the line. Even those fantasy gamers who don't play *Exalted* should consider making it a part of their library.

--Alec Austin

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



What's Love Got to Do With It?

Conditions of Love for the *d20 System*

by Owen K.C. Stephens

One of the ways the *d20 System* keeps its rules consistent is to have a set of conditions with specific, game mechanical meanings. If a spell or situation states a character is dazed, dazzled, or dying, those terms refer to a particular game condition that is defined in advance. Regardless of the source of a condition, the result on the character is the same. The conditions are designed to be consistent, so a character that is blinded has the same difficulty hitting a foe as one striking at an invisible target.

Nor are all of the conditions purely physical. Mental states ranging from fear-based conditions (cowering, frightened, panicked, and shaken), to confusion and being fascinated are covered, allowing mind-affecting spells with those themes to remain as consistent as physical effects. There are, however, no conditions describing the conditions related to romantic attraction and love.

Given how often love and attraction come up in many fantasy stories, this seems an unfortunate oversight. Presumably most groups simply roleplay such emotions, and see little need for defining their affects in game terms. This prevents some of the standard adventure tropes, however. A character besotted with a seductress can ignore her as soon as a fight breaks out, unless she actually has charm magic handy. And the most famous of love conditions, true love, becomes nothing more than a motivation for heroes. It has no real power when faced with skill checks and spellcasting.

In keeping with the season, and to patch this potential gap, this article presents five new conditions -- infatuated, enamored, besotted, heart-smitten, and true love. Each is given specific game effects, and new rules are presented to show how they're used. Not every group is going to have any use for these, but campaigns trying to mix romantic adventure with players uncomfortable roleplaying romantic urges may find them useful as well as those revolving around themes more subtle than killing monsters and taking their stuff.

New Conditions Summary

Infatuated: A character that is infatuated has positive feeling towards a creature, and is at a disadvantage when interacting with that creature. An infatuated character is considered to have a friendly attitude towards the creature, and suffers a -2 penalty to all opposed Bluff, Diplomacy, and Sense Motive checks made against the object of his infatuation, as well as to attack rolls and AC if attacking or being attacked by the creature (even to nonlethal attacks made in self-defense).

Enamored: A character that is infatuated has positive feeling towards a creature, and is distracted by the presence of that creature. An enamored character is considered to have a friendly attitude towards the creature, and suffers a -2 moral penalty to all Reflex and Will saves, as well as Dex, Int and Wis based skills when in the presence of the object of his affections.

If a character becomes infatuated with a creature he is already infatuated with, he instead becomes enamored.

Besotted: A character that is besotted has strong positive feelings towards another creature. If the creature is of the appropriate type and gender, the besotted character feels romantically interested. If not, the besotted character treats the creature as a close and trusted friend (the character's attitude toward the creature is friendly).

Being besotted does not mean the character obeys any order from the object of his affections, but the character perceives the creature's words and actions in the most favorable way. The creature can try to give the character orders, but it must win an opposed Charisma check to convince the character to do anything he wouldn't ordinarily do.

(Retries are not allowed.) A besotted creature never obeys suicidal or obviously harmful orders, but might be convinced that something very dangerous is worth doing.

If a character becomes enamored with a creature he is already enamored with, he instead becomes besotted.

Heart-smitten: A character who is heart-smitten is truly in love with a creature. A heart-smitten character is considered to have a helpful attitude towards the creature, and places that creature's well-being above his own. A heart-smitten character does not automatically take orders from the object of his affection, nor is he distracted by their presence.

Once each day a character acting directly to aid or protect a creature he is heart-smitten with may gain a +2 morale bonus to one d20 roll. A character directly sacrificing his own good in favor of a creature he is heart-smitten with (such as moving to take an attack in place of the object of his affection) always gains a +2 morale bonus to all checks needed to make this sacrifice.

It's possible to be infatuated, enamored, or besotted with a creature while being heart-smitten.

True Love: True Love is the rarest of conditions, with less than one person in a thousand ever having even a chance at it. Two characters with True Love for one another always find their way back to one another. Even death is only a temporary barrier to True Love. The GM is responsible for seeing to it that characters with mutual True Love eventually find their way back to each other. If a campaign ends before this happens, it's assumed they meet shortly afterward.

A character with True Love toward another who does not return that condition instead simply acts as though heart-smitten.

There are many possible uses for these conditions. As examples, presented below are some rules for skills, feats, and spells. Some of these are additions to the normal rules, while others replace existing game write-ups with those that match the conditions above.

Skills

Bluff: It's possible to use Bluff to seduce, or at least interest, creatures potentially romantically inclined towards you. This works only for creatures interested in a romantic liaison with a creature of your race and gender (though occupation, nationality and alignment are irrelevant). This works on NPC attitudes in the same way as Diplomacy, but rather than going from Friendly to Helpful, Bluff checks go from Friendly to Infatuated.

Seduction doesn't last as long as true friendship based on mutual respect and common interests. A creature that has been moved to a friendlier attitude stays there only if you engage in the kind of romantic relationship it is interested in, or keep stringing it along. In the first case, you must make a new Bluff check every week against the creature's original attitude, with the DC increasing by 1 each week. If stringing the creature along without engaging in a desired relationship, you must make anew Bluff check each time you meet the creature, with the DC increasing by 2 each time. In both cases, if you fail to adjust its attitude to infatuated, it reverts immediately back to one condition worse that it started.

A creature that you have failed to seduce is always harder to make friendly in the future, with Diplomacy and Bluff DCs to change attitude 5 higher.

Diplomacy: Diplomacy can be used to woo a creature potentially interested in you as a mate. A creature that already has a attitude of Friendly or better and is interested in a romantic liaison with a creature of your race and gender can be gradually brought around to loving you. This requires constant attention (at least one noteworthy contact each week), and time (this skill requires a month per check).

The DC for this Diplomacy check is 25. A check of 10 or more below the target DC results in the creature feeling you

are a friend, but inappropriate for a romantic relationship, resulting in the friend modifier below. This Diplomacy roll is modified by other factors, as noted below. If you fail to hit the DC by 10 or more for 4 consecutive checks, the creature becomes uncomfortable with your advances, and if Helpful moves from Helpful to Friendly. Another 4 consecutive failures by 10 or more results in the creature moving from Friendly to Indifferent. Most creatures ask the advances stop before this occurs.

Condition	DC Modifier
Creature is already infatuated, enamored or besotted	+3
Creature is already heart-smitten	+5
Creature is in a romantic relationship	+10
Creature is aware you're in a romantic relationship	+5
Creature sees you as just a friend	+10
Creature is in True Love	+20
Each month you've managed a DC of 25 or more	-1
You don't see creature in person daily	+5
You don't see creature in person weekly	+10

Spells

Charm Person

Enchantment (Charm) [Mind-Affecting]

Level: Brd 1, Sor/Wiz 1

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

Target: One humanoid creature

Duration: 1 hour/level

Saving Throw: Will negates

Spell Resistance: Yes

This charm causes a humanoid creature to become besotted with you. If the creature is currently being threatened or attacked by you or your allies, however, it receives a +5 bonus on its saving throw. Any act by you or your apparent allies that threatens the charmed person breaks the spell. You must speak the person's language to communicate your commands, or else be good at pantomiming.

Seduction

Enchantment (Charm) [Mind-Affecting]

Level: Brd 1, Sor/Wiz 1

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Touch

Target: One creature touched

Duration: 1 day/level

Saving Throw: Will negates

Spell Resistance: Yes

This charm causes a humanoid creature to become infatuated with you. If the creature is currently being threatened or attacked by you or your allies, however, it receives a +5 bonus on its saving throw. Any act by you or your apparent allies that threatens the seduced person breaks the spell.

Feats

Alluring [General]

You have a way about you, that attracts the romantic attention of others.

Prerequisites: Cha 15+

Benefits: Creatures often become infatuated with you. Anytime you encounter a creature that is romantically interested in creatures of your race and gender, which also has a friendly attitude towards you, it must make a Will save (DC 10 + ½ your level + your Cha bonus) or be infatuated for 1-4 days.

A creature that has made its save against this effect once is never forced to do so again.

True Love

You have that one chance at True Love -- but only a chance.

Prerequisites: Heart-smitten

Benefits: If two heart-smitten creatures both take True Love in regards to each other, they are considered to be in the condition of True Love. The GM may call upon any effect, up to and including a *limited wish*, to bring the two characters back together, generally in the form of coincidence and random chance. Once this has been done, the character must take True Love a second time if he wishes another intervention on the same level, though as long as True Love exists, some way will be found, though it may take 17 years.

If only one of a pair take True Love, he is permanently heart-smitten with the creature selected, but does not gain the benefits of True Love.

Alchemical Items

Heartsfire

Heartsfire is a powerful intoxicant that makes everyone seem more seductive and alluring. A character drinking heartsfire must make a DC 13 Will save, or become infatuated with the highest Cha creature of a race and gender appropriate for him to have romantic feelings. A failed save also deals 1d6 Wis damage. The infatuation ends once the Wis damage is healed.

Heartsfire has an overly-sweet flavor, and unless hidden in a strong dessert anyone eating or drinking it may make a DC 15 Wis check (DC 10 if the character is a gnome or has scent) to notice the sticky-sweet flavor.

Heartsfire costs 200 gp/dose, and requires a DC 25 Craft (alchemy) check to create.

Just In Time For Love Out of Time

For many roleplayers, portraying a character with a romantic interest or subplot is a lot of fun. Wooing a new-found love, interacting with that sweetheart between adventures, and swinging in and saving the damsel (or gent) in distress are all part of the fun for many heroes. Of course, coming up with a new romantic focus can be a pain; it doesn't take many character concepts or storylines to exhaust most of the obvious ones, even if you explore avenues such as [life after marriage](#). What sets *this* chandelier-swinging swashbuckler of love apart from all the other ones? What makes this "royal marriage" story different from the rest? How can you insert some spice into a romantic subplot, or into the romantic aspect of the world?

For something new, the answer might be as simple as mixing up the idea of what love is, either in the character or in the game world. Love is not a concept that has remained constant throughout time; there have always been controversies as to what is "proper" love, the role of marriage, and the definition of relationships and family. For example, the Greeks separated the ideas of love and marriage; the rise of Christianity brought with it the notion that sex was evil; and the Pre-Renaissance saw the creation of courtly love, which was a completely new concept in the Western world. Most games fall into one of two traps; they either assume that stories set in centuries past can have protagonists whose worldviews are very modern, or they assume that all members of a society adhere to the same moral and ethical code, with little room for variance. But neither needs extreme needs to be the law, and spicing things up with different views can lead to a lot of storytelling potential.

Romantic plots are all about friction. [Insert your *own* joke here!] While most of the time this friction come within the characters (she's taken a vow of chastity, he's afraid of commitment) or from the plot (she's taken away by demonic hordes, he's afraid of demons), the tension of the story can come from the definitions and views of romance themselves. A swashbuckler based on the Roman ideal of love would have a completely different outlook from one based on the typical chivalric code, which would be different again from the same character who followed a Victorian worldview; all three would react very differently to rescuing a victim imprisoned by an evil prince. Likewise a Shadowrunner with a conservative 1950's view on marriage and family can help differentiate that character from others, and would be a great deal of fun for the right player. [Scene of decked-out cyber-implanted street samurai holding a suitcase dripping blood in one corner, entering a modest suburban residence: "Hi, honey! I'm home!"]

As an alternative complication, all that may be necessary is to modify a region's entire outlook on relations. For example, it would be possible to construct a stereotypical medieval society, only one based around the principles of a 1960's "free love" openness . . . especially if magic or technology existed to deal with unwanted consequences of such actions. Of course, the GM will need to be careful that these elements do not enter the realm of the absurd, lest he be accused of turning the game into *Castle Hawke 90210*. Still, an otherwise mundane castle encounter can have new life breathed into it by having characters who, in other circumstances, would be cooing over poetry wistfully and coyly dropping handkerchiefs, instead be openly propositioning the PCs.

Ideas of love and sexuality have always been hot topics for a society to struggle with, and this can help provide either backdrop setting bits or full-fledged stories. Even today -- as I type -- people in power are debating vigorously as to what defines marriage, who can get married to whom, and what the implications of those definitions are. What if these ideas were projected forward or backward in time, or to other genres? What if a fae decides he wants to enter into a mortal union with a milkmaid? What if an AI starts arguing for polygamy rights to "wed" who it wants in meatspace, since it can split its essence into as many copies as needed? (As ever, the gaming group will need to find its own comfort threshold in dealing - even allegorically - with controversial modern topics.)

Some gaming groups may believe it stretches implausibility to have anachronistic ideas pop up, but I'm not sure I'd agree. At least in modern games, it's easy to look backwards; I've known people who have tried following chivalric or Victorian ideals in their romantic relations, and many writers and artists of eras past have held - and in some cases helped shape - alternate or progressive views of relations. (Of course, they were often burned at the stake as a result, but it should be possible to gloss over that . . . or even work in that danger as a plot possibility!) And outlooks on relations can be a source of major character development and progression; if an adventurer has been raised to believe

that women are soulless property, how does he react when a female fellow adventurer saves his butt a few times?

I hear this new Internet thing is popular with all the kids, and I would guess that a lot of information about different kinds and ideals of love are out there. At an admittedly casual search, the most useful link I found was at <http://www.neo-tech.com/history/>, where the article "The History of Love and Sex" gives a fairly thorough timeline of outlooks and attitudes (at least from a Western point of view).

If you're looking to add romance to your games, either as a player or GM, but don't know how to interject anything different, the answer might be as simple as adjusting the views of characters or the setting, and seeing what interesting things happen.

The Eisenhower Netrunners and open-love princesses will thank you.

--*Steven Marsh*

The Object Of His Affection

A Tale of Cupid & Psycho

by Michael Anguiano

Brief

Dennis Sherman is a deranged man obsessed with the actress Annaliese Simone. Unfortunately, Dennis is also a powerful latent psychic, causing each of his victims to also believe she *is* Annaliese Simone.

The Set-Up

Another dream of Hollywood stardom has come to a tragic end.

Michelle Dowling, an exotic dancer in her late 20s, has just been found gruesomely murdered, her naked body wrapped in a plastic sheet and dumped in a garbage dumpster. Dowling has been missing for four days. Dowling's car has been found abandoned in an area of downtown Los Angeles. The LAPD is assuming she was abducted from the area where her car was left, but as yet no witnesses have come forward.

Dowling was last seen alive at the Westwood mansion of actress Annaliese Simone, claiming to be the actress herself. The two women were only superficially similar in appearance. Simone was home when Dowling arrived at the mansion gate and demanded entry from the staff. After Dowling refused to leave, Simone confronted Dowling herself and sent her away, threatening police action. When interviewed by police, Simone reports that Dowling left in a sedan driven by a man, but recollects no other details. Security cameras show Dowling at the gate but the car and driver were off-camera.

The coroner estimates she has been dead for three days. No useful evidence was found on her body, aside from a few strands of random fibers, apparently from clothing. The murder included extensive ante mortem mutilation that indicates preoccupation with the victim's identity. Dowling was identified through fingerprints and dental records. In an odd twist, those handling the body initially identified Dowling's body as Annaliese Simone, but under later questioning were uncertain as to why.

A police search of Dowling's apartment suggests that she truly believed herself to be Annaliese Simone. Documents older than four weeks are signed by Dowling, but more recent documents, including checks and correspondence, are signed in Dowling's handwriting as Simone. These documents were often side by side without apparent conflict. Dowling even has recently printed acting resumes, which identify her as Simone. All of Simone's information is that gleaned from mainstream sources, like E! and the IMDB, containing resultant the occasional inaccuracy.

Dowling has not been dating anyone exclusively and her occasional lovers will have reasonably credible alibis, leaving police without an obvious suspect. "Plenty O'Toole's," the adult club where Dowling performed, will report that she stopped showing up for work about three weeks ago and was fired (by answering machine message) about two weeks ago.

Her friends and family will report that she had been acting oddly in recent weeks, but had little contact with her during that time and did not realize the extent of her behavior. Her credit card has been used extensively at several area restaurants, clubs, and clothing stores. Receipts will again indicate Simone's name signed in Dowling's handwriting. Upon questioning, service personnel will simply shrug. This is LA, after all, and they get a lot of wannabes pretending to be celebrities, including Simone.

The Austrian-born Annaliese Simone is pale, blond, and gorgeous, occasionally called "the Aryan Angel" in the foreign press. She began as a model, worked on a failed BBC television series, and then inexplicably made the leap to the big screen after a small but attention-getting role in an independent Australian film. Despite only moderate talent, Annaliese has managed to become the ascendant starlet of Hollywood on the basis of her looks and personal charisma. Her latest project is *Object*, a big-budget romance that features Annaliese as a jetset model who must overcome her elitist attitudes to accept the romantic overtures of an earnest young street musician. Annaliese hopes *Object* will establish her as an A-list star. Similar hopes are held by her manager, Mina Abrams, and her publicist, Lem Shalala of Creative Representation.

The studio behind *Object*, Maximarc Films, is understandably nervous about any publicity that might link their star to the dead woman. Due to be released in two weeks, promotional machinery for *Object* is fully in motion as Simone makes appearances, gives interviews, and does the talk show circuit. With tens of millions of dollars on the line, Maximarc would prefer to avoid any press about the murder until at least three weeks after the movie's release.

Behind The Scenes

Dennis Sherman is a Caucasian man in his mid-30s, raised in the Midwest. He was physically and emotionally abused as a child by his adoptive parents, Carl and Theresa, who often used him as a pawn in their vitriolic -- sometimes violent -- arguments. Carl worked as a carpenter to support the family, while Theresa cleaned homes. Dennis had few friends through childhood, took early to alcohol, and only finished high school because of an indifferent school administration. He dropped out of community college after a single semester and worked as a carpenter alongside his father. When he was 20, his mother died of misdiagnosed ovarian cancer. Following a protracted argument with his father, Dennis packed his few belongings and moved to Los Angeles.

Good with his hands, Dennis has worked as a carpenter and occasionally as a roofer during his 15 or so years in California. He mostly does contracting work in house construction and makes a decent living. He has pursued a series of romantic relationships, which usually ended over his drinking, possessiveness, or abuse. He has a police record in different jurisdictions regarding two drunken barfights and several domestic disturbance calls. He alternates between castigating himself for a failed, worthless life and blaming the world for not recognizing his potential greatness.

Four years ago, Dennis and a dozen others were hired on a construction project that turned out to be a downtown location shoot for the movie *Radiant*. During the work, Dennis met a beautiful young actress named Annaliese Simone, cast in a prominent ingénue role. The two spent much time chatting and flirting on the set. Flattered by the unexpected attention, Dennis assured Simone that she was destined for great things. Annaliese, for her part, was mostly concerned with making her costar (and then-boyfriend) jealous.

Following this encounter, Dennis had yet another violent, drunken argument with his on-again, off-again girlfriend, Jo Meachem. This time, Meachem knocked him briefly unconscious with a beer bottle. When he regained consciousness, Dennis killed her. Despite blinding headaches, he pulled himself together enough to dispose of the body at a building site, the day before the concrete foundation was poured. As part of justifying his actions to himself, Dennis began to convince himself that he and Simone were developing a relationship.

The blinding headaches have been a chronic occurrence since being knocked unconscious but Dennis refuses to see a physician. After all, he reasons, his mother wasn't sick until after she went to the doctor. He is unaware that the initial trauma was not the end of the damage and he will die of a massive stroke approximately six years after being hit (barring additional cerebral trauma). He is further unaware that the cranial trauma has unlocked a powerful, latent psychic ability. Of course, he is also unaware that he is becoming increasingly delusional and obsessed with Simone, jointly caused by a need to believe his rationalizations and his own psychic gifts operating against himself.

Dennis has followed a fairly straightforward pattern since his encounter with Simone. He will randomly bump into a woman who loosely fits Simone's general profile, follow her on impulse, and become convinced that she is Simone. Dennis will trail her from a distance and watch her, often taking time off from construction jobs to do so. After several weeks, he will intensify his surveillance, reluctant to approach her but hoping she will recognize him, at which point his psychic abilities will begin to have an effect on his victim. Shortly thereafter, the victim will begin to believe

herself to be Simone.

Once this happens, two outcomes are possible. In the first, the victim is involuntarily committed to a mental institution as delusional. Denied close proximity for more than a month, Dennis is initially extremely anxious but will slowly lose interest and realize that he was mistaken. Meanwhile, the victim will slowly emerge from her delusional state and eventually be pronounced cured by the authorities. Three of Dennis' victims have survived in this way.

The second outcome is that the victim will fully believe herself to be Simone and find herself unaccountably drawn to a "special place" in the downtown area. This is where Dennis met the real Simone. Now, Dennis waits there to meet his delusional Simone, who is locked fully into his delusion as well. Unfortunately, Dennis' unstable self-image will spill over into his victim's perception of him, causing her at some point to reject him as worthless. Humiliated and enraged, Dennis strangles her and later buries the body in a construction site, after which he convinces himself that he was misled, since Simone remains alive and in headlines. Five of Dennis' victims have died in this way.

In either outcome, Dennis would remain adrift for a time and pursue his life as normal before latching onto his next victim. Michelle Dowling suffered a different fate for a simple reason: Dowling convinced Dennis to give her a ride "home," at which point Dennis saw her and Simone standing face to face. He recognized Dowling as an imposter and seethed with rage at her fraud and, subconsciously, at himself because his delusion had been brought so dangerously close to his own awareness. Two days later, he dumped Dowling's dead body.

Currently, Dennis is very close to being completely over the edge. Witnessing the confrontation between Dowling and Simone has sparked a change in his pathology. Rather than expecting to see Simone randomly in the mall or at a restaurant, he knows that he must find her either at her home or her workplace. Additionally, prepublicity for *Object* has convinced him that the entire movie is a love letter from Simone to him, although he's sure the director changed the male lead into a musician to satisfy the studio. The closer the film's release, therefore, the more Dennis is convinced he must take action to be with Simone, rather than waiting for her to find him.

What To Do

At any point after the body's discovery but before the premiere of *Object*, the PCs can be detailed to the police investigation through a connection to any of the following: Michelle Dowling, Annaliese Simone, Simone's manager, Simone's publicist, or Maximarc Films. Each will entail a different set of priorities. Of course, the earlier that the heroes are brought in, the longer the GM can keep them busy with the routine work of the investigation itself. The most obvious problem for the party is that the police are unaware of Dennis' other victims, and no direct connection exists between the victims themselves.

If the PCs look into unsolved missing persons cases, several will involve Simone wannabes. Of the five relevant cases, three left cars near the "special place" downtown, one took the bus, and one took a cab there. Proper investigation shows that the first disappearance took place four months after this spot was used for filming, but 10 months before the movie was released. If questioned about the location, Simone will remember quarreling with her boyfriend but little else. However, other production staff will remember that she spent much time flirting with one of the crew, and further inquiry will identify Dennis Sherman as the person involved. Simone does not remember Dennis.

If the PCs find the relevant missing persons cases but miss the "special place," they can instead look more deeply into the missing persons themselves. This sort of search will require the PCs to sort through much, much more material. Each victim's workplace was near home construction sites, which employed several of the same crews. Proper investigation will place Dennis on each site and identify him as the obvious choice for a serial killer.

If PCs look into only the Dowling case directly, they will chase false leads and dead ends for a couple of days. This may be frustrating. However, at this point, several agents and studios have received mail with acting resumes with Dowling's picture over Simone's name. They will pass this information to either the police or Simone's agent, whichever is more convenient for the PCs. Further investigation at different agencies and studios will disclose that other women have done the same, and some of these can be identified as unsolved missing persons. This is a much more tenuous connection, but it should put the PCs back on track.

If heroes decide to simply guard Simone and let Dennis come to them, then innocent victims will eventually pay the price. Dennis will unsuccessfully try to sneak into the studio a couple of times, just like innumerable other fans. At the *Object* premiere, he will wrangle himself a good spot on the red carpet and even make eye contact with Simone, who will not recognize him. Feeling humiliated and rejected, he will now deliberately stalk and murder women who fit Simone's general profile. Rather than delusively seeking Simone herself, Dennis is now consciously seeking to assuage a wounded self-image by exercising control (by proxy) over the woman who humiliated him. The PCs' passive strategy has allowed Dennis to become a more active serial killer who now has a deteriorating mental state and an accelerating pattern of activity.

If apprehended, Dennis is fairly muscular and an experienced, if untrained, combatant. Police will find that some of his household knives will bear traces of blood, but no useful DNA. Some fiber analysis will link him circumstantially to Dowling's body. If "reunited" with Simone, he can be enticed into confessing to her the things that he has done to protect her from impostors. However, Simone will then become the person he thinks she is, which means that she will be in love with him and grateful for his protection. PCs should by now realize Dennis' peculiar situation.

For a more paranormal resolution, PCs might discover that Dennis' previous victims are lingering on as ghosts in the buildings constructed over their bodies. The victims' spirits are unable to move on because of their traumatic death but also because they died thinking they were Annaliese Simone. The result is a series of ghosts who think they are someone who is still living. Confronting each ghost with either a disbelieving Dennis or the real Simone should solve the problem.

Designer Notes: GURPS WWII: All the King's Men

by Brian J. Underhill

Generally speaking, writing a book for Steve Jackson Games takes anywhere from a few months to a year. But now and then a book comes along that just hangs on and demands attention above and beyond the norm.

From the time I signed the *All the King's Men* contract in December 2001, until the release of the book in early 2004, more than two years elapsed. The initial writing took place during most of 2002, during which I also finished *Cliffhangers 2/e* and wrote *GURPS Traveller: Bounty Hunters* and *GURPS WWII: Return to Honor*. The following year was no easier; *All the King's Men* went through playtest and subsequent drafts, while I cranked out *GURPS SWAT*, *GURPS WWII: Blitzkrieg*, and part of *GURPS All-Star Jam 2004*. Factor in five other, non-GURPS writing projects I was involved in from 2001-2004, and it's more than a mild surprise that *All the King's Men* ever saw the light of day.

But despite the lengthy process (and the occasionally heated discussions about Britain in WWII), the final version ended up a fine product, due in very large part to the patience and work of the WWII line editor, Gene Seabolt.

All Me? No Way!

I've often shared the spotlight with other writers, and producing *All the King's Men* was no exception. Because I was strapped for time from the beginning of the project, I relied heavily on fellow writers and historian friends to provide several pieces of the book during the initial draft.

A tremendous amount of technical material came from tech-savvy GURPS authors and playtesters. The small arms section is almost entirely the creation of GURPS weapon wiz, Hans-Christian Vortisch; and vehicle virtuosos like Brandon Cope and Kenneth Peters designed every vehicle in the book. The "additional material" credits in the front of the book attest to the number and quality of contributors to the project; without their help I could never have completed the book and still met the deadlines such a project incurs.

Unfortunately, these additional contributions took place in mid- and late-2002, a full year before the book reached playtest, making it difficult to wade through the playtest comments and deal with them quickly and easily. A substantial amount of my playtest time was spent checking dates, places, regimental designations, and other historical facts; occasionally I had few (if any!) references to check the information, and had to email my contributors to find out which of them might have the answer.

The Playtest: Crucial, but Time Consuming

As with other SJ Games projects, the playtest provided no end of criticisms, complaints, suggestions, fact corrections, and general opinions. It has been my experience, however, that playtests for WWII books seem to generate far more "fact checking" problems than most books. The problem is compounded by the disparity of historical information available in print; one source regularly contradicts others, and revisionist historical accounts abound.

Dealing with issues that arose during playtest was, perhaps, more difficult than writing the original manuscript to begin with. At times, with sufficient research, a reasonably solid fact could be established and confirmed. Other alleged factual errors simply couldn't be verified one way or another, and the manuscript had to either 1) be changed to address the equivocal nature of the data, 2) be changed to reflect the opinion of the majority of reliable sources, or 3) simply take a neutral stand on the issue based on the information that was available. All three techniques were used, depending on the topic being discussed. For example, determining the caliber of bullet used in a Sten Mk V submachine gun was easy; trying to sum up small unit tactics used by the British Army across a five-year-span was not!

A Book at Last

The British war experience was unlike any other, and certainly far removed from what my family experienced here in the United States. It shaped men and women at home and abroad, and the Commonwealth almost single-handedly stemmed the Nazi tide for more than two years. After several years of Allied effort, WWII came to an end.

Likewise, after two years of collaborative effort, the work of creating *All the King's Men* ended as well. With what result?

The final draft is richer, more detailed, and more accurate, thanks to the hard work of friends and colleagues. I also came away from the project with a greater appreciation for the Britons and their contribution to the war, as well as the trials they endured on the home front. My own research turned up stories of triumph and tragedy, but the personal experiences of those who lived through it, or whose families did, carried even greater impact.

Taking two years from start to finish, *All the King's Men* is certainly the most time-consuming project I've worked on. But despite the trials along the way, the finished product is also one I'm proud of. My hat's off to those that contributed along the way, as well as the men and women around that world that gave their time, energy, loved ones, and lives more than 50 years ago. It is no exaggeration to say that the world today owes a tremendous debt of gratitude to all the king's men.

The Highly Anticipated Director's Cut

As has become the custom, the following information is provided as an adjunct to *All the King's Men*. As it turns out, very little additional material was cut from the draft, and much of what was cut was sporadic and diffuse, making it unusable to most gamers. The only section that was cut intact -- *The Graf Spee* -- was originally included due to my own personal fascination with the German raider and the personal integrity of her captain, Hans Langsdorff. The section was cut for space, primarily because it did not directly relate to the British war effort.

The Graf Spee

The German raider KMS *Graf Spee* was dispatched to the Atlantic in September 1939 and quickly became a thorn in the side of the British Admiralty. Stationed in the South Atlantic, the "pocket battleship" waited quietly near the sea-lanes until activated by radio from OKM (German HQ) in Berlin (see W:IC33). On September 26, 1939, *Graf Spee* received word to begin raider operations against merchant ships. Four days later she recorded her first success by sinking the merchant ship *S.S. Clement*. This was only the first of many.

Over the next two and a half months the *Graf Spee* (commanded by Captain Hans Langsdorff) sank nine merchantmen totaling over 50,000 tons of shipping. Langsdorff warned merchant ships by radio before he opened fire, giving the British merchantmen plenty of time to abandon ship before the *Graf Spee* sank their vessel.

The *Graf Spee* soon caught the attention of the British Admiralty. It responded by forming 10 different hunting groups comprising nearly two dozen of the latest French and British warships. The squadrons were given letter designations (e.g., Force K, Force H, Force L), and many later went on to participate in other famous naval actions (see *The Bismarck*, p. W20). Eventually the German raider's time ran out. While attempting to disrupt the rich merchant traffic off the coast of South America, she was surprised by three British cruisers: HMS *Exeter*, HMS *Achilles*, and HMS *Ajax*. The cruisers attacked *Graf Spee* aggressively, and for an hour and a half a fierce battle raged.

The *Exeter* was severely damaged; nearly every man aboard was killed or wounded during the attack. *Exeter* eventually lost her guns, caught fire, and began listing badly. She soon withdrew from the fight. HMS *Ajax* was also heavily damaged, with two turrets knocked out and radio communications destroyed.

Eventually, *Graf Spee* herself broke off the action. Although she was not critically damaged, Langsdorff was certain

his ship could not continue without repairs, and sought refuge in neutral Uruguay. With British cruisers waiting off the coast, and reinforcements no doubt en route, Langsdorff opted to scuttle the *Graf Spee* rather than allow her to fall into British hands. Unable to cope with the loss of his ship, Langsdorff shot himself that night.

Guard, Turn, Dodge, Parry, Spin, Thrust!

More Combat Maneuvers for *d20 System*

by Justin Bacon

The new combat maneuvers presented in this article can be used by any character (including monsters and NPCs). Just like a bull rush or a disarm, characters don't need to take feats in order to perform these maneuvers; they're simply new tactical options which can be used upon the field of combat.

New feats which improve the use of these new maneuvers can also be found below.

New Maneuvers

Back-to-Back

On your turn you can choose to fight back-to-back with an ally as a free action. The ally must be within five feet, and must choose to fight back-to-back with you. While fighting back-to-back, you and your ally work to protect each other -- shoring up each other's defense and, literally, watching each other's back. You and your ally make attacks at a -2 penalty while fighting back-to-back, but so long as you are fighting back-to-back you cannot be flanked.

Note: You can fight back-to-back with multiple allies. However, in order to fight back-to-back with multiple allies, all your allies not only need to be within 5 feet of you, but within five feet of each other.

Drive Back

As a melee attack, you can attempt to drive back your opponent. In doing so, you are attacking in a way that should force your opponent to back away from you. When you perform the drive back maneuver, your opponent can either choose to move five feet directly away from you or remain where he is.

If he chooses to move, he suffers no adverse effects. However, you can choose to follow him (also moving five feet).

If he chooses not to move, you resolve your attack against them normally.

Note: The movement taken as part of the drive back does not count against your movement or your opponent's movement for the round. Your movement does not provoke an attack of opportunity from your opponent, nor does his movement provoke an attack of opportunity from you. However, this movement may provoke attacks of opportunity from other combatants.

Engage

As a melee attack you can choose to engage one opponent. If an engaged opponent attempts to move away from you before your next turn, you may take an attack against him at the same Base Attack Bonus as the attack you used to engage them (this attack is in addition to any attacks of opportunity you would normally be able to take).

Note: Even if you have more than one attack per round, you cannot engage a single opponent more than once (although you can engage multiple opponents at once).

Parry

On your turn you can choose to use one or more of your attacks as a parry. If anyone attempts to perform a melee attack against you before your next turn, you may use one of your parries. Doing so allows you to apply the attack bonus of the attack you sacrificed as a bonus to your Armor Class against that one attack.

Note: You cannot parry an armed attack while unarmed, unless you have the Improved Unarmed Strike feat (or similar class ability). This also means that you cannot parry an unarmed attack from someone who possesses the Improved Unarmed Strike feat (or similar class ability), unless you also possess the Improved Unarmed Strike feat (or similar class ability).

Throw

When grappling an opponent, you can attempt to throw him as an attack (in addition to the other options presented in the standard *d20 System*). To do so, make an opposed grapple check. If you succeed, make a Strength check. You throw your opponent five ft. + 1 ft./2 points above 10 on this check, to a maximum distance of your Height $\times 2$.

Characters who are thrown for 10 feet or more suffer damage as if they had fallen a distance equal to the throw. As with falling damage, a successful Tumble check (DC 15) allows a character to ignore the first 10 feet.

Special: Monks who possess the Leap of the Clouds class ability can ignore the maximum distance limitation when throwing opponents.

New Feats

Expert Grappler [General]

You are skilled at grappling opponents and are capable of performing maneuvers in combat that others cannot.

Benefit: The Expert Grappler feat gives you three new options during a grapple:

- If you pin an opponent during a grapple, you can choose to immediately bull rush them. (If you or your opponent are being grappled by others, however, you must first escape those grapples.) To do so, perform the bull rush maneuver normally (however, you are already in their space, so you do not need to move in before making the opposed strength check).
- When an opponent attempts to escape your pin, you can attempt to throw them rather than allowing them the chance to escape. Before resolving the escape check, make an opposed grapple check. If your opponent succeeds, they make their escape check normally. If you succeed, you can throw your opponent as a free action.
- When you escape a grapple, you can leave your opponent prone. After making a successful escape check, immediately make a Trip attack against your opponents.

Normal: See the description of grapple options.

Improved Drive Back [General]

You are particularly skilled at using your melee attacks to drive back your opponent.

Prerequisites: Int 13+, Expertise

Benefit: When performing the drive back maneuver, your opponents are driven back 10 feet.

Normal: A character performing a drive back normally only forces his opponent to move back five feet.

Improved Engage [General]

You are adept at keeping your opponents occupied on the field of combat.

Prerequisites: Int 13+, Expertise

Benefit: If a character chooses to disengage from you after you have used the engage maneuver, you attack them at your highest Base Attack Bonus.

Normal: When attacking a character who chooses to disengage from you, you attack them at the same Base Attack Bonus of the attack you sacrificed to engage them.

Improved Parry [General]

You are highly skilled at defending yourself from the blows of others.

Prerequisites: Int 13+, Expertise

Benefit: For each attack you choose to use as a parry, you can perform two parries. In other words, if you choose to use one attack as a parry, you would be able to parry two melee attacks before your next turn.

Normal: For each attack you choose to use as a parry, you can perform only one parry.

Power Drive [General]

You are capable of forcing your opponents to retreat from your melee attacks.

Prerequisites: Str 13+, Power Attack

Benefit: When you perform a drive back, if your opponent chooses to remain where he is, you may choose to force him to step back instead taking an attack. You and your opponent must make an opposed attack roll. If you succeed, your opponent must move back.

Normal: When performing a drive back without this feat, your opponent can choose to remain where he is.

Optional New Skill

The following new skill, Martial Arts, is optional. If you use it in your game, those trained in unarmed combat (i.e. those who take ranks in the skill) will become far more potent against those untrained in unarmed combat. Those who are frustrated by the fact that a 20th-level monk is not noticeably better at tripping an opponent than a 1st-level monk should consider this skill.

Martial Arts is a class skill for fighters, monks, assassins, and warriors. It is a cross-class skill for all the other classes in the the *d20 System*. When using classes found in other books, the DM will need to make a judgment call as to whether or not Martial Arts should be a class skill.

Martial Arts (Str)

You are skilled in unarmed combat, capable of performing certain combat maneuvers with great skill and precision.

Check: When attempting a bull rush, making a trip attack, or throwing an opponent in a grapple use this skill check instead of making a Strength check.

Retry: No, although you can attempt the same maneuver again.

Special: When someone attempts to make a trip attack against you, you can choose to use Dexterity as the key ability for this skill.

Julius Schwartz, R.I.P.

Before I became involved with *Pyramid*, I generally considered myself a writer . . . or at the very least a wannabe-writer. However, after I took the reins of *Pyramid* (four years ago this week), I came to associate myself more closely with my editorial duties. Oh, sure, I still do a fair bit of writing, but number-wise the alligator wants to eat the four million words I've edited more than the half-million I've written.

This has led to a number of interesting self-image issues. Primary among them is that, all things considered, I don't have many people I look up to for professional inspiration. When I'm writing, I can tell myself, "Wow, I hope I do half as good a job with this as . . ." and plug in the name of a dozen or so writers from across various creative fields I love.

But when it comes to editing, there are almost no people that I can conjure up and think, "I hope I can get close to the legacy of . . ."

In fact, there was only one person I routinely recalled in my editorial duties. That person was Julius Schwartz, long-time editor for DC Comics as well as one of the founders of science fiction fandom. Julie passed away on Sunday, February 8th.

I'm not going to write a eulogy of Julie's many achievements and contributions here; there are, frankly, many people much more qualified than I am to do so. (I can especially recommend Mark Evanier's comments and anecdotes from [February 8th](#) and [9th](#), as well as [DC Comics' eulogy](#).) Suffice it to say, as some highlights, that Julie edited comics for five decades; revitalized the Flash, Batman, and Superman when all three were in danger of disappearing; and, as an agent, sold Ray Bradbury's first story and some of H.P. Lovecraft's last ones.

Instead, I'm going to post some random thoughts as to what I've gleaned, both from Julie and his passing.

As an editor, Julie was inclusive. When DC Comics revitalized their defunct heroes in the 1950s, they were completely new versions; the (then-new) Flash did not live in the same world as the "old" Flash, and in fact the old version had only existed as a comic book character that the new iteration used as inspiration. I don't know the state of comic fandom at the time, but I imagine this caused a bit of dismay for long-time fans; what happened to the old Flash, Green Lantern, or Atom? Were their stories merely insignificant comics in this new vision? But several years after those characters were introduced, Julie used an idea from science fiction to tie it all together; by making alternate dimensions (where Earth-1 was the current world and Earth-2 was the "golden age" world), he was able to have the older heroes exist in their own stories, *and* interact with their new incarnations.

Think about how encompassing this is. In one stroke Julie was able to fondly recall an entire library of classic comic stories, while still keeping the modern tales relevant and new. The Superman and Batman who fought in World War II that someone read about as a child are still around; they just happen to be elsewhere. And having different versions of these icons meet must have been a truly exciting prospect . . . not unlike having Captain Kirk meet Picard, only in a story that wasn't pig excrement.

The best games continue to do be inclusive as well. As I've mentioned [before](#), one of the reasons I'm quick to sing *Vampire's* praises, for example, is that practically *any* vampire concept a player can bring to the table -- vampires as monsters, vampires as Anne Rice-esque fops, vampires as reflectionless servants of darkness, and so on -- can be represented in the game. (I suspect the converse of this is why I consider *Werewolf* to be a much less compelling and difficult-to-sell game; practically *no* preconceived notions about werewolves are true there.) I've tried to do use inclusive principles as an editor, as well. There are hundreds of different types of games -- many styles, genres, and systems -- and I've tried to ensure that everyone who reads *Pyramid* would hopefully find *something* that appeals to them.

Julie was excellent at determining the core of a character or story. In his revitalizations of Superman and Batman, he was able to pare down a lot of the cruft that had accumulated on them and return them to their essences. Thus Batman became a city-bound detective again, and his cases become gloomier and more mysterious (instead of the goofy

planet-hopping adventures from the previous decade). Superman became a true Man of Tomorrow, with incredible powers but greater responsibilities. Julius eliminated kryptonite as the omnipresent equalizer that had dogged Superman for decades, but also removed some of the more ludicrous of the Man of Steel's powers.

This is another area where I've tried to apply my editorial skills. In general, I look for articles to be the best type of that article it can. If I receive an article that's, say, a modern action-adventure story, except two-thirds of the way through a ghost appears and gives the heroes some new instructions, I'll likely reject it and tell the writer to either introduce supernatural elements earlier in the adventure or remove the spirit entirely. Or if I receive an article that is half about undersea adventuring and half about building submarines, I'll probably tell the writer to split it in two. Julie had a gift for looking at a story or character and telling what *kind* of creation it wanted to be; I have to work at it.

Finally, I've taken one more thought from Julie's passing. About a month ago, when Julie was in the hospital, long-time media professional Mark Evanier set up an e-mail address to write to Julie and publicized it on his [website](#), with the idea that he would print out the letters and mail them to Julie at the hospital. This was the letter I wrote.

Dear Julie,

I have been the editor of an online gaming magazine for four years now. Our magazine just had its 10th anniversary (having migrated to the Internet five years ago), and I consider us one of the few online ventures that escaped the Internet Bubble intact.

Anyway, one of my mantras I like to say for our magazine is, "If I'm doing my job right as an editor, no one knows I'm there."

After all, no one picks up a magazine and goes, "Damn! Someone edited the -heck- out of this magazine!" or "Wow! Did you see how that one article was =edited=?!?"

No, people only notice that the magazine even -has- an editor when I make mistakes, either on a micro level (I fail to catch a dumb typo or an incorrect word choice) or a macro level (I select an article that readers really dislike, or pick something that has already been done better elsewhere).

As such, I hope you can take it as one of the most sincere compliments I can offer when I say that, for many, many years as a young comic reader and fan, I didn't even know you existed.

Oh, sure, in hindsight I can recognize your fingerprints all over my favorite comics: well-chosen stories, attention to characterization, value with each issue, and a delicate balance between "advancing" a character while at the same time keeping it accessible and true to the book's roots.

And, of course, this doesn't even count all the additional bits I know an editor does every day. Mistakes and misspellings were nonexistent, at least to my memory. The letter columns were always thoughtful and encouraged dialog between the creators and the fans. Writers and artists were always well-chosen for their assignments, such that -- as a young fan -- I usually had a hard time even -considering- other creators in those roles.

And it's when these facts are absent from today's comics that I fully realize how much I admire and appreciate you. Every typo I see, every continuity error, every woefully miscast creator, every time a book runs late, every time a beloved character drifts far afield of what made me a fan, I find myself thinking: "Julie never would have allowed this..."

I have met you several times at DragonCon; although you've graciously and personally signed my copies of "Man of Two Worlds," "Essential Showcase," and "Last Superman Story," I don't know if I've ever shared my thoughts with you on this. To be honest, it's usually all I can do to fumble for my latest rediscovered Schwartzian treasure for an autograph, and maybe mutter a thanks or two. However, as an editor who wants to do the best job possible, I find myself constantly judging myself based on the grace and talent of one man: Julius Schwartz.

Thank you for being the most important creator who -- for most of my earliest comic memories -- I didn't even know existed.

I wish you a speedy recovery and hope you get well soon.

Sincerely,

Steven Marsh
Editor of Pyramid Magazine
pyramid@sjgames.com

Although I wrote to Julie, I'm not sure if he ever received it or read it. I wrote the letter on January 29th, and less than two weeks later he was gone.

I don't like letting things go unsaid, and for the most part I've been fairly successful in letting people know how they've affected me or what they've contributed to my life. For some reason, though, I never wrote Julie, and -- despite his eminent approachability and affability -- I never told him in person. This is probably because it wasn't convenient; he didn't have an e-mail address or other obvious means of writing him, and I'm painfully shy around strangers. However, in hindsight this strikes me as a really lame excuse.

If there's one more pearl of wisdom I would pass on, then, it would be to tell the people who've affected you that they've done so. This goes for anyone: friends, artists, professors, family members . . . anyone. We go though touching so many lives, but I suspect that many -- even those who are "famous" or "successful" -- don't know the depths that they've influenced others. Even those who *are* aware -- perhaps in a vague, abstract way -- could probably stand to hear it again. After all, it's difficult to envision a circumstance where you might go, "I really regret telling that person how I feel," but it's easy to come up with a scenario where the opposite is true.

Good-bye, Julie. And thank you.

--Steven Marsh

For those looking for more good Julius Schwartz-touched works, I can recommend the following:

- *Man of Two Worlds*, by Julius Schwartz with Brian M. Thomsen. This was Julie's autobiography, and is a fascinating read, covering in roughly equal proportions his involvement with both science fiction and comics.
- *Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?* by Alan Moore, Curt Swan, George Perez, and Kurt Schaffenberger. This was the last "Silver-Age" Superman story, is the last comic Julie edited, and is probably the best Superman story ever. It still gives me a lump in my throat.
- *Superman #400*, by Elliot Maggin and various. Besides being a good anniversary story itself (highlighting what was the more-epic-than-epic of the 1980s pre-Crisis Superman stories), this book also had pin-ups or contributions of many luminaries -- such as Will Eisner, Jack Kirby, and Steranko -- all in one place. (I should also note

that, as I dug up this issue, I was pleasantly surprised to learn that I had gotten Julie's signature on it.)

- *The Essential Showcase 1956-1959*. This book shows Julie's hand in helping to revitalize the super-hero genre, and includes an interesting snapshot of what comics were before then -- and might have continued to be like -- if the renaissance had been unsuccessful.

Pyramid Pick

Grimm

Grimm: Adventures In A World Of Twisted Fairy Tales (for d20 System)



Published by [Fantasy Flight Games](#)

Written by Robert J. Schwalb

Cover by Larry MacDougall

Illustrated by Jim Brady, Larry MacDougall, James Ryman, and Scott Schomburg

64-page b&W softcover; \$14.95

Grimm: Adventures In A World Of Twisted Fairy Tales is the second release for the "Horizon: New Roleplaying Frontiers" line published by Fantasy Flight Games. Each in the line is a self-contained exploration of a particular world or genre. Designed for the *d20 System*, each title is meant to be -- like many of the current RPGs released in PDF format such as [Buggin' RPG: The Tiny Game of Big Adventures](#) from Deep7 and [Vice Squad: Eighties Police Adventure](#) from Politically Incorrect Games -- used as a diversion from, or a break between, longer campaigns. Of course, there is nothing to prevent a DM from expanding any Horizon-based games into something longer than a mere diversion. To date, the only other Horizon title, [Redline: High Speed Road Duels In A Post-Apocalyptic Future](#), explored a post apocalyptic world in the mode of *Mad Max* and *A Boy and His Dog*, while the forthcoming *Virtual* casts the players as sentient software in imminent danger of nuclear immolation at the hands of squabbling humans. Where *Redline* and *Virtual* explore a pair of different dark futures, *Grimm* looks to the familiar past for its dark origins.

Like [Lashings of Ginger Beer](#) and [Little Fears](#), *Grimm* is a game in which the players take the roles of children. Its tone and subject matter lies between the two, *Lashings of Ginger Beer* being set in an age of innocence, and *Little Fears* being about the all too real threats of the bogeymen, creatures under the bed and worse still, of child abuse. *Grimm* lies closer to *Little Fears* in tone and feel, but its subject matter is not quite so adult in nature.

As its title suggests, *Grimm* is set in a world of fairy tales, specifically those of "*Kinder-und Hausmarchen*" ("Children and Household") or *Grimm's Fairy Tales* by Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm. They saw their work as an attempt to catalog all of the strange peoples, creatures, and so on of their age, though in *Grimm* it was actually commissioned for some malevolent but unseen employer. As the brothers made a new entry in their book, the very subject of the entry disappeared and receded into myth. Where they disappeared is not known, except by those children unlucky enough to be pulled -- or find their way through -- the doors that lead into the Grimm Lands. There they find a strange but familiar land of patchwork square kingdoms and surrounded by an endless sea. It is just like the real world, only more so, its features exaggerated with looming or impassable mountains, wide and rushing rivers, and thick forests penetrated by narrow paths that lead in from lush green meadows. This land has a fickle nature, with even the Sun and Moon taking an occasional dark pleasure in the suffering below. Even worse, the lay of the land can change while its inhabitants are sleeping, and travel throughout the many little Chequered Kingdoms is not always easy. The quickest routes are by crossing one of the many bridges across the Riotous River (though a toll will have to be paid to the troll beneath it), or to traverse along the Giant Beanstalk, fallen to earth and hollowed out by gnomes to provide safe passage.

Just as dangerous are the denizens of the Grimm Lands. Even the ordinary inhabitants are affected by the madness of their world, such that they will view everything around them as ordinary and the sanity of the children as being quite mad. Worse still are many of its major denizens, each of which is a very twisted interpretation of a figure from a classic fairy tale. There is Humpty Dumpty, the Rotten King, who was not put back together properly and is homicidally insane, both shell and mind cracked; the Three Little Pigs, who have become specialists in fortress construction; Mother Goose, who flies out over the great and awful forest in search of children to torment; and a cross-dressing evil queen with a hatred of all women, starting with Snow White.

Player characters in *Grimm* are children between the ages of eight and 12, for they possess the imagination to not only end up in the Grimm Lands, but also to find their way out . . . which is their eventual objective. Counted as small creatures under the *d20 System*, the characters are rolled up as normal, except for being physically weaker than adults, only rolling 2d8 for Strength. Instead of class and race, players select one of six archetypes, each obvious in their stereotyping and combining the concept of class and race in one. The six are the Bully, the Dreamer, the Jock, the Nerd, the Normal Kid, the Outcast, and the Popular Kid. Each archetype consists of only six levels, with one level gained at the end of an adventure, reflecting the direct and simple nature of a game in which survival is its own reward. An archetype comes with an inherent Armor Class bonus that increases by level, but this works only as long as they remain un-armored. Each archetype also possesses an equally inherent flaw; for example the Bully is only secure if he has the upper hand and suffers penalties after losing three quarters of his hit points. Similarly, the Normal Kid cannot over-specialize in his skills and will always be the first target of choice for any aggressor. In addition, because they are children, all archetypes possess Imagination Points -- the Dreamer more than any other does -- that can be used to fuel small changes in the Grimm Lands around them as well as Incantations, the game's equivalent of spells.

Grimm reduces the *d20 System* skill list to just 25 skills. For example, Diplomacy, Gather Information, and Sense Motive all fall under the new Socialize skill, the Boy Scout skill covers First Aid plus Survival, and Athletics covers all physical skill outside of combat. Other new skills include the familiar Home Ec and Industrial Arts, while the less-familiar Magical Intuition is used to learn and cast Incantations, and Nimbleness is used to avoid attacks of opportunity, replacing both the Escape Artist skill and Armor Class when actively dodging.

New feats are also detailed, including six origin feats, one of which must be selected during character generation. These are City Kid, Exchange Student, Home Schooled, Orphan, Rich Kid, and Farm Kid. The other new feats are either tied into the nature of the kid or that of the Grimm Lands. Thus for the former there is Allowance, Brat, I'm Telling, Punk, and Self Reliant, while for the latter there is Cut it Open, the ability to free an ally trapped inside the gut of a monster that has swallowed them whole; Inedible, which gives a child an unappealing culinary quality to the monsters that would eat them; and Maturity, with which a character can overcome their archetype's inherent flaw. In some cases there is a natural and obvious progression in these feats. For example, a player wanting their character to hold lofty ideals might select Promising so that all Knights, nobles, and royalty will recognize a certain noble quality in them, then progress on to Noble Spirit, which gives benefits when they are protecting someone else during combat, and then Knightly Prowess, which gives bonuses when using a knight's weapons.

At the beginning of the game each child has a set of equipment to fit its nature: Studious, Prepared, Distracted, Devious, Equipped, and Fashionable. They also have focuses, treasured items into which they place their hopes and dreams; as long as a focus remains in his possession, a child in the Grimm Lands will not lose hope. Like their starting equipment, a focus also reflects their nature. Yet each can also provide a special ability. A beeper can warn when a friend is in danger, a mobile phone connects to the Grimm Lands Answering Service and will answer one question each day, a holy book will suggest the proper course of action just like the *augury* spell, and an umbrella will act as a *feather fall* spell.

Arms and armor is handled somewhat differently to the standard *d20 System* game. Weapon size is described relative to a child's own size, so to a small character, an adult's hunting knife would be the equivalent of a long sword. Armor comes not as single suits but as three pieces: one for the body, plus a shield and helmet. These pieces can be prosaic, including cardboard, football pads, heavy winter coat, or wooden barrel, each worn on the body; even serving platters or barrel lids can be used as shields. Actual combat encourages cooperation between children, especially against larger, more capable opponents. It also covers the common theme of being swallowed whole by (for example) the Big

Bad Wolf.

Imagination Points fuel many of an archetype's innate abilities and can be spent to alter the world around them: heal a point of damage, find a simple but useful item lying around, use a skill they do not actually possess, control the next action of an NPC, enchant an item for a limited time, and even boost any aspect of a character on a on-time permanent basis. Though Imagination Points can be regained overnight, a child with no Imagination Points suffers from an exhaustive fatigue. Spell or incantations, also fueled by Imagination Points, can take mere minutes for 0-level spells to days for higher levels, and can come from any *d20 System* school bar those of Evocation and Necromancy, as they are not in keeping with the flavor of *Grimm*. The higher level spells can be expensive in terms of Imagination Point expenditure to cast, but no incantation requires a concentration check nor can it be interrupted or provoke an attack of opportunity. Though some NPCs are able to cast spells as per standard *d20 System* rules, the possession of an imagination as modeled through the use of Imagination Points is a major advantage that children have over the inhabitants of the Grimm Lands, who have neither points nor an imagination.

Balanced against the child's imagination is the danger of Despair. As long as they have the powers of imagination and the companionship of their friends, then their fears can be kept at bay. Yet if they end up alone in an unknown and frightening place, Will Checks are required to resist Despair; failure results in a loss of their Imagination Points and eventually causes an exhaustive state. This perilous situation can be successfully resisted, and can also be recovered from if returned to both the companionship of friends and restful sleep.

As well as describing the major denizens and places of the Grimm Lands, including the Devil, the Dragon, and Giants, there is solid advice for the DM on running a campaign set within the Grimm Lands. This starts out with mechanical elements, such as templates for both upright *and* talking animals, but also discusses staples of the genre. In particular these include the binding nature of oaths and the dangers of breaking them, and the perils of falling prey to temptation. The appendix is where the authors discuss "Telling Tales," the creation of adventures in the Grimm Lands. The emphasis is upon taking a moral from a fairy tale, and giving it that *Grimm* twist, but this should be part of the ongoing quest of the children to find *the* door out of the Grimm Lands. Running at just two pages, it is a shame that no examples of adventure seeds are included, but then a referee should be able to find plenty of ideas and concepts to be inspired from throughout this supplement.

Physically, *Grimm* is a very well done softcover from the pleasing cover inwards. The internal artwork is equally good, particularly that of Larry MacDougall, whose beautiful depiction of the six archetypes echoes the feel of Atlas Games' *Lunch Money* card game. Elsewhere he captures both the horror of Little Red Riding Hood and the madness of the Rotten King, Humpty Dumpty perfectly. James Ryman's line art is also good, depicting equally well the dark and twisted whimsy of fairy tales in the Grimm Lands. Unfortunately, his artwork in a couple of places has been reproduced back to front -- the only real production error in *Grimm*.

In setting out to explore both the genre of fairy tales and the horror we felt at reading them or having them read to us, *Grimm* lives up to the subtitle of the Horizon line: "New Roleplaying Frontiers." At least in terms of the *d20 System*, because *Little Fears* has explored the same territory, at least in intent rather than genre. Bearing that in mind, *Grimm's* approach to the subject is no less valid or uninteresting, though it is not as strong in material as *Little Fears*. This makes it more suitable for a less adult audience, but then an adult gaming group is likely to appreciate and get the most out of *Grimm*. In some ways it is a shame that it has been constrained to just 64 pages, as it deserves an expanded treatment; it is also disappointing that the archetypes are constrained to just six levels. The obvious way around this is for the referee to award character levels when they feel it is appropriate rather than at the end of every adventure. Otherwise a campaign may be shorter than the book deserves.

In the end, *Grimm* is not a horror RPG, although it contains such elements. It shares with [Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game](#) a sense of empowerment, there of female empowerment, here in *Grimm* of empowering children against the fears they acquire from tales. In *Grimm* they have the chance to face them down, even though they have been given a dark and sometimes quite adult twist. That empowerment is perfectly modeled in the use of the Imagination Points, without which the children could not stand up to the threats they face in the Grimm Lands. If *Redline: High Speed Road Duels In A Post-Apocalyptic Future* was good, *Grimm: Adventures In A World Of Twisted Fairy Tales* is even better, more intelligent and more adult because of its subject matter and its treatment.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Review

Time Control

Time Control

Published by [Thompson Industries](#)



Designed by Anthony Thompson

Edited by Andrew Mayer

Illustrated by Rob Arnow

4 timeline boards (full-color), 72 time wave tokens (full-color), 31 Fate cards, 64 Problem Cards, 88 time control tokens, 48 time agent tokens, rulebook, boxed; \$24.95

As confusing as time travel can be, trying to mimic it in a gaming format can be even harder. Trying to fit the broad spectrum of this literary device into the compact environment of a board or set of cards seems almost impossible. *Time Control*, the new time travel game from Thompson Industries, is of little help.

The object of the game is to be the last time-traveling power left in the game.

Each player gets a timeline board showing the present and the six other descending eras of the past (back to the prehistoric) for their timeline, and a set of time agent disks representing the men sent through history to maintain or fight for the timeline. The disks are generic agents, brawlers, historians, and scientists, the last three having special abilities for dealing with duels or time waves.

In a single round, activity is split into two turns: the Time Agent turn and the Time Wave turn. During the Time Agent turn, after all the players have sent their agents to whatever era they want on their board and "alerted" (flipped over) those agents that were busy doing something the previous turn, players may use agents to take actions.

The game plays in real time, without turns. Everyone does anything they wish with their agents simultaneously, though if there is a conflict there will be a duel. Actions entail moving through time and attempting to fight other agents or the time waves they start. You can travel backward (as you did at the start of the turn, though when you see what other players do you may want to move more agents), slide sideways through time to the same era on another player's board, or snap back to today.

While in the past, you can create a time wave to hurt your opponent, you can attack an enemy agent in the same time and board as you, or you can try to stop a time wave in your current era (waves attack you in the Time Wave turn). Time waves comprise time wave tokens, and as these move through your history they may gain strength. When you attack one, you simply remove a token from the wave (alternately, a Historian or Scientist can flip over some or all of them). Other forms of combat are more involved.

If two or more players want to perform actions that conflict, they must duel for Time Control. Similarly, if they want to attack other agents, or if a time wave attacks them, there will be a duel. In a duel, players use their Time Control tokens or draw a Fate card. A player's tokens are numbered 1 through 21 (or marked Fate), and he chooses which one he will bring to the fight. Using the Fate token means you draw a Fate card -- valued from 15 to -15 -- and use its value instead. The higher value wins, though if a player loses, he can demand a re-duel. When the (re-)duel is over, the players discard the highest-value token they used and draw another Fate card. This last card will dictate what happens to the winner and the loser: move the agents, busy them, discard them, etc.

If a time wave passes through history and ends up in your present day, you may be saddled with Problem cards. The tokens in a wave say "Create" on one side and "Solve" on the other, and give or take problems as appropriate. Problems are technological, cultural, or societal in nature, and if a player has four or more of a single type, his timeline is eliminated from the game. Each card also lists a limitation for that player or his agents while the problem is in force -- time travel may be limited, re-duels may be prohibited, and time tokens may have to be chosen randomly.

You can also cash out. This is a twisted system by which you can trade out Time Control tokens, agents, and problems for one another, somewhat like an unforgiving round of rock-paper-scissors.

Time Control suffers in many ways. While the components are fine and the pictures on the timeline boards have an artful, elegant simplicity, the rules suck a lot of the fun out of the germ of a good idea. The timelines lack any concrete events or context, which wouldn't be bad in and of itself except that it leaves behind a generic, flavorless gaming experience (the game could be taking place on Earth, or it could just as easily be Alpha Centauri). The need for simplicity in a time travel game is understandable, but the bland strategy game that apparently is meant to stand in for a lot of complex interlocking historical events leaves one wanting. The Problem cards are similarly inscrutable -- the effects and rules are clear, but if there's a matching theme it isn't entirely obvious. There's no more perspective on events here than there is with the royal families in a pack of playing cards. The cards also layer on a lot of new things to remember, and since the cards can be cashed out it's an ever-changing landscape of rules and limitations.

With the circular nature of the cashing in method and the cyclic rotation of agents through the time streams, getting to the end of a game seems more likely to happen by sheer accident than through well-planned intentions -- if an ending is reached at all. *Time Control* is the gaming equivalent of doing long division in your head. Like a chess game with no parameters for movement, it's an almost impossible exercise in trying to anticipate the moves of others with actions of your own. Combined with the dry and anemic feel of the generic setting, it ends up being a contest of stamina to see who will cry "mercy" to the rules first.

--Andy Vetromile

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Virginia Wade: A Thoroughly Modern Mage

For *GURPS*

by Mark Gellis

Everyone has neighbors. Some of them change your life.

When Virginia Wade was a little girl, she knew Ruth Fitz as the old lady with wispy silver-white hair who lived in a big house at the end of her block. Mrs. Fitz was a nice neighbor. Her husband had died years ago and she did not go out much, but sometimes you would see her gardening. She would always say hello to Virginia and her mother if they saw each other at the grocery store, and she always had good candy on Halloween. But there was something funny about her . . . something which Virginia could never put her finger on.

The years went by and Virginia was in high school. Mrs. Fitz still lived down the block. Virginia got involved in her high school's "Meals on Wheels" program. She wasn't sure why she joined; it just felt like the right thing to do. Naturally, they assigned her to visit the senior citizens in her neighborhood. Including Mrs. Fitz.

She liked visiting Mrs. Fitz. The old lady was frail, but her mind was sharp, and she loved talking to Virginia. They talked about everything from television to politics. Over time, the conversations started to become more and more philosophical. Mrs. Fitz, it seemed, knew quite a bit about magic. Not stage magic, but real magic.

At first, Virginia did not believe magic actually worked, but she thought what Mrs. Fitz had to say about it was interesting.

One day, she asked Virginia if she would like to see something. Virginia nodded. Mrs. Fitz took out a candle, muttered a few words, and the candle lit itself. Virginia stared at the flame until Mrs. Fitz said a few more words and the flame put itself out.

Virginia asked how she had done that. Mrs. Fitz responded by asking if she would like her to teach her to do it herself. When Virginia wondered aloud if that was possible, Mrs. Fitz smiled, as if she had been waiting for years to answer that question, saying, "Oh, child, of course you can. Like me, you have the Gift. You just needed someone to teach you how to use it."

In fact, she *had* been waiting for years. She had known from the first time she saw Virginia in her stroller that the little girl had the Gift. So she had waited until Virginia was old enough to be told, and "arranged" for her to start visiting so she could decide if the girl was someone she wanted to teach.

Virginia was one of the smartest girls in her class. She was pretty, but skinny, and had braces. She was proud of how well she did in school, and she had friends, but a lot of the time she felt somewhere between invisible and ugly . . . especially when she realized that, once again, she had been talking too much and people were laughing at her. And now someone wanted to teach her how to pull the secret strings of reality. Did she want to learn magic? She nodded eagerly.

And that was how Virginia Wade started her education in magic. She finished high school. She went to college. She went to graduate school. She got a job. But she stayed close, never living more than 50 miles from her home town. She would call Mrs. Fitz every few days to talk, and also visited Mrs. Fitz once a week to study together.

It was more than just the magic, though. The two women became close friends. Mrs. Fitz came to all of her graduations. Virginia called her "Grandma Fitz." Eventually, so did the rest of her family. (Ginny has never told them that she is a mage and that Mrs. Fitz was her teacher. To this day, they know only that Mrs. Fitz was a sweet old lady who lived down the block. Which, of course, was quite true.)

Ginny learned how to make potions. She learned the physics of magic, what Mrs. Fitz called Thaumatology. And she learned about the world of magic, of the people who had the Gift, and of the other things that had and used magic, hiding in the shadowed places, of wood and stone and even steel, some of them friendly, some of them monstrous.

She learned that spells -- real spells -- were difficult to use in our world, because there was little magical energy available. There were other worlds, Mrs. Fitz said, and some of them had a lot of mana, but opening a gate to those worlds could be a risky business.

A few years after Virginia started her first teaching job, Mrs. Fitz died, quietly in her sleep, at the age of 81. In her will, she left Virginia a small collection of books and a silver ring with a ruby in it. The books were mostly about magic and astrology. The ring was completely ordinary; it had been a gift Mrs. Fitz's husband had given her many years ago and Virginia had always admired it. Virginia considers it one of her most precious possessions and wears it most days on her right ring finger.

Virginia, or Ginny, as she likes to be called, is now 30. She has an M.A. in Foreign Languages and teaches at a local high school. She is a good teacher and quite popular with her colleagues, except for her tendency to just keep talking sometimes, mostly about completely trivial topics, long after a conversation has run out of steam. (The one exception to this is that she never talks about magic unless she knows someone else is a mage. And, for some reason, she never babbles when she is talking about magic.) This gives some people the impression that she is ditzzy when they first meet her, and they are often surprised to see how intelligent and competent she really is. Most of her students like her, too. The girls think she is nice and smart, if a little ditzzy; the boys think she is nice. And pretty. And a little weird . . .but definitely pretty.

Ginny lives in a small house within walking distance of the school where she teaches. She lives quietly, spending much of her free time reading, gardening, and listening to music. She continues to study magic, mostly on her own, although she sometimes corresponds with other mages. She has been thinking about approaching a powerful mage she met some years ago and asking if she could study under his tutelage. Whether he will accept her as a student, and what he will ask for in return, is left to the GM.

Using Ginny In A Campaign

At 100 points, Ginny could be used as a PC in any modern-day campaign that allowed magic, from a light "urban fantasy" to a far more serious story, such as *GURPS Horror* or *GURPS Cabal*. She could also serve as an ally or contact for heroes (perhaps they are working for the mage with whom she wishes to study; his "tuition fee" is that Ginny helps them out on occasion). Or, she could be a client, initiating an adventure by asking the player characters for their help, and then providing whatever assistance the GM considers appropriate.

As a player character, ally, contact, or client, Ginny could be quite useful to a team of adventurers. She is a capable linguist who speaks and reads five languages. She knows quite a bit about literature, history, and the occult, and is a skilled enough researcher to be able to find out what she does not already know. Her magical abilities, while limited, are still fairly impressive. What Ginny cannot do very well is fight. She has studied karate so she can defend herself (and because it is good aerobic exercise), but this is her only combat skill. (It would be a simple matter to replace Karate with a Gun skill, but it is not clear why a person like Ginny would learn to use a firearm, unless she has already been involved in some dangerous situations.) In adventures involving serious combat, her limitations need to be taken into consideration.

Alchemy is probably her most powerful magical ability. Potions take longer to make in low mana zones and the effects do not last as long, but the ability to make potions and their effects remain the same. Ginny is also a competent herbalist and astrologer. She knows several spells, but because she lives in a low mana world, her effective skill is at a penalty of -5. This means that many of her spells require long, elaborate castings, and about half of the time they still do not work.

Ginny knows other mages, and could get in touch with them if she needed to, but she is not close to any of them, so

they do not count as Allies or Patrons. (The exception would be if she had started studying with the aforementioned senior mage; the cost of the Patron advantage would then need to be balanced with Duty, Sense of Duty, Enemies, or other disadvantages to keep her at 100 points, if someone wanted to use her as a PC.)

Despite her many positive traits, it would be fair to say that Ginny is also a bit of a flake. As such, she offers an excellent opportunity for players who want to play a character who is a little on the eccentric side, and good for some comic roleplaying, but who is still competent and capable.

One of her long term goals is to become more knowledgeable about magic. Naturally, this creates possibilities for adventures. Ginny might learn of a rare book of magic and try to locate it. But someone else (or something) is also looking for the book, and willing to do anything to keep her from getting to it first. Or Ginny might accidentally uncover some eldritch secret, which would make her the target of those interested in making sure that secret was never revealed. Another possibility is that one of Ginny's connections in the world of magic (perhaps the senior mage with whom she wishes to study) might invite her to join in some project, and there are many ways in which such things can go terribly wrong, ranging from releasing something horrific into our world by accident to drawing the unwanted attention of rivals or enemies.

It would be easy to adapt her for other locations (simply change the Area Knowledge skill) or other periods in the 20th century or late 19th century (probably replacing Computer Operation with Typing, and perhaps replacing Driving with Riding, Karate with Judo or Bow, etc.). She might, for example, be working as a language and literature teacher at an elite girl's school during the Cliffhanger era, or as a translator and occult specialist helping protect the home front in a Weird War II campaign.

Another possibility for a campaign would be to play a group of youngsters -- students at the school where Ginny teaches -- who happen to have unusual talents, becoming her protégés. Ginny knows what it means to be unusual and have a secret, and to have a special talent that needs to be nurtured. She would guide them while they solved mysteries and battled evil. Characters for a "Welcome to Adventure High" campaign might be built with a budget of 75 points. Ginny would gain an Ally Group, available on 12-, and worth 10 points; she would also gain a Secret (Teacher encouraging students to dabble in dangerous activities) [-10]; she probably would not go to jail if her secret came out, but she might be fired and have to start over in another town. Ginny is still worth only 100 points, so she would count as a 5-point Ally, available on 12-, and worth a total of 10 points when designing the youngsters (who would probably have a 5-point Sense of Duty (to Ginny) to reduce the cost). The GM should determine whether their powers would be limited to occult advantages and spells or if they could include psionic or super abilities.

One last possibility for a scenario is if Ginny learned that her beloved mentor Mrs. Fitz had not died of natural causes. Mrs. Fitz was a practicing mage for more than 50 years (she was probably a 150- to 200-point character, with at least half of that in spells and magic-related skills) and may well have crossed paths with some truly unsavory individuals. The books she left Ginny included some of her personal notebooks on the subject of magic. Perhaps they will provide a clue to solving the mystery, if it is a mystery, of her death.

Virginia Wade

Female; Age 30; 5'5", 120 lbs.; Hair: Strawberry Blond, Eyes: Brown, Skin: White

ST: 9 [-10] **DX:** 10 [0] **IQ:** 14 [45] **HT:** 10/9 [-5]
Speed: 5.00 Move: 5 Dodge: 5 Parry: 6

Advantages: Attractive [5]; Contact (Other mages Ginny knows, effective skill 15-, available on 9-, usually reliable) [4], Magery 2 [25]

Disadvantages: Odious Personal Habit (Babbling) [-5]; Secret (Mage) [-10]

Quirks: Has a large collection of hats (and loves wearing them) [-1]; Likes to be called "Ginny" [-1]; Loves plants (and often talks to them) [-1]; Prefers to sleep naked [-1]

Skills: Alchemy-13 [4]; Area Knowledge (Long Island)-13 [1/2]; Astrology-12 [1]; Computer Operation-13 [1/2]; Cooking-13 [1/2]; Driving (Automobile)-10 [2]; Gardening-13 [1]; Herbalist-12 [1]; History-12 [1]; Karate-10 [4]; Literature-12 [1]; Occultism-13 [1]; Professional Skill (Housekeeping)-12 [1/2]; Research-13 [1]; Teaching-13 [1]; Thaumatology-13* [1]

*includes bonus from Magery

Languages: English (native)-14 [0]; French-14 [2]; Italian-13 [1]; Latin-13 [1]; Spanish-14 [2];

Elixirs: Aesculapius-12; Apollo-13; Chiron-13; Delphi-12; Epmetheus-13; Eros-11; Melampus-13; Odysseus-10; Orpheus-12; Phobos-13; Prometheus-12; Tantalus-13; Tyche-11

Spells: Extinguish Fire-17 [6]; Ignite Fire-17 [6]; Illusion Shell-14 [1]; Mind-Reading-17 [6]; Sense Emotion-15 [2]; Sense Foes-14 [1]; Shape Fire-16 [4]; Simple Illusion-14 [1]; Truthsayer-14 [1]

Total Points: 100

Spy Games

by [Chad Underkoffler](#)

Art by [Chris Cooper](#)

Genre: Espionage

Style: Cinematic

Theme(s): Secrets, Action, Order vs. Chaos

Campaign Setting and Background Information

What Everybody Knows

Sixty minutes into the future, it's basically what you see outside your window. . .

What Everybody Doesn't Know

. . . yet beneath the surface, secret organizations strive against each other for the fate of the world!

What Everyspy Knows

The State of the World

It's not the Cold War anymore. This fact of history -- while it hasn't eliminated the need for spies and spying -- started the changes in the nature of espionage. The dwindling importance of nationalism in the face of international relations -- with a few notable holdouts, such as the United States of America -- has given way to the rising importance of multinational organizations, corporations, and ideologies contesting each other for the most important resource on Earth: information. While the national intelligence-networks remain, they're more commonly just recruitment pools for new-style spies. . . and even that is changing, as the modern agencies develop their own idiosyncratic training programs.

Secret Knowledge

Thus, the Great Games of Espionage go on, except the new players outshine the old ones. The two most powerful and effective intelligence organizations on Earth are described below: *CHESS* and *POKER*. Their epic struggles against one another dominate the Great Games.

***CHESS* (Central Headquarters for Espionage, Security, and Safety)**

- **Ideology:** CHESS is all about order, control, and security. It is more important to be safe than free, in their eyes. To that end, they are willing to do anything to protect the world from radical things, be they technologies, individuals, groups, or ideas.
- **Organization:** This organization is composed

Black Knight

of 33 individuals, 32 who are codenamed (and structured) along the lines of the pieces of a standard chess set.

- *Kings/Queens*: The four Kings and Queens are the top, double-oh, licensed to kill superspies of CHESS. By tradition, the Kings are male and the Queens are female agents. While the Kings are nominally of a higher rank than Queens, their roles and duties are the same in practice, with one proviso: the White King and the Black King have responsibility for management of their Color's headquarters (or *Citadel*) -- which they tend to oversee in an executive fashion, delegating the day-to-day to their Pawns (see below).
- *Bishops*: Bishops are intelligence specialists -- gathering, analyzing, manufacturing, and disseminating.
- *Knights*: Knights are highly-trained combatants, assassins, and weaponry experts.
- *Rooks*: Rooks are skilled at construction, demolition, infiltration, and gadgetry.
- *Pawns*: Pawns support their direct superior in the agency, either to extend the superior's skillset (i.e., a Bishop's Pawn may concentrate on information gathering or analysis) or as a supplement to the superior's skillset (i.e., another Bishop's Pawn may be a field agent for their intellectual but wheelchair-bound Bishop). They are batmen, sidekicks, major domos, and bodyguards.



The 33rd individual is the mysterious *Grandmaster*, who moves his pieces as he will in defense of world order. The two Colors of chess pieces indicate a division in CHESS operations and agent skills:


- *White Ops* have a *visible* effect; that is, people will notice that something about the world has changed: destruction of a bridge, introduction of a new piece of technology, a shift in fashion, or the theft of a new telecommunications satellite before launch.
- *Black Ops* have an *invisible* effect; that is, people should not notice that anything has changed: a bridge destroyed and replaced with an exact duplicate (that possess a hidden mechanism), an alteration of an existing technology to add secret new functionality, a minor change in fashion easily attributable to the natural churn of the Paris designers, or the upgrade of a telecommunications satellite to make it into a covert weapons platform.

CHESS operations are generally compartmentalized, working in ignorance of each other; the Grandmaster only informs field-teams of possible conflicts on a need-to-know basis.

- **Hierarchy**: In questions of primacy of rank, orders, or operations, rank comes first, followed by file, then Color (Kingside ranks are superior to Queenside ranks, in a reversal of Steinitz's support of the Queenside majority;

- and Black is always superior to White, in a reversal of the "White always moves first" rule). Thus, a Black Queen's Bishop can give orders to both White Bishops and any operative of lower rank -- no matter their Color - - and is subject to the commands of the Black King's Bishop, both Queens, both Kings, and the Grandmaster.
- **Resources:** CHESS operatives have the best training and most advanced technology -- save in one telling regard -- on Earth. They have dump-trucks full of money, and access to many governmental and corporate entities.
 - **Special:** There are some special aspects to the CHESS organization:
 - *Promotion:* If a lower-ranked operative's skills or knowledge is essential to a particular mission, they can be temporarily promoted to Queen rank, with all the perks, visibility, and danger associated with it.
 - *Castling:* If one of the Kings sends out the command to Castle, this is an immediate, A-1 priority order for all Rooks and their Pawns to assemble at the Citadel -- they are to drop *everything*, even deep-cover work, and haul it to HQ, while all other ranks move to a state of alert.
 - *Check, Checkmate, & Stalemate:* The declaration of *check* means that a King or Queen rank operative is in danger, and all CHESS members in the area are to lend aid. *Checkmate* is used as a codeword to indicate failure of a mission and call for immediate extraction; *stalemate* is the codeword to indicate slow disengagement from a mission, as it cannot be completed under the original parameters.
 - **High Road:** The world is getting wilder and woollier by the day -- folks can make serious bombs out of simple household goods, crime is on the rise, any wacko with a gun and no respect for life (especially their own) can cause massacres, what amounts to uncontrolled psychological warfare is being perpetrated on everyone, and the freedoms we hold so dear are being perverted with ill-intent. It's chaos out there, unsafe for people. CHESS is dedicated to restoring that security, so that people can sleep without fear.
 - **Low Road:** It's all about *control*. Untrammelled liberty has made the world into an abattoir. CHESS is there to clean-up the mess and resurrect a workable structure for the human animal to live and work in, by any means necessary.

POKER (The Peoples' Organization of Knowledge, Espionage, and Revelation)

- **Ideology:** POKER is all about chaos, liberty, and independence. It is more important to be free than safe, in their eyes. To that end, they will do what they must to liberate and inform the world of all the choices they have in technologies, individuals, groups, or ideas that would otherwise get swept discreetly under the carpet. Jack of Hearts
- **Organization:** This organization is composed of 53 individuals divided into 4 suits of 13 members each, who are codenamed (and structured) along the lines of the pieces of a standard deck of cards.
 - *Aces:* Aces are the department heads, older operatives who rarely venture into the field anymore. However, if thrown into play, their long experience in the Great Games and knowledge of the playing field makes them deadly opponents.
 - *Court:* The Court cards are the elite field agents of POKER. They are highly-trained in the skills of their Suit (see below), and well-trained in other aspects of espionage. Court cards are the ones gambling at Monte Carlo, bantering with evil masterminds, and skiing down mountainsides pursued by snow-ninjas. 
 - *Number:* POKER's number cards are lesser agents who support their Suit's Court: the even numbers work in the field, while odd numbers work remotely from secure agency locations.

The fifty-third individual is the mysterious *Joker*, who plays his cards as he will in defense of freedom for all people.

The card Suits indicate a division in POKER operations and operative

skills:

- **Hearts** are the socially-adept agents, the face men, the confidence tricksters, the shmoozers, the femme fatales and lotharios.
- **Diamonds** are the go-to guys and gals for *stuff*: money, cars, weapons, residences, passports, gadgets -- you name it.
- **Spades** are the detectives, the investigators, and the snoops, those agents who rely on their intellect as their greatest weapon.
- **Clubs** are the physical specialists: the fighters, the killers, the pilots, the racecar drivers, the mountain-climbers, and the sneaks.

Knowledge of ongoing POKER operations is usually restricted below the Court level, though at their own discretion, Court agents can inform those working under them of other missions in the same area.

- **Hierarchy:** The Joker is in absolute charge, followed by the Aces, then the Court, then the Numbers; nominally, orders flow downhill in that way. Normally, a POKER agent only respects orders within their Suit; no Suit is considered "higher" than another (but see *Trump* below).
- **Resources:** POKER operatives have pretty good espionage training and slightly advanced gadgetry; however, they are notably lesser-skilled than CHESS agents. There is one thing they possess than no one else does: the *Circuit*, an utterly secure and untraceable worldwide, wideband, wireless communications network. While the Circuit can be jammed in rare occasions (with great effort, enough to knock out *all* human telecommunications in a large geographical region), messages passed between the Joker and his pack of cards cannot be otherwise blocked, detected, intercepted, or decoded. Furthermore, each POKER agent is issued a *Deck*, an ultraminiaturized computer about the size of a postage stamp, that can link into the Circuit, the Internet, and local telecom networks; Decks possess multimedia information transfer, holographic display capability, vast electronic storage, and excellent voice recognition capabilities. Under the all-seeing eye of the Joker, agents are teamed, advised, connected, and directed in real-time, which allows uncanny coordination of their efforts; this "tele-teamwork" is what makes POKER a threat to other organizations such as CHESS. If a Deck is captured by enemy agents, it generally destroys itself; depending upon the situation, this self-destruct can be almost unnoticeable (it just "vanishes") or brilliantly spectacular (it explodes and takes out a city block).
- **Special:** There are some special aspects to the POKER organization:
 - *Trump*: If the Joker declares a Suit *Trump* on a particular mission, POKER operatives of that Suit possess absolute command on the mission. They still must obey their superiors within their Suit, however. This means that on a Hearts Trump mission, the chain of command might run Jack of Hearts, Four of Hearts, Ten of Spades, and King of Clubs.
 - *Wildcard*: The Joker can also declare a particular agent a *Wildcard*, which removes them from under any authority (other than his own) and grants them temporary Ace rank for all Suits.
 - *Table Talk*: *Ante* is the resources required for a mission; the *pot* is the target of the mission, a *check* is an action during the mission that doesn't expend resources or increase risk, a *bet* indicates that more resources must be spent on an aspect of the mission, a *raise* informs other team-members that the risk-factor has increased, *call* means that a showdown in the mission is imminent, and *fold* is a warning/command to abort the mission. If a mission is *stud*, it has an overt component or goal; *draw* missions have covert components or goal.
- **High Road:** The world is getting more organized and stifling by the day -- governments are sticking their noses into everybody's business, corporations are pulling the wool over the eyes of their employees and customers, police powers are growing more wide-ranging and stupid, old-boy networks and outright conspiracies are shaping the future while the people are unaware and disenfranchised, and voices of reasonable dissent are being drowned out. POKER is dedicated to restoring the liberty so many have died for before it's all dubiously taken away in the name of "security."
- **Low Road:** It's all about *chaos*. Too much control has stunted the growth and development of the world, choking off all potentials for change. POKER exists to smash all structures and free the human animal to live and die independently.

Other Players in the Great Games

Really, the only two world-class contenders in this world of 60 minutes into the future are POKER and CHESS. However, there are a few smaller competitors in the Great Games that often turn up, ready to play:

- The once-great national spy organizations (CIA, MI6, KGB, etc.), which are slowly collapsing into uselessness.
- The fresh-faced World Government kids of the UN, ready to make a name for themselves, with little training, experience, or resources: the agents of *WHIST* (World Headquarters for Information/Security Tactics).
- The first "spycorp" -- a fully-tricked out business concern dedicated to (usually industrial) espionage for cash -- that is heavy on the toys and light on the skills: *CRAPS* (The Corporation for Reconnaissance And Professional Spying).
- Ideological organizations, who have minimal skills and resources, but an amazing can-do attitude (and example would be *Rule 8*, a group solely-dedicated to discovering, informing the public of, and -- if possible -- stopping fixed elections).
- Other superspy groups, such as SHIELD, COBRA, KOBRA, HYDRA, or [the Ossuary](#).

What Everyspy Doesn't Know

Who are the Chiefs?

Both CHESS and POKER are run by mysterious commanders. Who are the Grandmaster and the Joker? Here are some options:

- Legendary spies or detectives (fictional characters are great to pattern these sorts of leaders on: James Bond, Felix Leiter, Konrad Siegfried, Operator Number 5, Batman, Sherlock Holmes, Kent Allard, etc.).
- An operative who's serving in the ranks, probably at the middle-ranks of superspydom (CHESS Bishop/POKER Queen or lower).
- Cold War-era supercomputers which, with continual upgrading with the very latest technologies, finally became self-aware.
- Two immortals (spirits, aliens, demigods, mutants) simply playing.
- The same entity (running the Great Games for fun or as some expression of a split personality).
- Some combination of all of the above.

How Many Chiefs?

Some operatives in both organizations wonder about their bosses -- is there really only one Chief? After all, no one can be on duty 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, month after month, year in and year out. Surely, someone must spell them for the time they need to sleep, right? Are there secret chiefs unknown to the spies of CHESS and POKER? Even a Grandmaster needs a Player on the Other Side of the chessboard, and many decks of cards come with a second Joker (often called *the Bug*). . .

PC Opportunities

Spy Skills

A cinematic spy's skills generally revolve around a knowledge of codes, ciphers, situational analysis, sneaking, hiding, psychology, con-artistry, foreign languages, disguise, weapons use, hand-to-hand combat, breaking and entering (climbing, picking locks, safecracking), combat driving, tailing/shadowing and evasion, searching, sleight of hand, interrogation, computer use, and access to cool spytech. This is the base from which specialized abilities -- gadgeteering, gambling, intel analysis, and seduction -- of advanced operatives build upon.

Which Company Are You With, Again?

Characters in a "Spy Games" campaign can be operatives from CHESS, POKER, or other espionage organizations. (Indeed, some adventures could be every interesting if the PCs come from a mix of groups with differing motives and goals. And do not neglect the gaming potentials for double- or triple-agentry!)

Depending upon the organization a PC is part of, they gain certain strengths or weaknesses related to the nature of that group that builds on or takes away from their basic Spy skill package:

- **CHESS Ops:** These agents are the gold standard for spy skills, technology, and cash, but do tend to suffer from an overabundance of rules, regulations, hierarchy, complicated plans, and a limited ability to improvise in the field.
- **POKER Ops:** Pound for pound, a POKER operative's skills and spytech aren't as picture-perfect as a CHESS operative's, but they are excellent improvisers and jury-riggers, and their team-efforts are synergistically hyper-effective. They also possess a Deck, which grants absolutely secure communications.
- **WHIST Ops:** WHIST agents aren't much better than plain old spies in their skills and resources, but they do have something no other group does: the recognized freedom and authority to operate in every country that belongs to the UN.
- **CRAPS Ops:** Agents of CRAPS have decent spy skills, but their real talents revolve around business skills and technologies; they also have CHESS-equivalent spytech.
- **Rule 8 Ops:** The members of Rule 8 cannot be considered superspies -- they're just not in the league of these other organizations. What they do have is an uncanny ability to gain support and aid from people they meet outside of the Spy Games; the worldwide public invariably responds favorably when a Rule 8 agent explains his or her organization's mission and goals.

Advice, Opportunities, & Pitfalls

Spy Story Structures

Cinematic spy stories follow two main structures or idioms:

A. Bondian

1. Teaser (sometimes, two of them: Villain and Hero);
2. Briefing (by Superior);
3. Gear Up (visiting R&D for cool toys);
4. Infiltrate (agent insertion into Villain locale or plot);
5. Meet & Greet (the Villain, the Notable Henchman, the Femme Fatale, the Double Agent);
6. Report to Superior (and gain further information);
7. Caught by Villain (either by bad luck, treachery, or foreknowledge);
8. Villain Monologue (often over dinner or drinks; indeed, this may be the point of many missions -- hearing the Villain's plans);
9. Deathtrap (see "[The Deathtrap Construction Kit](#)" for ideas);
10. Escape Deathtrap (usually using toys from Gear Up);
11. Thwart Villain/Plot (may or may not involve death of Henchman and Villain, but probably includes an explosion);
12. Debriefing (agent tells Superior what happened); and
13. Tag (agent canoodles with someone).

B. Impossibilian

The instructions to writers of the first series [of *Mission: Impossible*] read: "The tape message contains the *problem*. An enemy or criminal *plot* is in existence; the IMF must *counter* it. The situation must be of enough importance and difficulty that only the IMF could do it. The villains (as here and later portrayed) are so black, and so clever that the

intricate means used to defeat them are necessary. Very commonly, but not inevitably, the *mission* is to retrieve a valuable item or man, and/or to discredit (eliminate) the villain or villains. . ." (Emphases in the above paragraph are mine; see also below, *Other Resources*, for the source of this quote and more information.)

Generally, a Bondian plot is reactive (something has happened, and the Hero must respond) and an Impossibilian plot is active (the Heroes do something to stop something else from happening). Mixing up these two types of mission for a gaming group can help a GM avoid "plot-fatigue." ("Another Mad Scientist bent on world domination? Yawn.")

Generating Missions

Given the iconography of CHESS and POKER, a GM can get a lot of mileage out of the use of descriptions of chess gambits or a poker glossary (see *Other Resources* for examples).

Running a Gambit: There are two ways one can interpret a chess gambit to generate a mission for a Spy Game adventure:

1. Pick a side (CHESS itself is represented by either White or Black); or
2. Taken pieces represent the mission goals (all the pieces on the board are assumed to be CHESS agents in action, and when a piece is removed from the board, it shows that their individual goal has either succeeded or failed).

Here's an example of using choice 1 to design a mission called *the Sicilian Defense*:

- The descriptive chess notation for this sequence would be something like: White KP-K4; Black QBP-QB5; White QP-Q4; Black QBP-Q4, BxQP (which translates to "White moves King's Pawn 2 spaces forward; Black moves Queen's Bishop's Pawn 2 spaces forward; White moves Queen's Pawn 2 spaces forward; Black Queen's Bishop's Pawn captures White Queen's Pawn.")
- White represents the opposite "side of the mission" (say, an unnamed Balkan government) and Black represents CHESS.
- The first move in the game is the movement of White's King's Pawn into a position of vulnerability. Who is the Pawn? Well, let's say that the King is the Prime Minister of Slavoslavia; that would make the Pawn his personal secretary.
- Black moves, placing a Bishop Pawn (intelligence specialist assistant) in position.
- White moves, placing a Queen's Pawn -- possibly another personal secretary who works for another prominent Slavoslavian minister, possibly the Minister of Defense -- next to the Prime Minister's secretary. Perhaps the two secretaries are conspiring to blackmail their bosses with knowledge of secret arms deals that the Ministers have been gaining illicit funds from?
- Black moves, with the CHESS agent capturing the secretary to the Minister of Defense and ending up on the same square . . . a situation that could be read (if we go with Black Ops as being "invisible") as the CHESS Operative killing and replacing the secretary. Now, he is undercover with the conspiratorial secretary of the Prime Minister, and can proceed from there.

Deal a Hand: Dealing out a hand or two of cards can help the GM assemble a team of POKER agents . . . the fun part is then analyzing the hand by rank and Suit to figure out what sort of mission such a team would be assembled for. Here's an example, using the cards that Wild Bill Hickok held when he was shot to death: *the Dead Man's Hand* (Ace of Clubs, the Ace of Spades, the Eight of Clubs, the Eight of Spades, and the Nine of Diamonds).

- This gives us a team of agents comprised of two Department heads (in intel and combat), two medium-ranked field agents (again, in intel and combat), and a gadget guy in a base somewhere.
- Two Department heads means that this mission is serious (and possibly dangerous).
- The existence of two field agents -- the Eights -- could mean that the Aces have been roistered out from behind their desks.
- The absence of Court cards can mean that the use of the best agents would be a risk . . . or that they were unavailable for use.
- The absence of the Hearts Suit might be telling.

- So, here's an idea for the mission: CHESS has somehow gotten their hands on a list of all of the POKER Court agents and their missions . . . possibly through turning the Ace of Hearts. Maybe the Heart's Court has been captured, replaced with Killbots, or mind-controlled; evidence is sketchy, but what's been found is compelling. The black Aces have recruited the two second-best Number-rank field agents -- not the best, the Tens, because that reassignment would raise too many flags -- and the best Number-rank gadget desk agent available. They're flying under the radar of their own organization as they try to figure out how to stop the insanity.
- The biggest questions here, of course, are "what happened to the Joker?" and "why didn't he notice this happening?" (Well, maybe the Dead Man's Hand are the ones being mind-controlled. Maybe the Big J is running this as an Internal Affairs op, trying to find evidence that the Ace of Hearts has gone over to the other side. Maybe he's one of the agents who's been captured or controlled? Failing all that . . . sunspots?)

Defining Other Operatives in Play

Given the turnover of folks in the spying life (from promotion, retirement, and casualty), it can be extra, unneeded effort for a GM to assign all of the agents of an organization. The nomenclature of CHESS and POKER help minimize this. That is, by virtue of the roles and skills encapsulated in the different schemes for rank and Color/Suit, the GM will already have a general idea of the abilities of the BQP (Black Queen's Pawn) or the Ten of Diamonds. The former will be the assistant to a covert-op superspy (probably a lady's maid or chauffeur), and the latter will be a gadgeteer field agent.

Q-ing Up for Gadgets

The fruits of spytechnology are the wonderful toys that operatives carry with them in the field. These gadgets tend to possess one or more basic capabilities or qualities:

1. They are *disguised* as something else (a Geiger counter watch; a robot-camera fish);
2. They are *small* and/or *collapsible* (a camera the size of a thumbnail; a gun that can be disassembled into five common, small personal items); and
3. They are more *advanced* than the commonly-recognized technology (a two-way wrist TV when portable radios had to be fit into car trunks).

Operatives generally receive one of each of the following classes of spytech when going out on a mission:

- Weaponry (overt, covert, or both; with ammo);
- Detectors (Geiger counters, tracers, biochem sniffers);
- Recorders (mini-cameras, memory sticks, micro-copiers);
- Communicators (shoe phones, watch phones, one-time pads); and
- Transport (Aston Martins, Shaguars, alligator mini-sub).

Furthermore, a cliché of the genre is that at least one of the toys the agent receives will have a telling impact upon the plot of the story, whether used to distract or eliminate the Villain's Henchman, break the Hero out of the Deathtrap, or aid in the final escape of the Hero after the Climax.

Badguytech

Often, Villains have even better toys than the Heroes. Here's a short list of gadgets or equipment that Evil Masterminds tend to utilize in their plots for world domination:

- Army of X (ants, sharks, zombies . . .)
- Assassination of World Leaders
- Bioweapons
- Cloning
- Cryptography

- Laser
- Mind Control Satellite
- Nanotech
- Nuclear Missiles
- Resource Control (cornering the market or destruction of the resource)
- Robots or Androids (as an army or world leader replacement)
- Weather & Natural Disaster Control (visiting upon or protecting from)
- Xenotech (crashed alien spaceship technology)
- Any combination of the above

Inter-Agency Relations

Note that CHESS and POKER can both be played as "good guy" (High Road) or "bad guy" (Low Road) groups. While it's obvious to set one as "good" and one as "bad" for a Spy Games campaign, setting them as the "same" type of group can lead to interesting dynamics:

- *Both High Road:* While both groups are dedicated to the protection of the world, they prefer different methods and endpoints. This stance makes the decision to kill an enemy agent a murky moral question, and could very well lead to a setting rife with "Spy Codes of Honor" and sportsmanlike agency rivalries.
- *Both Low Road:* If CHESS and POKER are both solely concerned with gaining control of the world, the setting takes a darker turn. Since their ideologies are antithetical, agents will have no compunction about slaughtering enemy agents (or even innocent bystanders) to reach their goals. The only concern will be with keeping things quiet enough so that they can operate effectively.

Intra-Agency Relations

GMs should never neglect the opportunity to promote intra-agency rivalries and counterplots between Colors and Suits: often their methods and goals will be at odds with one another. However, while the tele-omnipresence of the Joker keeps the internal competition of POKER within safe levels, the Grandmaster of CHESS may actually *encourage* strife between the Colors -- or even the front and back files -- in order to promote a "survival of the fittest" organization.

ADVENTURE -- Mission: Cascade

Mission Briefing

Situation: Something is brewing in the state of Slavoslavia. Doctor Laszlo Sklenchar, reclusive but brilliant scientist, has made a scientific breakthrough, the nature of which has the Slavoslavian Ministry of Science in a tizzy. Exactly what is unclear; our sources have been unable to gain further information.

Background: The following information is available to operatives on this mission:

- **Slavoslavia:** *Capital:* Borcharesh. *Population:* 4.7 million. *Main Exports:* High-grade bauxite ore, coal, zinc. Known as the "Monte Carlo of the Black Sea," Slavoslavia has had a tumultuous history of repeated invasion, starting with the Greeks, Mongols, and Turks, up through Germany and the USSR in WWII. After the end of the Cold War, the royal family of Hanover-Krstulovic was welcomed back from their British exile to head the newly-formed constitutional monarchy. Interestingly, His Grace Tibor Hanover-Krstulovic has taken the title of "Duke" rather than "King," owing to the tradition of Dukes holding the throne of the land in trust for when the Lost King Zakarrij returns. Today, Slavoslavian science and industry is blossoming in the field of high-speed telecommunications technologies.
- **Doctor Laszlo Sklenchar:** Sklenchar possesses several degrees, most notably doctorates in Subatomic Physics and Astrophysics, and significant postgraduate work in Anthropology and Archeology. While well-respected among his peers in physics, in recent years, this regard has decreased. After being removed (under suspicious

circumstances, it must be said) from Nobel Prize consideration several years ago, Sklenchar began to exhibit signs of extreme paranoia regarding his work. While he lectures once a week at Slavoslavian University in Borcharesh, he refuses to use the University's facilities for his studies, and maintains a lab at an undisclosed location. Interestingly, Sklenchar is closely related to the royal family through the Krstulovic bloodline, and resides in an apartment in the Royal Palace. With the recent death of Count Erno Krstulovic, Sklenchar is now third in succession to the Slavoslavian throne after the Duchess and the Countess Hope. The Slavoslavian Secret Service (SSS, or S-3) has stepped up their observation of him.

Observations: We first became aware of Sklenchar's unknown breakthrough through another mission (observation of Cornell quantum physicist Dr. Emil Reynolds; cross-ref *Mission: Iota*). E-mails exchanged between the two scientists referenced the "boson cascade effect," an abstruse piece of superstring theory, which is thought to be unverifiable . . . except Sklenchar broadly hinted that he had indeed verified it, with "interesting effects on macro-reality." (Unfortunately, given the events of *Mission: Iota*, that information source has dried up.) Sklenchar's paranoia and secretiveness, combined with a mild societal taboo in Slavoslavian culture discouraging "unseemly" interest into royal affairs, and the relatively recent emergence of widespread First World technologies, has made remote data collection problematical. That is why you are being sent into the field now.

In seven days, Sklenchar is scheduled to escort his cousin, the Countess Hope, to her upcoming Birthday Gala. This party is by invitation-only, and will be held at the Casino Sublime, the hottest nightclub of Borcharesh. Analysis indicates that the optimum times to observe or interact with Sklenchar is before or during the Countess' Birthday Gala.

Mission Goals: Primary Goal: Discover the nature of Dr. Sklenchar's current work. **Secondary Goal:** Locate Dr. Sklenchar's secret lab. **Tertiary Goal:** Make direct contact with Sklenchar and gain his trust.

- **(Further details & objectives for CHESS PCs):** We believe that there are POKER agents currently operating in Slavoslavia with the same objective; exercise caution. This is initially an information-gathering mission; however, if the nature of Sklenchar's discovery warrants it and the opportunity presents itself, the mission *may* switch to a snatch-and-grab, if the Grandmaster approves. This is a Black Op, and Black agents are ranked for the duration, even if cover is broken. (CHESS operatives will not be informed of the Black King's Knight's Mission.)
- **(Further details & objectives for POKER PCs):** We believe that there are CHESS agents currently operating in Slavoslavia with the same objective; exercise caution. This is solely an information-gathering mission; unless one of your team, Dr. Sklenchar, or an innocent civilian are endangered, further activities are unnecessary. The Joker will, as always, be monitoring your situation. Additionally, there is a team of your fellow agents currently on a mission in Slavoslavia, codenamed "Short Straight." Unless asked to assist by the ranking agent -- the Jack of Hearts -- or directed to get involved by the Joker, do not interfere in or with Short Straight. However, if your mission goes south and the circumstances justify it, the Short Straight team *may* be available to serve as your backup. . . but don't count on it.

Recommended Team Composition: CHESS teams should have at least one Rook or Rook's Pawn and one Bishop or Bishop's Pawn. POKER teams should have at least one Spade and at least one Diamond.

Available Covers & Resources: Possible cover identities for this Mission include: Senior Analyst position with British Technicore; Press credentials with AmeriNews*; the grandchild of Slavoslavian war hero, Sandor Boyko*; Grant Researcher with Marduk Philanthropies; and Diplomatic Attache for the Embassy of Iceland*. All covers include relevant passports and identity papers. Those marked with an asterisk include an invitation to the Birthday Gala.

All agents will be issued 1500 USD and 10,000 Slavoslavia zlotnys (roughly 2000 USD) for this mission. Other gear available upon request (with a strong recommendation against unconcealed weaponry).

Concurrent Missions

CHESS Operation: Sicilian Defense: The basic structure of this mission is detailed above (see *Running a*

Gambit), but the details are slightly different: taking the place of the white pieces is Vasily Dzursky, the Slavoslavian Undersecretary to the Minister of Defense, who wishes to purchase atomic secrets from a Korean arms dealer named Kim Sam Kun. The CHESS team is planning on eliminating the arms dealer and sending their own ringer (the Black Queen's Bishop's Pawn) in his place to meet with the Undersecretary. The CHESS team is comprised of the Black King's Knight (BKN) and his Pawn (BKNP), the Black Queen's Bishop (BQB), and the White Queen's Rook's Pawn (WQRP).

POKER Operation: Short Straight: The POKER team is made up of two field agents (the Jack of Hearts and the Ten of Spades) and one remote agent (the Nine of Diamonds). Their mission is to gather blackmail evidence on vacationing American executive Sandra Vargo, VP of Research & Development for MicroTeleCom. POKER wishes to lay the foundation for sabotage of some highly-invasive cellphone technology MTC is working on. Currently, the Jack is seducing Vargo during her three week long gambling junket at the Casino Sublime; meanwhile, the Ten monitors all of her communications via tracers, bugs, phone and internet taps, etc.

Other Ops in Place

S-3 Operation: Cake: The Slavoslavian Secret Service is working overtime to make safe the Casino Sublime for the Countess' Gala. Security is tight for the week previous to the Gala: all incoming casino guests, their luggage, and service personnel are (and will be until after the party) scanned and searched; all hotel staff and guests will be issued photo and magnetic strip security badges; all guards are equipped with portable card readers; and a police cordon will go up around the Casino beginning at dawn on the day of the celebration.

The Doctor's Plan: Sklenchar is due to give his weekly lecture at the University four days before the Gala, after which he will have dinner with the Duke and Duchess at the Royal Palace. He will secretly leave the palace by a side-door, and bike downtown through the narrow streets of the capital to his lab, where he will remain sequestered until he has to escort his beloved cousin, the Countess, to the party via limousine. He will show his cousin a good time and help her keep to the party itinerary as best he can. After the Gala, the Doctor will convey his drunken cousin home to her townhouse in the limo. As he walks her in, the chauffeur will remove a bicycle from the trunk. When Sklenchar returns, he will mount the bike, wave good evening to the driver, and pedal off madly down the narrow streets of the capital. He will go back to his lab, without even stopping to change out of his eveningwear.

Further Details

Sklenchar's Research: Simply pick a likely choice from *Badguytech* above. He will drop enigmatic hints as to his research -- more if he's drunk -- so long as he has no intimation that the person (or persons) he is speaking to has any substantial scientific or technology grounding. If he suspects that the listener might be able to puzzle out his abstruse allusions, he'll clam up.

Sklenchar's Lab: The Doctor's hidden lab is located on the second floor of a small commercial office building in the downtown business district of Borcharesh; the only tenant listed is the "Blenki Brokerage" on the third floor (the phone and internet lines from the third floor have been patched to lead down into his lab). Sklenchar *always* takes a circuitous route to the lab. If he ever suspects he is being followed on his way to the lab, he will redouble his efforts to lose pursuers, doubling back along alleys, riding down staircases, cutting across plazas, discarding his bike in a dumpster, etc.

Getting Into the Gala: No One True Way of entry for agent PCs is provided, though use of a cover identity with an invitation is probably the easiest option. GMs should use the parameters of *S-3 Operation: Cake* above to adjudicate likely responses. That is, if the PCs just knock out the waitstaff and steal their uniforms, they'll probably run into problems with security since their id pictures won't match their faces (not to mention any weaponry or spytech the scanners detect). Then again, there's nothing that says that the characters *need* to attend the Gala . . .

The Countess' Itinerary: Up until three days before the Gala, the Countess is skiing in Switzerland. Upon her return to Slavoslavia, she will spend the days between partying on her private yacht, in nightclubs, and her swanky

apartment downtown. She and Sklenchar are due to leave the Royal Palace at six on the night of the Gala, and will travel by motorcade to the Casino Sublime for the party. The Countess will spend most of her time trying to sneak away from her cousin (Doctor Sklenchar) to chase after attractive young men (and women). Towards the end of the evening, she will become quite drunk, and need to be taken home to her apartment.

Party Down!: Everything might go down at the Gala. Just mix in all the characters, the Mission timelines (see the matrix below), the *Cover Concerns & Mission Complications* (see below), high-stakes gambling, and liberal amounts of alcohol.

Mission Interaction Matrix

The matrix below shows the timelines for each of the plots currently in motion in Slavoslavia that PC operatives might notice (or interfere with). *Phase 1* indicates the six days before the Gala; *Phase 2* means the daytime hours leading up to the Gala; *Phase 3* is the Gala itself; and *Phase 4* is immediately after the Gala. (Parenthetical notes) show actions taken in response if relevant NPCs detect the PC team (or anyone else) observing them during that Phase; [bracketed notes] give the GM further info.

As always, the progression of these plots is considered in a vacuum; if PCs change the basis situation -- by killing Kim Sam Kun, for instance -- all bets are off and the NPCs will adapt to this change.

	CHESS: SD	POKER: SS	S-3: C	Doctor's Plan
<i>Phase 1</i>	A1	B1	C1	D1
<i>Phase 2</i>	A2	B2	C1	D2
<i>Phase 3</i>	A3	B3	C1	D3
<i>Phase 4</i>	A4	B4	C1	D4

Key for Mission Events

CHESS: Silician Defense

- *A1:* On Day 1, Kim Sam Kun arrives in Borcharesh. [Any Spades, Bishops, Bishop Pawns, or other characters with experience in Southeast Asian covert mission may recognize him.] He is immediately put under observation and tailed by CHESS agents. [Unless Kim is recognized by a PC, this CHESS activity is probably overlooked.] (If the PCs show interest in Kim, CHESS may put them under observation as well.) On Day 2, Kim contacts Vasily Dzursky; they will exchange money for information at the Gala. On Day 3, the BKN abducts, interrogates, and kills Kim; the BQB takes his place. (The BKN will attack any PCs who become too nosy or try to interfere.) Day 4 and Day 5 are spent arranging high-tech recording equipment in the Casino bar while dodging S-3 agents. (BKNP will be dispatched to observe anyone expressing undue interest in these activities.)
- *A2:* The BKN and BQB prepare to attend the Gala, while the WQRP makes final checks on the equipment from his Casino suite. (BKNP will observe anyone interested in these activities; today, he has authorization to kill enemy agents doing so.)
- *A3:* The BKN covertly guards the BQB at the Gala; the BKNP watches the BKN's back; the BQB meets with Dzursky in the bar; the WQRP remotely operates the equipment to produce blackmail material on Dzursky. (Any interfering enemy agents detected at this juncture will be quietly eliminated by the BKN or BKNP.)
- *A4:* Extraction from Slavoslavia.

POKER: Short Straight

- *B1:* On Day 2, the Jack of Hearts dazzles Sandra Vargo at the gaming tables, while the Ten of Spades bugs her room. [Any Hearts, Bishops, or Bishop's Pawns will recognize the Jack.] (If at any time during the course of this mission, the Jack sees another POKER team, he'll quietly arrange to meet with them and share info in a secure location; if he instead notices CHESS or other enemy agents, he will coordinate with the Joker, then table his

current Mission, dropping Vargo like a hot potato. The Short Straight team will immediately begin covert observation of the enemy operatives.) On Day 4, Vargo has a short e-mail from her personal assistant, in order to arrange a teleconference with one of her Research Divisions for the day after the Gala. On the evening of Day 5, Vargo is out clubbing with the Countess, an old school friend. [The Countess becomes interested in the Jack at this point.]

- *B2*: In the wee hours, Vargo and the Jack have a fight over the Countess' interest in him. The Jack spends the remainder of the day getting back into her good graces.
- *B3*: The Jack avoids the Countess while maintaining visible interest in Vargo; he must somehow manage to modify her cellphone with a cunning short-range tap created by the Nine of Diamonds in time for the teleconference tomorrow.
- *B4*: After Vargo's teleconference is over and POKER has gathered all the intel possible on MTC's current research, the Ten will immediately leave Slavoslovakia with the information, while the Jack slowly cools the relationship with Vargo over the next few days.

S-3: Cake

- *C1*: Security patrols begin and new procedures are put into place as noted above. (Suspicious characters are put under observation; if these suspicious pan out in the eyes of S-3 agents, the perpetrators are arrested and taken downtown for holding and interrogation.)

Doctor's Plan

- *D1*: See above for full details; information replicated here for timeline purposes. On Day 2, Sklenchar gives his lecture and dines with the Duke and Duchess. He then goes to his secret lab. (If he suspects he's being followed, see above, *Sklenchar's Lab*).
- *D2*: Appears in his apartments at the Royal Palace, prepares for the Gala, escorts the Countess to the Casino Sublime.
- *D3*: Attempt to keep the Countess to the itinerary and have fun. (If he suspects he's being pumped for information on his work, see above, *Sklenchar's Research*).
- *D4*: After taking the Countess to her townhouse, bikes to his lab. . (If he suspects he's being followed, see above, *Sklenchar's Lab*).

Cover Concerns & Other Complications

Here are some interesting concerns and complications to further spice up the Missions being run:

- The BKN and the Jack of Hearts have a "history."
- Sklenchar is very interested in getting a grant from the Marduk Philantropies -- not for the money, but the prestige.
- The Countess is attracted to several attendees at her party: the Jack of Hearts, her old school chum Sandra Vargo, and that fascinating Asian man, Kim Sam Kun.
- Vargo is looking to jump ship from MTC, and would be quite interested in a commensurate job at British Technicore.
- Since Sklenchar's Nobel woes stem from Ketil Thorkellson, an Icelandic physicist, he has an unreasoning dislike of all Icelanders and those openly friendly with them.
- After the Gala starts, S-3 agents discover that Slavoslovakian war hero Sandor Boyko died without issue, which means that the "grandchild" in attendance is a phony!

NPC Backgrounds

NOTE: In the interests of space, the following NPCs are not written up: (CHESS) BKNP, BQB, the WQRP, Vasily Dzursky, and Kim Sam Kun; (POKER) the Ten of Spades, the Nine of Diamonds, and Vice President of R&D for

MicroTeleCom Sandra Vargo.

Countess Hope Hanover-Krstulovic: More glamorous than pretty, the twentysomething Countess Can Drink Like a Fish (Expert), Dance Like a Dream (Expert), and has Bedroom Eyes (Good); she's also a Spoiled Brat (Poor) and a bad Gambler (Poor). While she respects her brilliant cousin, she's not going to let that old fuddy-duddy mess up her party!

CHESSE Agent Victor Pax aka the Black King's Knight: Dressed in tailored black leather, Victor Pax looks like a rockstar . . . of death! While Charming (Good) and Witty (Good), his real talents lie in Assassination (Master), where he favors hands-on techniques over firearms, poisons, or "accidents." He's otherwise an Expert Spy, and has a Distracting Scar (Poor) that's too big to disguise adequately.

Doctor Laszlo Sklenchar: (See above, *Mission Briefing*, for further details.) Master in Subatomic Physics and Astronphysics, Expert in Anthropology, Good in Archeology, an Average Athlete, and a Paranoid (Poor in situations involving his work).

POKER Agent Jack Valentine aka Jack of Hearts: Valentine -- he changed the surname after his promotion to Court rank-- is a Handsome Devil (Expert) and as Smooth as Silk (Expert). He's a Good Spy in other regards . . . but a Poor Driver. His preferred sidearm is a Beretta automatic, his watch is chock-full of gadgets, and his Deck is disguised as a St. Christopher's medal.

Other Resources

- "The Armadillo of Destruction," *The Platypus of Doom and Other Nihilists*, by Arthur Byron Cover
- [Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery](#) and its sequels.
- [The Avengers](#) (TV)
- ["Bond. James Bond."](#)
- [Casino Royale](#)
- [Chess Openings](#)
- [Declare.](#) by Tim Powers
- [Get Smart](#) (TV)
- [Global Frequency.](#) by Warren Ellis (Wildstorm Comics)
- [GURPS Black Ops](#)
- [GURPS Covert Ops](#)
- [GURPS Espionage](#)
- [Hopscotch](#)
- [The Invisibles.](#) by Grant Morrison
- [Kim Possible](#) (TV)
- [Mission: Impossible](#) (TV)
- [Our Man Flint](#) and [In Like Flint](#)
- [rec.gambling](#) Glossary of Poker terms
- [Spy Game](#) (TV)
- [The Wild Wild West](#) (TV)
- If you have a broadband connection, go to <http://www.mk12.com> and click on "Man of Action" to see the stirring Quicktime tale of Mr. President Steve Elvis America.

Losing the Memories of Civilization

by David Morgan-Mar

Information is the currency of the future and, increasingly, the present. It also holds the keys to understanding the past. What happens when the information you need isn't there, because it wasn't stored properly or has been lost to the ravages of time? What if you can read the raw data, but can't translate it into something you can understand? If you're digging through the abandoned County Records Office for birth details or uncovering an alien library in an archaeological dig, what sorts of data are likely to have survived?

Questions like this, and their answers, can pose interesting problems for characters.

Encoding Data

In order to understand how data can be lost, the first step is understanding how it can be recorded. Information generally falls into two classes:

- **Human-readable:** Data that can be directly understood by a person. Examples include text (in a known language), lists of numbers, and images.
- **Encoded:** Data that needs to be processed in some way before it can be understood by a person. This includes any form of digital computer file (even text files are actually stored as series of ones and zeros in a physical manner that humans usually can't see), digital storage medium (CDs, floppy disks, etc), and some analog media such as video tapes or vinyl records.

(These definitions are somewhat flexible and can overlap depending on exactly what you consider to be "processing." For example, is text written in a microdot "encoded" because you need a microscope to read it? This is merely a question of terminology and should not affect the application of this article! Also, written language is, in a sense, encoded, but it can be understood by a human without additional hardware, which is the important point here.)

Human-readable data has the obvious advantage that it can be understood without any help. Encoded data has other advantages: it can be more secure, stored in a much smaller physical space, and easily processed by automated systems. The big disadvantage of encoded data is that if you lose either the decoding algorithm or hardware, you cannot understand the data at all. That becomes an important issue when considering long-term storage and recovery of information.

Storing Data

Once someone has chosen what format they wish to record data in, the next step is deciding on the physical medium for storage.

Stone

Carvings in stone are extremely durable, but their portability is limited, to say the least. Depending on the hardness of the stone used, carved symbols can remain legible after tens of thousands of years if exposed to erosion by the elements. Exposed granite erodes from 0.2 to 5 inches per 10,000 years, depending on climatic conditions -- faster with heavy rainfall, slower in arid regions. Softer stones erode faster. Engravings will be visible for a time dependent on the depth of the engraving. If stone is stored out of the elements, it will last almost indefinitely.

Clay Tablets

The next step up from carving stone is making impressions in clay tablets, which are then baked to harden the clay. Such tablets have been found in legible condition, buried in the ruins of ancient cities some 5,000 years ago. Buried, such tablets would last until geological processes erode or distort the area -- perhaps a million years. Exposed, clay tablets erode much faster than rock.

Parchment and Vellum

Parchment is the prepared skins of animals used as a writing surface. The Domesday Book, written in 1086 on sheepskin parchment, is still in good condition. The Dead Sea Scrolls are over 2,000 years old, with some in reasonable condition while others are crumbling away. Vellum is high-quality parchment made from calfskin. The Book of Kells, 1,200 years old and well-preserved, is written on vellum.

Paper

The archival lifetime of paper depends critically on how it is stored. Temperature and humidity extremes or variability, exposure to ultraviolet radiation (such as from sunlight), airborne pollutants, mold, and vermin all affect paper in adverse ways. When stored away from such influences, components of the paper itself become the factors limiting its longevity.

Normal modern paper contains acids from the manufacturing process that can degrade the paper integrity and make it crumble within 50 years. It can be stored longer if de-acidified by backing it with buffered alkaline matting and coating it in a neutral and stable polymer like Mylar. Ironically, a lot of older paper -- from before the industrial revolution -- is still in reasonably good condition today, because acids were not used in the laborious procedures used to make paper then.

Archival quality (acid-free) paper has a claimed storage lifetime of 100 or more years. Since modern acid-free paper was only introduced a few decades ago, nobody has tested it conclusively to establish a longer lifetime, but it is a good bet that it will last at least as well as pre-industrial paper, some of which has survived 1,000 years.

Microfilm

Microfilm is a polyester film used for storing printed images at a microscopic size. Information is stored on microfilm in the form of text and images, and can be read by a human with nothing more than a microscope or enlarging viewer. Commercial microfilm manufacturers claim microfilm is stable and remains readable for 500 years.

Magnetic Media

Magnetic disks and tapes are often used for data backup purposes these days, but magnetic media are not suitable for long-term archiving. Tapes and disks are subject to environmental influences such as magnetic fields, temperature, and humidity. All of these can change the alignment of the magnetic particles and corrupt the data within a few years, even under ideal storage conditions.

Magnetic media used for archival purposes cannot be stored reliably for more than three to five years. Standard practice is to read the media and record new copies every 18-24 months.

CDs

CDs (and DVDs) are plastic disks with a reflective metal layer inside them. This layer is pitted by the manufacturing or recording process to represent digitally encoded data, which can be read back by measuring the reflectivity of a focused laser. The metal layer slowly oxidizes and deteriorates, until it becomes unreadable. Kodak estimates that its premium recordable CDs, stored in ideal conditions, will retain data for over 200 years. TDK estimates the lifetime of its CD-Rs at 70 years. 3M has published a figure of 100 years for pressed CD-ROMs. More commonly quoted figures for CDs stored in home or office conditions are a more meager five to 10 years.

Audiovisual Media

One of the great boons of modern technology is the ability to record not only text, but audio and video. The problem is, the most commonly used media for storing these recordings are magnetic (audio and video tape) or CD-like. Tapes record data in an analog format, which is more robust to degradation of the medium than digital files. Kodak claims a high quality videotape stored in ideal conditions remains watchable for 30 years, although after this time the image and sound will be degraded somewhat with static due to the deterioration of the magnetic domains. CDs and DVDs will fare a little better, but will certainly be rendered obsolete within their own lifetimes, making finding the right hardware to decode them an issue.

The best audiovisual medium for long-term storage is, ironically, film. Movies are now being shot without film, and it may be that in 100 years people will still be enjoying *Citizen Kane* while *Star Wars: Episode I -- The Phantom Menace* is lost (no comment on the relative merits of the films is intended!). Perhaps more importantly, news images are routinely recorded directly on to videotape. Unless transferred to a longer-term storage medium, video images of the events that have most strongly affected our lives will inevitably decay and be lost within decades.

Engraved Metal

The Voyager 1 and 2 deep space probes carry deliberately recorded information about Earth. It is encoded in analog form as grooves on a copper disk, similar to a phonograph record. The disks are gold-plated and stored inside a protective sleeve, which contains engraved symbolic instructions on how to play the disk and decode the data. The data consist of 115 images (of fairly low resolution), audio greeting messages in 55 human languages, 40 different natural and man-made sounds, and finally 90 minutes of widely varied music. The images are designed to be decodable by a technological civilization and provide scientific, technical, and hopefully cultural information about Earth and its life forms. In interstellar space, where Voyager will spend most of its existence, the limiting factor on data integrity is microscopic pitting caused by collisions with dust particles. Carl Sagan -- designer of the Voyager disks -- estimated that they will still be readable after a billion years in space.

More advanced is High Density Read-Only Memory (HD-ROM) disks. These are ion-beam etched nickel disks, with pixel sizes in the nanometer range. Text and images can be stored unencoded at a density about 200 times that of a CD-ROM, and read with an interferometric laser microscope or scanning electron microscope. Digitally encoded data could be stored at about five times the density of unencoded data. Tests show these disks remain readable for at least 400 years in *uncontrolled or poor* storage conditions -- including fire or immersion in salt water. In a controlled environment, they would be likely to last many thousands of years.

Environmental Factors

The lifetimes for the media discussed above assume reasonable storage conditions. Common sense will usually suffice to decide if a particular medium is damaged by extreme conditions. Books and CDs will be destroyed by fire, while engraved stone and metal will survive unscathed, for example.

Reading Data

Storing information is all well and good, but that is only half the story. The really interesting part comes after a long time, when someone wants to *read* the data.

For digitally encoded data, the crucial issue often is not

Data Loss Timeline

All of these times are approximate, and can vary widely in different environmental conditions. They represent an average for "normal" storage.

Time	Data Lost
5 years	Magnetic data tapes
50 years	Standard modern paper
100 years	CD-ROMs and CD-Rs
500 years	Microfilm
1,000 years	Pre-industrial hand-made paper, acid-free paper
2,000 years	Parchment, vellum
1,000-20,000 years	Carved stone exposed to weather

how long the media will last, but how quickly the software encoding used and the hardware to read the media become obsolete. It's no use having a readable CD in 100 years if the last CD player fell apart 50 years ago. If you have the specification for CD data encoding, you may be able to cobble together a makeshift reader -- with time, effort, and expense -- but if the specification is lost (or stored on CDs!), the data will remain a random stream of infuriating bits.

10,000 years	Ion-beam etched HD-ROMs
+	
1,000,000,000 years	"Voyager record" engraved metal in interstellar space

Now consider the revolution in data storage that accompanied the several abortive moves toward a paperless office over the past 20 years. A lot of records have been written to magnetic media, by people thinking that this would ensure their availability essentially forever. Much of that information is *already lost* to the physical ravages of only a few years, or to the fact that hardware to read those media are now museum pieces and the amount of work required to read and recode the data on to longer-term media is simply too much. Such losses include financial records, business reports, surveys, market research, demographic data, medical records, news articles, works of fiction, and scientific research data, to name just a few.

For media like paper and parchment, modern day preservation techniques are good enough to read the content off any material that hasn't actually physically disintegrated yet. This may involve storage in inert gases or conserving chemicals, and reading by CT scanning or other exotic technologies that did not exist just a few decades ago. Characters in a game without such technology may be faced with the frustrating experience of having books turn to dust as they open them to read them. In appropriate campaigns, [magic might help](#) in retrieving data from old storage media.

Understanding Data

Once any medium is decoded or read, there may then come the problem of understanding the language in which it is recorded. Many of the most important relics we have of the earliest civilizations and attempts at recording information remain [tantalizingly incomprehensible](#) to us, even though we can see the [symbols and perhaps even illustrations](#) clearly. Such items may record a known language in an unknown way, or might be the only remnants of a [language otherwise unknown](#).

Magic might be able to help characters comprehend unknown languages, but without mystical assistance the best chance is to find something akin to the Rosetta Stone. The original Rosetta Stone is a slab of basalt engraved with the same text in ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, demotic script, and ancient Greek. It was carved around 200 B.C., found in 1799, and was instrumental in the deciphering of Egyptian hieroglyphics in the 19th century. A modern-day "Rosetta Stone" could be anything that helps translate an unknown language into something understandable, from multilingual historical records, to the last living speaker of a language, to a travelers' phrasebook. And can you imagine the potential for misunderstanding when translating important documents with the equivalent of a dime-store phrasebook?

Most old information is stored under the assumption that whoever reads it will know the language in which it is recorded. But it is also possible to deliberately include a primer of some sort designed to allow comprehension to future readers who do not share the writers' language. In fact, if this is the case, the data will be more likely to be stored in a manner designed to last the ravages of time -- a time capsule for the benefit of future generations, or a message akin to the Voyager records for aliens.

Even when data are understood in basic terms, the significance of the information might need to be worked out. In many cases, much of what is gleaned may be [worthless or misleading](#). Sometimes the information might promise material riches, scientific understanding, or spiritual enlightenment, yet the clues as to how to achieve these might be so infuriatingly opaque that the [whole document might be dismissed as legend](#). Such cases may lead to mythologically based archaeological treasure hunts, complete with dangerous rivals to challenge cliffhanging adventurers.

Gaming Applications

The loss and retrieval of data can be used in most games with a little thought, or even made a feature.

Fantasy or Historical

In a fantasy game, arcane knowledge often holds power, whether it be formulae for magical spells or alchemical compounds, or lore about intelligent races or monsters. Many fantasy worlds have a long back-history, allowing for ancient civilizations or long-dead wizards who may have recorded valuable information in some way. Appropriate media include parchment, clay tablets, and carven stone. Most retrieval problems will revolve around recovering the physical medium intact, possibly in the face of potentially destructive forces such as dragon flame or giant rats, and then translating the language. If magical translation is unavailable or ineffective for some reason, seeking the means to understand the inscriptions can launch quests, either for native speakers, scholarly sages, or to find the only known skull of an ancient dwarven line followed by communing with the dead.

Historical characters will be concerned with more mundane information, such as tax records, religious texts, or the lineages of nobility. Any of these could form the core of an adventure based around a misunderstanding or falsification that can be proved false by appeal to records. Complications arise when the records are found to be damaged, ambiguous, or written in arcane tongues.

Modern Day

Any sort of investigator will eventually run across the need to find information from missing, damaged, or obsolete media. A lot of records are still stored on slowly-decaying paper, in libraries or halls of records. Particular items of interest to adventurers might be genealogies or old news stories relating to a current spate of strange activity. Musty books in old libraries or personal collections might require active conservation or technology to read them before they fall apart, which can involve complications based on discovering and acquiring the right services or equipment.

Digital media pose another suite of problems. Many are fragile and can be damaged by exposure to heat, water, or magnetic fields, not to mention gunfire, explosions, and being tossed out of speeding vehicles. Then there is the problem of decoding the digital data. If it has been recorded recently, easily available computers might be sufficient. If not, the heroes may need access to museum pieces or to build their own reading hardware. Maintaining confidentiality can be a problem when you need the services of a company to read a digital format that hasn't been used for 20 years.

On the other hand, there is the problem of preserving and deciphering historical writings, inscriptions, and carvings. Information about the past can be valuable enough to kill for, especially if it might be mystical in nature or lead to priceless treasures. Scholars able to understand dead languages may be in demand, or in peril. These sorts of events fit well into cliffhanging style campaigns, but can also pave the path to mystical or cosmic horror as the heroes slowly uncover information best left unknown.

Future

People in years to come will look back on us and wonder why we didn't have the means or motivation to preserve our data better. Almost all of the paper we are using now will be gone in 100 years. Digital storage media won't last that long. Multiply redundant computer systems may keep digital data accessible for some time, but people die, companies go bust, and eventually the will to keep the machines up and running will peter out as new technology emerges and the cost of maintaining and moving ever-growing piles of obsoletely stored data increases. You may have some genuinely interesting things on your web site, but do you honestly think it will still be accessible in 100 years? The omnipresent audio and video recordings of our time are also ephemeral. People of the future may be able to read about Pearl Jam and the Chicago Bulls, while being unable to see or hear them perform.

About the only things that will survive past the century mark are those that people take deliberate steps to make available to future generations, by recording on more stable media. Archaeologists a thousand years hence will not be flipping through books or searching computer files for ideas of what life is like now -- they will be examining microfilms and etched metal plates. And 10,000 years from now, our civilization might only be known from those

metal plates -- the equivalent of the Rosetta Stone.

These considerations have a profound impact on future settings in which knowledge of the past is important -- particularly post-apocalyptic games. If the downfall of civilization was caused by a nuclear war, magnetic media and computers in bombed cities would be wiped clean by electromagnetic pulses produced by the nukes themselves. Papers would be scorched and burnt. Finding information on the past would mean finding towns or bunkers untouched by the damage. Less destructive apocalypses such as disease or environmental disaster leave storage media relatively untouched, but finding a working floppy disk reader before the data on that disk become irretrievably corrupted by time could be a difficult task. And hundreds of years after the doomsday event there won't be much information left about how the Ancients manufactured ammunition for the relic weapons they left behind. In a post-apocalyptic world in which [pre-apocalypse information is powerful](#) in itself, retrieving it will be a priority of heroes and villains everywhere.

The other great realm of futuristic information-gathering is the investigation of alien civilizations. Unless self-repairing, their computer systems are likely to be long-dead, and hints will need to be garnered from sources such as decorative carvings, inscriptions on jewelry, and perhaps archival media like HD-ROMs. Of course deciphering the language will take some work, and may slowly uncover clues to why the aliens died out -- and if the forces that caused it might still be at work. Other mysteries in space can involve lost pockets of humanity. [Investigating a dead colony world](#) can be made more complicated if the data storage systems for local computer networks and news media have passed the point of decay.

Time Travel

One solution to recovering old or lost information is to travel back to the time when it was recorded! Time travel can circumvent many of the problems of acquiring the data, but may be less helpful with reading and understanding it. It's little use recovering an ancient Babylonian text if you still can't read Babylonian. Time journeys can therefore become fact-finding and translating missions, even for documents found in the present day. Finding someone in Babylon who can read the ancient text is the simple part -- explaining why you want him to read it and getting him to explain it to you so you can understand it are much more difficult, especially if he gets suspicious as to why strangers are asking him to read royal court transcripts listing the contents of the king's tomb, *before he's dead* . . .

Further Reading

- [It Is Time For Durable Records](#) -- a short "popular" essay on different archiving media.
- [Archival Preservation](#) from the U.S. Library of Congress.
- [Basic Facts About Paper Deterioration](#) from the U.S. Library of Congress.
- [Kodak CD-R lifetime measurements](#).
- [The Voyager Golden Record](#) at JPL, NASA.
- [HD-ROM technology](#) at Norsam Technologies.

Animal Vessels in GURPS In Nomine

by Elizabeth McCoy

Were-characters, and other kinds of shapeshifters, are covered briefly in *GURPS Bestiary*, and are the focus of the forthcoming *GURPS Shapeshifters*. However, *GURPS In Nomine* vessels have properties which are peculiar to the setting, and are thus treated somewhat differently.

In *GURPS In Nomine*, a basic human vessel costs 30 points if the character has a Role associated with it (i.e., Alternate Identity, p. CI20), or 35 if the vessel is Zeroed (p. CI32). Advantages and disadvantages that affect only that vessel modify it accordingly, but the cost can never be less than 5 points (p. IN34). (It's never a disadvantage to have a spare vessel; the alternatives are always . . . worse.)

To aid the GM or player designing animal vessels for celestials and ethereals, here are some guidelines.

Animal vessels are bought as a collection of advantages and disadvantages that modify the basic 35 points for a Zeroed vessel. (There are a few types of animal vessel which warrant the 30 point cost; prizewinning racehorses or police dogs, for instance. Subtract 5 points if the vessel has such a Role -- or role -- attached to it.) Note that the *default* for an animal vessel is that it can speak and sees in full color! Colorblind, Disturbing Voice, and Mute are disadvantages. Also remember that it's the default to transport the characteristics across "straight" -- DX is DX for the character, not the racial type.

Animal vessels come in three modes: *economy*, *deluxe*, and *exotic*.

An *economy* vessel only modifies the form of the being. Cats don't have Catfall, dogs can't distinguish smells much better than normal, eagles can't see all that well from the air, and horses tend to fall down if anyone heavy tries to ride them. These are the cheapest form of vessel, and considering that the average characteristic of a celestial is 14, not 10, that's not too shabby. (Cats, dogs, and eagles will all be *very* strong for their sizes. Elephants and horses get enough Natural ST to move around, but tend to slip and fall over if they try to push against things, etc.)

Deluxe vessels add in all the advantages inherent in the species, such as Catfall for cats, Discriminatory Smell for dogs, etc. Large vessels, such as horses or elephants, get enough Natural ST to do more than lumber around carefully. (There are shades between economy and deluxe, but those are more likely to depend on what's affordable.) Skills packages (see below) are usually part of a deluxe vessel, but should be bought separately.

Exotic vessels add something extra to the package; prehensile tails are popular. If the extra feature is unusual enough to draw unwanted attention with a casual search (a bird with a pair of arms, or a dog with thumbs), it also has the Unnatural Feature disadvantage -- which, in this case, *adds* to the cost of the vessel! (You have to have that many more brownie points to get a Superior to give you something that could get the mortals in an uproar.) Note that an exotic extra can be added to an economy vessel!

Many vessels may have a skill package associated with them -- a set of skills for being an effective, normal-seeming member of the species. This package only needs to be purchased once, and will affect all similar vessels the character owns (GM's decision as to what is "similar" enough). At the GM's option, these skills apply to the *base character* and are not limited to the vessel! Otherwise, these skills are optimized for the animal vessel only, and must be improved separately from any skills in non-animal vessels.

Also, disadvantages are sometimes taken, such as Colorblind or Disturbing Voice. (Few celestials or ethereals willingly take Mute -- but it happens now and then.)

Sample Vessel Templates

All point costs are drawn from *GURPS Bestiary* and *GURPS Compendium I* unless noted otherwise. Consult those books for the actual values of individual advantages.

If a given economy vessel's cost would be below the minimum, such as cat and dog vessels are, advantages are added to it until it is at least the 5-point minimum.

Bird *(Based loosely on the Parrot template on p. BE111)*

Birds all get Flight at DX by default; the GM may rule that celestials without winged celestial forms have a default of DX-4 instead.

Economy Bird Vessel: 18 points (with an Alternate Identity as a pet) or 23 points (if Zeroed). Advantages are Decreased Life Support (Small Vessel, -50%), Enhanced Move (Flying) $\times 1.5$, Flight (Winged, Cannot Hover), Increased Speed $\times \frac{1}{2}$, and Peripheral Vision. (Owls lack Peripheral Vision, but gain Night Vision.) Disadvantages are Fragile (necessary for flight), Inconvenient Size, Poor Grip, Poverty (Dead Broke), Restricted Manipulators, and Social Stigma (Valuable Property). This is a good template for the average pigeon vessel.

Deluxe Bird Vessel: 52 points with Alternate Identity, or 57 with Zeroed. Adds the advantages of Acute Hearing +3, Alertness +5 (Mundane Only, -10%), and Attractive Appearance. (Predator bird forms will add Sharp Claws, and large values of Acute Vision.)

Exotic Additions frequently include Pouch and Mimicry (p. BE111 or CI60). A very exotic addition would be a pair of Short Arms, folded into the feathers to be hidden from casual viewing, removing the Poor Grip and Restricted Manipulators disadvantages, but adding Unnatural Feature, for a total charge of 15 points.

Cat *(Based on the Cat template on p. BE108)*

Economy Cat Vessel: 5 (with an Alternate Identity as a pet) or 8 (if Zeroed). Advantages are Acute Hearing +4, Acute Taste and Smell +4, Attractive Appearance, Fur, Claws, Decreased Life Support (Small Vessel, -50%), Double-Jointed, Enhanced Move $\times \frac{1}{2}$, Faz Sense (3-hex range), Four Legs, and Sharp Teeth. Disadvantages include Horizontal, Inconvenient Size, No Fine Manipulators, Poverty (Dead Broke), Short Arms, and Social Stigma (Valuable Property). The economy cat vessel includes no skills.

Deluxe Cat Vessel: 81 points (with Alternate Identity) or 86 points (if Zeroed). This adds the advantages of Alertness +5 (Mundane Only, -10%), Catfall, Discriminatory Smell, Night Vision, Perfect Balance, and Ultrahearing. The first cat vessel will include the Cat Skills Package, below.

Cat Skills Package: Acrobatics, Climbing, and Jumping at DX, and Stealth at DX+2. (15 points.) Note that cats are at +3 to climb up, and -3 to climb down, as per *GURPS Bestiary*.

Exotic Additions frequently include Prehensile Tail, Pouch, and Thumbs.

Dog *(Based on the medium-sized Dog template on p. BE108)*

A small dog vessel adds Inconvenient Size, reducing costs by 10 points; in the case of the economy vessel, this is below the minimum of 5 points for the vessel, and is treated as 5 points, for a cost of 10 or 15 (Alternate Identity or Zeroed). The largest dogs no longer have Decreased Life Support (Small Vessel, -50%), raising their cost by 5 points.

Wolf-vessels are similar; remove Decreased Life Support from the economy Dog vessel, change Social Stigma to Barbarian, and add Penetrating Call and Thick Fur to the deluxe Dog vessel.

Economy Dog Vessel: 13 points (Alternate Identity) or 18 points (Zeroed). Advantages are Acute Hearing +4, Acute Taste and Smell +4, Alertness +5 (Mundane Only, -10%), Decreased Life Support (Small Vessel, -50%), Enhanced Move $\times\frac{1}{2}$, Four Legs, Fur, Sharp Teeth, and Ultrahearing. Disadvantages are Horizontal, No Fine Manipulators, Poverty (Dead Broke), Short Arms, and Social Stigma (Valuable Property).

Deluxe Dog Vessel: 36 points (Alternate Identity) or 41 points (Zeroed). Add the advantage of Discriminatory Smell (functions as Empathy within 2 hexes,+50%). The first dog vessel will include the Dog and Wolf Skills Package, below.

Dog and Wolf Skills Package: Brawling, Running, and Stealth at DX. (7 points.)

Exotic Additions typically include Pouch and Prehensile Tail.

Dolphin

(Based on the Dolphin template on p. BE109)

This is a popular vessel for Jordi's Seraphim, rarely found among Servitors of other Superiors. Some ethereals also favor dolphin vessels, especially if they happen to have a Beasts strand, or an Image of Flipper.

Economy Dolphin Vessel: 10 points (Alternate Identity) or 15 (Zeroed). Advantages are Acute Hearing +3, Enhanced Move (Swimming) $\times 1$, Independently Focusable Eyes, Nictating Membrane $\times 1$, Oxygen Storage, Peripheral Vision, Pressure Support, Sonar Vision, and Ultrasonic Speech. Disadvantages are Aquatic, Horizontal, Increased Life Support, No Manipulators, Poverty (Dead Broke), and Social Stigma (Barbarian). This is a slightly weak dolphin for its species, and the vessel requires water to function over long periods of time.

(If using Transhuman Space dolphins, remove the disadvantage of Horizontal and the advantage of Acute Hearing, adding 4 points to the total economy template.)

Deluxe Dolphin Vessel: 86 points (Alternate Identity) or 91 (Zeroed). Add the advantages of Enhanced ST +6 (No Fine Manipulators), Alertness +3 (Mundane Only, -10%), and 3D Spatial Sense. Remove the Increased Life Support disadvantage -- a beached deluxe dolphin vessel will merely be annoyed, not in danger of death. The first such vessel also gets the Dolphin Skills Package, below.

Dolphin Skills Package: Acrobatics at DX and Survival (Open Oceans) at IQ +4. (14 points.) Considering the typical IQ gap between celestials and dolphins, Survival (Open Oceans) might be lowered somewhat, modifying the package's cost.

Exotic Additions: most commonly include trading No Manipulators for No Fine Manipulators and One Fine Manipulator (raising the cost by 5 points), and a male dolphin vessel. There is enough anecdotal evidence that male dolphins can control their anatomy that few humans would be surprised to observe this. This can also justify changing No Manipulators to One Fine Manipulator with Bad Grip (raising cost by 25 points) or One Fine Manipulator with Poor Grip (raising the cost by 30 points). Changing it to merely One Fine Manipulator would count as a secret Unnatural Feature -- no one expects *that* amount of flexibility! Likewise, a hermaphrodite dolphin might attract some attention, if discovered.

Other exotic additions include weak arms (raising the cost by 50 points, hidden in pouches near the front fins or in the genital slit, and slowing swimming speed if not "stowed"), Gills (typically replacing Oxygen Storage, for a *gain* of 4 points), and Pouch. Jordi's Seraphim frequently take Disturbing Voice for talking to "landlubbers"; their Ultrasonic Speech lets them communicate with each other without hassle.

Horse

(Based on the Warhorse template on p. BE112)

Economy Horse Vessel: 24 or 29 points. Advantages are Enhanced Move $\times 2$, Enhanced ST +10 (No Fine

Manipulators, -40%); Four Legs, and Peripheral Vision. Disadvantages are Horizontal, Inconvenient Size, Increased Life Support (Large Vessel, -50%), No Depth Perception, No Fine Manipulators, Poverty (Dead Broke), and Social Stigma (Valuable Property).

Deluxe Horse Vessel: 83 or 88 points for a pony (no extra Enhanced ST); 128/133 for a racehorse (Enhanced ST +20; No Fine Manipulators, -40%); 137/142 for a warhorse (Enhanced ST +30; No Fine Manipulators, -40%); 140/145 for a draft horse (Enhanced ST +40; No Fine Manipulators, -40%). Aside from the Enhanced ST suitable for the type of horse, add the advantages of Acute Hearing +2, Acute Taste and Smell +4, Alertness +6 (Mundane Only, -10%), Attractive Appearance, and Enhanced Dodge. Also add the Horse Skills Package, below.

Horse Skills Package: Riding (Being Ridden) at DX. (2 points.)

Exotic Additions typically start with buying off No Depth Perception, raising the cost by 10 points. Prehensile Tails can also be hidden in the horsehair. Pouch is sometimes used, but usually only when paired with a Prehensile Tail, or low-ST arms that tuck into the pouch as well. (While a Prehensile Tail might be missed on such things as x-rays, pouch-arms are Unnatural Features.) Servitors of Beleth are prone to adding such Unnatural Features as Fangs, retractable hoof-Claws, and finger-tentacles that protrude from the hooves, giving them a form of Restricted Manipulators (p. BE118; the structure is such that they can't swing a weapon or use more than one "hand" at a time easily). Adding the Unnatural Feature of a Horn (Long tusk, p. CI67) gives one a unicorn. Adding Fragile and Winged Flight (Cannot Hover) results in a pegasus . . .

Rat and Mouse *(Based loosely on the Giant Rat template on p. BE110)*

Economy Rat Vessel: 11 or 16 points (Alternate Identity or Zeroed). Advantages are Acute Taste and Smell +2, Cast Iron Stomach, Decreased Life Support (Small Vessel, -50%), Faz Sense (3 hex range, -20%), Fur, Night Vision, Passive Defense +1 (due to size), Peripheral Vision, and Sharp Teeth.

Deluxe Rat Vessel: 48 or 53 points. Add Acute Taste and Smell +2 (total +4), Alertness +4 (Mundane Only, -10%) and Cast Iron Stomach.

Exotic Additions start with eliminating No Depth Perception, and continue with Prehensile Tail and Pouch. A mouse's Pouch would be even smaller, but even a tiny Pouch can carry a gemstone or two, or valuable postage stamps.

Animal Vessel Advantage Notes

Alertness for vessels has the -10% limitation that it does not affect resonances or other supernatural abilities that require a Perception roll. The vessel's Alertness is only a combination of increased sense of touch, Acute Hearing, Acute Vision, and Acute Taste and Smell.

Decreased Life Support with a -50% limitation reflects the reduced breathing needs of a small vessel. Since celestials don't eat and drink, breathing is the only life support they require. (A vessel that is very large will have the same limitation, as it only requires more air.)

Prehensile Tail replaces No Fine Manipulators with One Fine Manipulator with Poor Grip (-2 to skills requiring a firm grip) and Extra Flexibility, adding 25 points to the vessel.

Pouch adds a discreet kangaroo-style pouch to a vessel, frequently with sphincter muscles to hold it closed, costing 2 points per pound of capacity. (More detailed rules for large races are in *GURPS Bio-Tech*, p. 136.) For a bird-sized vessel, the maximum is a half-pound (and restricts flight accordingly!). For cat-sized vessels, the pouch holds a maximum of one pound. For medium size dog-sized vessels, the maximum is three pounds. For large dog-sized vessels, the maximum is 10 pounds. Horse-sized beings have a maximum of 100 total pounds of pouch(es), and elephant-sized gets a maximum of 1,000 pounds! (Naturally, someone can always have smaller pouches than the

maximum that an animal vessel will allow.) A pouch is very useful for Thieves and Windys!

Thumbs are primarily useful for cats with polydactylism ("extra fingers"); the fat, doubled "thumb-claws" conceal the muscles and joint-modifications required for an opposable thumb. Replace No Fine Manipulators with Bad Grip (-4 to anything requiring a firm grip), for a net gain of +20 points. (This does *not* affect cats' Climbing skill.) When in doubt as to what actions could be accomplished, wrap rubber-bands around the player's finger's middle knuckles.

Unnatural Feature, as stated above, is an "advantage" for the purposes of obtaining a vessel; the weirder the form, the more likely that it will bring the secret of celestials to mortal attention. (Alternatively, the GM could simply bring even more pressure to bear on the Secret disadvantage in every non-human's racial template -- but Unnatural Feature should never reduce the cost of a vessel, since the purpose of vessels is *not* to attract attention to unnatural goings-on.)

A Note on Wealth

The animal vessels above all have Dead Broke and Social Stigma attached to them. That's because they're *animals*. It doesn't matter if your other vessel has a Filthy Rich Role -- you can't touch that money to buy things or bribe people while you're a parrot. (Flying up to the ATM to get money out is considered bad form, and you can't spend the money anyway.)

One loophole in this is the Internet or, if your voice sounds the same as your human vessel's, telephone. In the *In Nomine* spirit of "don't sweat the small stuff," these are ignored. You'll have enough trouble typing in your credit card with your beak (or paws; on the Internet, no one knows you're a dog), and signing for your package when it's delivered.

Swamp Ogres and Desert Minotaurs

Templates for Sub-Species of Giants, Monstrous Humanoids, and Humanoids for the d20 System

by Owen K.C. Stephens

Templates are a quick and easy way to expand the options DMs have to challenge players without creating basic rule problems or taking up a huge amount of room. Templates can apply to numerous different monsters, and work within the existing framework of creature types, so new favored enemies and Knowledge skills don't become necessary. Just a few templates can change the flavor of a game and keep players on their toes, while helping to fill out the number of monsters of a given type available at each CR level.

This article presents a number of regional templates designed to create subspecies of giants and monstrous humanoids. The templates are kept intentionally simple, so they give monsters a new flavor without forcing a DM to do a lot of work. All the templates have "giant" in their name, as giants, ogres, and trolls are the most common examples of such creatures. Many of the templates can also be added to monstrous humanoids and humanoids, however, allowing DMs to create subspecies of minotaurs, centaurs, and even goblins.

Though geared for different environments, these three templates essentially make giants and humanoids bigger, smaller, or just tougher. A DM can easily mix and match these traits, turning swamp ogres into desert ogres simply by changing their breath weapon to something heat-related. Cosmetic changes of this kind do not affect a templates basic function or CR shift, and thus were not made into independent templates.

Desert Giant

Desert giants are monsters adapted to the harsh conditions of the deepest deserts. Though smaller than their less hearty brethren, desert giants are no less strong and considerably more nimble. They have keen senses and great natural cunning, allowing them to plan ambushes and build communities more successfully than others of their kind. Desert giants feel no kinship to non-desert breeds, and often make war on those they come into contact with.

Creating A Desert Giant

"Desert Giant" is an inherited template that can be added to any giant, humanoid or monstrous humanoid. A desert giant uses all the base creature's statistics and special abilities except as noted here.

Size and Type: Decrease size by one category, making all appropriate changes to size modifiers for AC, attack rolls and skills.

Speed: A desert giant's base speed in all natural forms of movement is increased by 10 feet.

Armor Class: Natural armor improves by +2 (this stacks with any natural armor bonus the base creature has).

Attacks: The desert giant gains a bite attack if the base creature didn't already have one. This attack deals the damage listed below, based on size. The creature uses its bite attack only when unarmed or making a full attack action.

Size	Bite Damage
Small or smaller	1d6
Medium	1d8
Large	2d6

Huge	3d6
Gargantuan	4d6

Special Attacks: A desert giant retains all the special attacks of the base creature and also gains the following special abilities.

Poison (Ex): The bite of a desert giant is poisonous. The desert giant may, as a standard action, lick a melee weapon or single piece of ammunition to poison it as well. A poisoned weapon is effective for one blow or 1d4 minutes, whichever comes first. The poison has a fort DC of (10 + 1/2 racial hit dice + con modifier), initial damage of 1d6 Str, and secondary damage of 1d6 Con.

Special Qualities: A desert giant has all the special qualities of the base creature, plus the following special qualities.

- Tremorsense to 30 feet.
- Scent

Abilities: Increase from the base creature as follows: Dex +4, Con +2, Wis +4.

Feats: Desert giants receive Alertness and Multiattack as bonus feats.

Challenge Rating: HD 8 or less, as base creature +1; HD 9 to 18, as base creature +2; HD 19 or more, as base creature +3.

Alignment: Usually lawful evil

Sample Desert Giant

Desert Minotaur

Medium Monstrous Humanoid

Hit Dice: 6d8+18 (45 hp)

Initiative: +2

Speed: 40 ft. (8 squares)

Armor Class: 19 (+2 Dex, +7 natural), touch 10, flat-footed NA

Base Attack/Grapple: +6/+14

Attack: Greataxe +10 melee (3d6+6/x3) or gore +10 melee (1d8+4) or bite +10 melee (1d8+4) plus poison

Full Attack: Greataxe +10/+5 melee (3d6+6/x3) and gore +8 melee (1d8+2) and bite +8 melee (1d8+4) plus poison

Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Powerful charge 4d6+6, poison bite (DC 16, 1d6 Str/1d6 Con).

Special Qualities: Darkvision 60 ft., natural cunning, scent, tremorsense (30 ft.)

Saves: Fort +7, Ref +7, Will +5

Abilities: Str 19, Dex 14, Con 17, Int 7, Wis 14, Cha 8

Skills: Intimidate +2, Listen +11, Search +2, Spot +11

Feats: Alertness, Great Fortitude, Multiattack, Power Attack, Track

Environment: Any desert

Organization: Solitary, pair, or gang (3-4)

Challenge Rating: 5

Treasure: Standard

Alignment: Usually lawful evil

Advancement: By character class

A desert minotaur stands more than 6 feet tall and weighs about 600 pounds. Desert minotaurs speak Giant.

Mountain Giant

Mountain giants are freaks of nature -- larger, tougher versions of common giants of their kind. Most scholars believe mountain giant creatures are throwbacks to an ancient time when all monsters were larger and more powerful, while others claim they are from bloodlines with a dash of titan blood. Mountain giants are often found among other giant types, with mountain fire giants living on volcanos and mountain frost giants living on glaciers. As larger and tougher versions of their type, mountain giants often rule other giants or monstrous humanoids of their type. They rarely gather in communities of their own.

Creating A Mountain Giant

"Mountain Giant" is an inherited template that can be added to any giant or monstrous humanoid. A mountain giant uses all the base creature's statistics and special abilities except as noted here.

Size and Type: Increase size by one category, making all appropriate changes to size modifiers for AC, attack rolls and skills.

Speed: A mountain giant's base speed in all natural forms of movement is doubled.

Armor Class: Natural armor improves by +4 (this stacks with any natural armor bonus the base creature has).

Special Attacks: A mountain giant retains all the special attacks of the base creature and also gains the following special abilities.

Mighty Blow (Su): A mountain giant's melee attacks deal triple damage to inanimate objects.

Smite (Su): Once per day a mountain giant can make a normal melee attack to deal extra damage equal to its HD (maximum of +20) against any one foe.

Special Qualities: A mountain giant has all the special qualities of the base creature, plus the following special qualities.

- Damage reduction: 5/adamantine (8 HD or less) or DR 10/adamantine (HD or more)..
- SR equal to 10 + base creature's hit dice (maximum SR 30).

Abilities: Increase from the base creature as follows: Str +8, Dex -2, Con +4, Wis +4.

Challenge Rating: HD 5 or less, as base creature +2; HD 6 to 10, as base creature +3; HD 11 or more, as base creature +4.

Alignment: As base creature.

Sample Mountain Giant

Mountain Fire Giant

Huge Giant (Fire)

Hit Dice: 15d8+105 (172 hp)

Initiative: -2

Speed: 60 ft. in half-plate armor (6 squares); base speed 80 ft.

Armor Class: 25 (-2 size, -2 Dex, +12 natural, +7 half-plate armor) touch 6, flat-footed 25

Base Attack/Grapple: +11/+25

Attack: Greatsword +23 melee (4d6+21) or slam +23 melee (1d6+14) or rock +8 ranged (3d6+14 plus 2d6 fire)

Full Attack: Greatsword +23/+18/+13 melee (4d6+21) or 2 slams +23 melee (1d6+14) or rock +8 ranged (3d6+14 plus 2d6 fire)

Space/Reach: 15 ft./15 ft.

Special Attacks: Rock throwing, mighty blow, smite

Special Qualities: DR 10/adamantine, immunity to fire, low-light vision, rock catching, SR 25, vulnerability to cold
Saves: Fort +16, Ref +3, Will +11
Abilities: Str 39, Dex 7, Con 25, Int 10, Wis 18, Cha 11
Skills: Climb +13, Craft (any one) +6, Intimidate +6, Jump +13, Spot +16
Feats: Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Overrun, Improved Sunder, Iron Will, Power Attack
Environment: Volcanos, Warm mountains
Organization: Solitary, or with a gang (2-5) of fire giants
Challenge Rating: 14
Treasure: Standard
Alignment: Often lawful evil
Advancement: By character class

An adult male fire mountain giant stands 24 feet tall, has a chest that measures 12 feet around, and weighs about 40,000 pounds. Females are slightly shorter and lighter. Fire giants can live to be 700 years old. Fire mountain giants wear sturdy cloth or leather garments colored red, orange, yellow, or black. Warriors wear helmets and half-plate armor of blackened steel.

Swamp Giant

Swamp giants are most common among ogres and trolls, though a few other monstrous humanoids come in swamp varieties as well. Swamp giants are solitary creatures, rarely gathering in numbers above two or three. Their long lifespans and increased toughness make up for their tendency not to mate.

Creating A Swamp Giant

"Swamp Giant" is an inherited template that can be added to any nongood giant, monstrous humanoid or humanoid with at least 4 non-class hit dice.

A swamp giant uses all the base creature's statistics and special abilities except as noted here.

Speed: A swamp giant gains a swim speed of 30 feet. If the base creature has a swim speed of 30 feet or greater, than speed is increased by 10 feet.

Armor Class: Natural armor improves by +2 (this stacks with any natural armor bonus the base creature has).

Special Attacks: A swamp giant retains all the special attacks of the base creature and also gains the following special abilities.

Breath Weapon (Su): A swamp giant and gains a breath weapon that deals 1d8 points of damage per hit die of the swamp giant in a 30 foot cone. A successful Reflex save (DC 10 + 1/2 swamp giant's racial HD + swamp giant's Con modifier) reduces damage by half. It may use this break weapon once every 2d4 rounds.

Special Qualities: A swamp giant has all the special qualities of the base creature, plus the following special qualities.

- Darkvision out to 60 feet. (Or +30 feet if base creature has darkvision)
- Low-light vision.
- Immunity to disease.
- Resistance to acid 20, and cold 20.
- +4 racial bonus on Fortitude saves against poison.

Abilities: Increase from the base creature as follows: Str +6, Con +6, Wis +4.

Challenge Rating: HD 5 or less, as base creature +1; HD 6 to 10, as base creature +2; HD 11 or more, as base creature +3.

Alignment: Always evil (any).

Sample Swamp Giant

Swamp Ogre

Large Giant

Hit Dice: 4d8+23 (42 hp)

Initiative: -1

Speed: 30 ft. in hide armor (6 squares); base speed 40 ft.

Armor Class: 16 (-1 size, -1 Dex, +5 natural, +3 hide armor), touch 8, flat-footed 16

Base Attack/Grapple: +3/+12

Attack: Greatclub +11 melee (2d8+12) or javelin +1 ranged (1d8+8)

Full Attack: Greatclub +11 melee (2d8+12) or javelin +1 ranged (1d8+8)

Space/Reach: 10 ft./10 ft.

Special Attacks: Breath weapon (30 foot cone, 4d8, DC 14)

Special Qualities: Acid and cold resistance 20, darkvision 90 ft., immune to disease, low-light vision, +4 to saves vs poison

Saves: Fort +6, Ref +0, Will +1

Abilities: Str 27, Dex 8, Con 21, Int 6, Wis 14, Cha 7

Skills: Climb +8, Listen +4, Spot +4

Feats: Toughness, Weapon Focus (greatclub)

Environment: Any swamp

Organization: Solitary

Challenge Rating: 4

Treasure: Standard

Alignment: Usually chaotic evil

Advancement: By character class

Level Adjustment: +2

Adult swamp ogres stand 8 to 9 feet tall and weigh 500 to 550 pounds. Their skin color ranges from dull green to dull black. Their clothing consists of poorly cured furs and hides, which add to their naturally repellent odor.

Swamp ogres speak Giant, and those specimens who boast Intelligence scores of at least 10 also speak Common.

Pyramid Review

Iron & Silk: The Player's Guide To Improvised Weapons (for Feng Shui)

Published by [Atlas Games](#)

Written by Will Hindmarch, Chris Jones, & John Seavey

Cover by Kagan Mcleod

Illustrated by J. Scott Reeves

72-page softback; \$17.95

The situation is this: It's downtime. Your latest mission is over and you have just spent an enjoyable evening celebrating at a local restaurant. And in true Dashiell Hammett style, just when you least expect it, ninja attack. The problem is they are armed to the hilt with sword and throwing stars, and you left your favourite Glock locked in the boot of the car. But what do you have on hand? Since this is *Feng Shui*, lots and lots of things -- plates, chopsticks, Chinese lanterns, the silk drapes hanging on the wall, the ceremonial giant gong over by the entrance that would make excellent cover -- and all this before the fight moves to the kitchen!

The point is that everything and anything in the *Feng Shui* game can be turned into a weapon, but sometimes the imagination deserts a player, or that he is not a true devotee of the Hong Kong martial arts flick and is just short of getting into the genre. This is where *Iron & Silk: The Player's Guide To Improvised Weapons* comes in handy. Designed to sit readily at hand near the gaming table, it is primarily a collection of items that live up to the book's tag line, ". . . Everything is a weapon."

In fact, there are over 350 such potential weapons described and given stats in *Iron & Silk*. There are new rules to allow for the fact that, while anything can be picked up and used to whack somebody over the head with it, doing so will destroy the item in the process. This can range from the simple vase -- which as we know will smash immediately upon contact with that mook's head -- right up to the human or zombie arm. You might get five good hits in with the bloodied limb, but as soon as it is successfully parried, it is rendered useless. The same goes for the zombie arm, but its desiccated and decaying nature means that it only lasts for three hits. Even better is the arm of the "Jiang Shi," the hopping vampire, which lasts until it is parried and can even induce temporary paralysis upon a successful hit. Other rules allow for the use of improvised shields and parrying.

These 350 entries are spread over almost 50 pages and across all four junctures. This means that both the mundane and the esoteric are listed. So you have the household appliance, the Knirk (the multi-purpose eating utensil brought to you by the Buro after a century of scientific progress and Swedish design), the mattress, and the stapler. And then the bumper car, the cricket cage, the iron egg (a quail's egg left in horse dung and urine for a month, considered a delicacy), the upright scooter (or Segueway) and the baby squid. While their direct ability to dish out damage is covered in the stats, often their description suggests other uses, such as squeezing the baby squid's ink sac at an opponent. Items that cannot be directly employed as weapons are likewise described, such as the hair rope, which is better employed to bind supernatural creatures.

Besides all of this, each of the game's four junctures is given a short location list and the type of items that can be found there. The descriptions of each juncture serve as a handy guide to what kind of life and dangers the heroes are going to find there, but without giving out anything otherwise reserved for the GM. The various locations refer back to those mentioned in their juncture description and are really thumbnail write-ups to help a player get a quick grasp of

its set-up.

If the supplement has a weakness, it is that it highlights the game's need for a book of locations in the mode of the *Thrilling Locations* sourcebook for the *James Bond 007 RPG*. Done in style of booklet that came with the [On Location: The Feng Shui GM Screen](#), it would make the perfect companion to *Iron & Silk*. There are one or two typographical errors, but otherwise this supplement is well done and the internal artwork of J. Scott Reeves perfectly captures the feel of the genre.

Though all characters will doubtless find something in here to fight with, the core game's "Everyday Hero" archetype will get the most out of it, as they possess an intrinsic bonus with improvised weapons. Even so, *Iron & Silk* is a book useful for player and GM alike, as it is not purely a "Player's Guide." Both will be referencing its pages on a regular basis, particularly during the midst of a fight, making *Iron & Silk: The Player's Guide To Improvised Weapons* likely to be the most used supplement bar the *Feng Shui* rulebook.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Review

Universe Primer (for Universe RPG)

Published by [Tower Ravens](#)

Designed by Mark Wilkinson, Michael Wilkinson, Kristen Redd Wilkinson, & William Pace

Illustrated by Andria Stark, Tracy Pace, Eric Wallis, Mike Sorenson, & David Matson

320-page b&w softcover; \$29.95

Most contemporary RPGs tout a movement away from complicated sets of rules, toward fewer charts and tables, and toward less-detailed combat and action systems. *Universe* from Tower Ravens is something of a throwback, then, to involved games like *TimeLords*, *Powers & Perils*, and *Space Opera*.

The game is set in the Antwaris galaxy, in a 100-light-year cubed area that seems to overflow with humanity. There are no fewer than four species of humans, and perhaps more, all saddled with an uneasy alliance following centuries of war and cross-colonization efforts that have subverted, enslaved, freed, and politicized relations among the offshoots. Much of the Primer is set on Marrgen, a volleyball of a world that has been the most hotly contested of the five Terra-like planets in the Thuwasik System. The game includes an extensive and detailed history that sets the stage for the action.

Action is based on percentile dice rolls. Characters are made with a selection of attributes, rated from one to 100, paired up fairly intuitively so that points shifted back and forth won't make you super-tough and weak as a kitten. Strength and Stamina are matched, for example, as are Comeliness and Charisma. Shifting points from one paired set to another is more costly. Skills are called Aptitudes, and are ranked one through eight. Characters may also have psionic powers, which get a cursory treatment here. The chapter reads rather philosophically, like a cross between an evolution lesson and an examination of chakras, which gets in the way of an already elaborate system for powers. They do score points for originality, and the powers fit the rest of the game system. As for where all this information goes -- and about half of the character creation process comes with the caveat "This is not used in the Primer" -- note that the character sheet is 12 pages.

The Performance Table is used to adjudicate all the rolls in the game -- find your Aptitude on the left (or your Attribute if you have no skill), and do a Row Shift up or down depending on the modifiers. Roll d100 and read across the table to find what percentage of success you achieved; the roll of a d100 is not the same as the percentage the table will give you. Those successes decrease only in increments of 10, and then fall off into marginal, total, or critical failures.

Below that the table has a percentage region, usually used for determining damage. It only lists 1s and 10s, so if your weapon does 46 points of damage and your success percentage was 30, you have to read across the 40 row to the 30 column (12) and then the 6 row to the 30 column (2). Add those together and you get 14. Graphically it's easier than it sounds, but not by much.

Combat uses Action Points -- the faster you are, the more you have to spend during a round of combat, though longer actions (bandaging a wound) may take several points over a number of segments. Actions occur simultaneously, so initiative in ranged combat is only used to determine who acts first in case of conflict (you want to hit the airlock

button, but your opponent hopes to shoot you). In melee combat, you may only attack if you have initiative. Otherwise you're on the defensive and have to try to win initiative back. Reversing your roll gives you the hit location, so if you roll well -- a 01 -- the hit location is the head (10). This puts the most damaging rolls in the most vital areas.

Everything comes with its own name. The GM is modestly called the OverLord, the attacker in melee is the assertor, the defender is the refuter. The Performance Table lists things by the Ordinate and Abscissa (the axes, though it also talks about rows and columns). Sometimes the product is detailed because that's the intent of the design, but other times it seems to be used only to establish proprietorship over the contents.

The background story is a convoluted tale of takeovers, rebellions, and alliances made and broken. It seems like every other paragraph someone is splitting from their government and forming a splinter group. After a while one wonders where they're finding room on Marrgen for these countless entities, and how they can keep from constantly fighting (not that there isn't plenty of that). Wisely, Tower Ravens states up front which portions of the setting they will not be describing, giving game mas . . . er, OverLords a sandbox to play in that won't be overrun by company canon.

The *Universe Primer* (part of the Primer Series) is a lead-in to the Master Series, which will delve deeper into the Antwaris Galaxy and provide even *more* rules. Some of the book sounds like it was cut and pasted from the larger work. This doesn't appear to have any detrimental effects on the rules themselves, but you get the sense that there may be the occasional bit of unimportant but connecting text missing. That may be just as well in the case of the "running the game" advice chapter. It's brief, it barely touches on practical advice for anyone (new players or veterans, players of this setting or not), and it rambles. It's confrontational in places, almost hateful, and borders on open contempt for no one in particular.

For casual gamers, or those who appreciate the simplicity of an *Over the Edge* or Storyteller set of rules, *Universe* will send them screaming from the store. For those seeking a level of realism lost from many modern systems, who don't mind the dearth of setting material, and who can't wait for the Master Rulebook to provide more information, the *Universe Primer* will be a mature and welcome change of pace in the market.

--Andy Vetromile

Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Ring of the Lords: Reality Alberich

*"Inheritance of the world
Would be won by the man
Who from the Rhinegold
Could fashion the Ring
That would bestow limitless power on him."*

-- Richard Wagner, *The Rhinegold* (1869)

Call it a Worked Example in advance of the landing of *GURPS Fantasy*, or an alternate-historian's response to cinematic Tolkein-mania in honor of Oscar season. All quotes are accurate, and some of them may even be true. Whatever excuse I provide [this time](#), Reality Alberich is nothing so much as a Wagnerian tale of conspiracies and bloodlines, a Dark Lord's Reich rising in the East and the kings and wizards he brings under his Shadow. This is operatic fantasy splayed against the torchlit canvas of the [first Millennium](#), the last great [Apocalypse](#) and the ending of an Age of Darkness. Adventures in Alberich are grim tales, certes -- but they are tales that flare with firelight and gleam with gold.

"This Otto was grandson of the Italian queen and son of a Greek princess, the daughter of the emperor Romanus. He had inherited all of the Byzantine ideas of the imperial power. . . . His great ideal was his predecessor Charlemagne, and in the year 1000 he is said to have solemnly opened the tomb of the latter and to have looked with emotion upon the figure of the great emperor; from the finger of Charles he is said to have taken a ring which he always wore until his death."

-- Dana Carleton Munro, *The Middle Ages* (1902)

It is the thousandth year after the birth of Our Lord, or thereabouts. Time has fallen into [some confusion](#), and the clerks agree neither on the dates of Easter or the words of the Creed. Two popes contend for the Throne of Peter, and claim each other Antichrist. Surely one must be correct; a great comet appears in heaven in September, and fiery armies are seen contending in the skies over Rheims. Saint Anthony's Fire grips Burgundy and France, bringing hallucinations and madness in its wake -- or perhaps it brings demons and night-hags. The moon has crimsoned over Germany, a lidless red eye staring down at a realm covered in primeval forest, a realm grown from the ancient Saxon marches of the sundered Grossreich of Charlemagne. The Saxons grew from the roots of a white tree -- the Irminsul -- and a shoot from their branch, Otto III, has claimed the throne of the Reich. Literally, as it happens: Otto entered the tomb of Charlemagne, hidden and inviolate for 200 years, and removed the Undying Kaiser's throne and regalia. He has gifted powerful artifacts from Charlemagne's tomb (the Spear and the Crown) to the kings of the Easterlings, the Slav and Magyar hordes his ancestors had warred against, and spread his cloak and power over them. And from the finger of Charlemagne, Otto drew off the Ring of the Nibelungs, and placed it on his own hand.

"Let this suffice for the present, to shew, if not the genealogic, at least the mythical identity of the Frankish royal family with those Nibelungen of the saga; which has adopted unmistakable features from the history of this stem into its later, more historical development, where the focus still remains possession of that Hoard, the cynosure of earthly rule."

-- Richard Wagner, *The Wibelungen* (1848)

The Nibelungs (called Wibelungs in Swabia, where they ruled long, and Ghibellines in Italy, where they long sought to rule) were one of the contending Great Houses of the Franks and Burgundians, who invaded Roman Gaul during the end of the Second Age. They produced great warriors such as Karl Hammerhand, and from the days of Pippin the Fat became Steward to the Frankish kings. But Pippin slew his master Dagobert II and broke the royal line; his son Karl Hammerhand gained great power over the weakened kings, and made his own son Pippin the Short king in 751, placing the Nibelungs on the throne. And Pippin's son Charlemagne became Kaiser, taking the powers of old Rome, placing a certain Spear head onto the Ash Shaft that Wotan had cut from the World Tree. For fifty years he warred against all the world, and his might spread over the earth in a Greater Reich. And from the golden treasures of Irminsul, the Tree of the Sun watered by the Rhine, he (or his dwarf Alberich) melted down a mighty Ring, within

which was bound the power and the will to rule the world. When Charlemagne died, none of his heirs could agree who took the Ring, so it was sealed up with him, and the power of the Nibelungs was lost, and the Reich was sundered.

The Nibelungs, or Niflungar, are those from Niflheim -- the land of *nifl*, the mists, boiling up from below the roots of the World Ash Tree. Niflheim is also home to the dishonored dead, who now march in the armies of Otto, their hereditary master, who called them up by the power of Charlemagne's sword Joieuse, and commands them with the Ring. There are learned doctors among the Jews in Spain who hint that the Niflungar are the "fallen ones" -- the [Nephilim](#), who took power from the Tree of the Serpent -- returned at the last days. But among the Anglo-Saxons, they know the Nephilim as the Entas, the tree-giants who begin to stir again as Something quickens their roots. In all these tales, the power coils at the roots of the Tree like the dragon Fafnir -- or Satan -- wrapped around itself in a ring of fire. And inside this ring of fire lies all the Dragon's cruelty, and his malice, and his will to dominate every living thing. Charlemagne turned the ring of fire into a Ring of gold. And those who take up this ring become Nephilim or Nibelungs, subject to its fell powers.

"What you gave, you were either able to give or you were not. If you were not able to, why did you pretend to be able to? If you were able to, what unknown emperor without name commands our emperor? In what shadows is he lurking?"

-- letter of Gerbert of Aurillac to Otto III (997 A.D.)

Against the Ring, a few wise and holy men could stand. Chief among them was Gerbert the White, the wizard-priest of Rheims. He had studied the stars, including the hateful new stars and fearful conjunctions of the time, and studied deeply in books of wisdom, such as the *Astronomicon* of Manilius, left over from the Second Age. He had a marvellous chamber that could appear or disappear at a word, and a wondrous mechanism that could fix time in place by means of bells and water. He had even traveled among the Saracen wizards of the South, and learned Southron ways and seemings. In the South, he discovered [Abuphimahet](#), the speaking Brazen Head of Wisdom, and learned from it dark secrets. With such secret lore Gerbert suborned the lesser Nibelungs Lothair and Clovis from the throne of France, replacing them with the Capets, whose name gave secret sign of the Head that perhaps chose them.

Most astounding of all, he had found the Speculum, a miraculous mirror that once belonged to Vergil Magus in the Second Age, into which he gazed long nights as the red moon glowered down. Perhaps too long; long enough to look into the eye of the Kaiser, then roaming incessantly in search of the Ring. Or perhaps in Southron lands he, too, had heard the whisper of the Ring from the brass lips of Abuphimahet, and coveted its power for himself. He abandoned Rheims and joined the court of Otto, becoming an appanage of the growing Reich. He told the Kaiser where the lost tomb of Charlemagne was hidden, and saw the Ring regained. Then he told Otto of the hidden forge of Vergil, in a Brazen Tower on the slopes of Vesuvius, where the Ring can be remade to transfer Charlemagne's powers to Otto, who will become the new Undying Kaiser. So Otto, "the pale death of the South," moves into Italy, to place Gerbert on the ancient hills of Rome as Pope and Pontifex, Lord of the Gateways, and to open the way to a Thousand-Year Reich.

"But as God willed it, Isenbart himself came by and asked the old woman what she was carrying. She answered that she had some whelps [welfen] or young puppies. 'Let me see if some of them can be used later for breeding,' said the count. 'Oh, you have dogs enough,' said the old woman, backing away. 'It would give you the creeps to see this messy tangle of dogs.' But the count did not give in and forced her to uncover the children and show them to him."

-- Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm, *German Sagas* (1818)

Otto and his Nibelungs are opposed by the Welfs, or Guelphs -- or wolves -- of Burgundy and Bavaria, the descendants of the "whelps" disguised as "a messy tangle of dogs" long ago. Wolfsblood runs in their veins, from the days of the ancient [Neuri](#). Well do they remember the dark years of Charlemagne, when two *luporii* rangers were sent to every town to kill wolves without let or mercy. The Welf scion Rudolf III rules [wolf-haunted](#) Burgundy, where he battles both the Nibelung line there and Gerbert's creature Robert Capet of France, who presses against the borders even as he luxuriates in incestuous anathema. Heinrich of Bavaria, who attempted to take control of Otto from his Byzantine mother Theophano, is now tied to the Welfs by marriage, and shudders at the pallid passage of the Kaiser's armies, and at what the Ring has called out of the Black Forest. The Welfs further have an ancient link to Rome, city founded by another pair of whelps, Romulus and Remus, suckled by a she-wolf on Capitoline Hill. But the milk of

wolves is thin and curdled there now. Only the feeble mobs commanded by the tyrant John Crescentius cower within the Eternal City's tumbled walls, waiting for the inevitable end of days.

"It is said that when Chlodio was staying with his wife on the sea shore in the summer, his wife went to the water to bathe at noon, and a beast of Neptune resembling the Quinotaur sought her out. As she conceived right away, either by the beast or by her husband, she afterwards gave birth to a son called Merovech, after whom the kings of the Franks were later called Merovingians."

-- Fredegar of Burgundy, *Chronicle* (c. 680 A.D.)

The other ancient blood that cries out against Otto is that of the true kings, the Merovingians descended from the sunken lords of [Atlantys](#) by the wife of Chlodio, king of the Franks. The "sea-born" kings hold a certain power and grace that not even Charlemagne could blot out. Childeric, the last Merovingian king, died in 754, three years after Pippin the Short deposed him and cut his long hair, in which resided his strength, and which covered a certain mark or [scar](#). But somewhere the line of Merovech continues -- Dagobert II, basely slain by Pippin the Fat, had an heir, Sigisbert IV, who escaped into the Pyrenees, where the last Iron Tower of Atlantys is hidden from impious eyes. Here in the holy place, the Merovingian holy blood regained a measure of its strength. Sigisbert VI attempted to rebel against the Nibelungs of France in 881, but failed; his heirs themselves fled into the elven forests of Broceliande in Brittany, a dell riven only by pure waters and golden sunlight.

"[W]hat then can we think but that the whole human race, root and branch, is sliding willingly down again into the gulf of primeval chaos? . . . And because, in fulfillment (as we see) of the Apostle's prophecy, love waxes cold and iniquity abounds among men that are lovers of their own selves, therefore these things aforesaid befel more frequently than usual in all parts of the world about the thousandth year after the birth of our Lord and Saviour. For, in the seventh year before that date, Mount Vesuvius (which is also called Vulcan's Caldron) gaped far more often than his wont and belched forth a multitude of vast stones mingled with sulphurous flames which fell even to a distance of three miles around; and thus by the stench of his breath he began to make all the surrounding province uninhabitable."

-- Radulf Glaber, *Miracles de St.-Benoit* (ca. 1020)

So thus matters stand. Mount Vesuvius erupts, spreading ash across the plains of Campania as Otto's Dark Reich spreads across Europe. He has brought the armies of the East to his banner, and through Gerbert's treason France is prisoner and the Southrons gather their black corsairs for the slaughter. The wise wizard-priests Abbon and Arnulf alone hold the guttering hopes of the free peoples. But they cannot defeat the Shadow alone, or blind the burning Eye over Germany. They need a fellowship -- men of Rome, wolflings of Burgundy, elves of Broceliande and Arden -- dedicated to destroying the power of the Ring. Could the Norse ship-lord Olaf Tryggvason be found, who defeated Thor himself but vanished into the sea during a battle against the pagan Svein Forkbeard? And talking of kings from the sea, what of the Merovingian heir, the Lost King? Do the ancient Basques of Navarre, who slew Charlemagne's greatest wraith at Roncesvalles, keep his Horn of Apocalypse in their Pyrenean fastnesses guarding the Iron Tower? If so, could its sounding somehow restore the [true Christian history](#) from this hateful caricature? And there is another hope. Arnulf, poring over Gerbert's library abandoned at Rheims, has read of a second Ring -- an Atlantean ring, held by the sorcerer Gyges the Gray, that makes its wielder invisible. Could this ring somehow bring and bind the Ring of the Nibelungs? Someone must answer these questions, and soon -- before the Crack of Doom opens to swallow the world.

Adopt an Adaptable Game!

I've spent a fair bit of time in the past little while trying to figure out if there are any other "games" akin to RPGs, where the point is generally not to "win" but solely to have fun and tell a story. (I'm also lumping in RPG-like constructs, such as the [How to Host a Murder](#) series.) So far I haven't come up with any other examples, outside of maybe some story-telling parlor games or improvisational theatre. In fact, I wondered if RPGs might be better classified as "toys" instead of "games," since "no clearly defined victory conditions" are one of the hallmarks of toys. But that's not the point of this column directly.

Let's say you're watching a horse race. Generally speaking, it's rare for someone who's eight lengths ahead at the end to suddenly pull the reins and slow down enough for everyone else to catch up, since it's much more exciting to have a close race.

Or say you're part of the Scrabble World Championship. You rub your eyes briefly - owing to the fact that you weren't prepared to be dumped headlong into another hypothetical example - only to learn that your opponent is kicking your butt. "Don't worry," he says, handing you two blank tiles. "I can see you're down on your luck, and might be able to use these."

I was thinking about these non-examples last month when I was at the Dreamation gaming convention, as part of a fantasy RPG. As I am wont to do, I created a fairly social character, heavy on smarts and know-stuff skills but light on pointy-stabby abilities. However, during the game itself I tweaked my play style a little bit, since, y'know, it's a game convention . . . even if everyone hates what I'm doing, I'll never see these folks again. (Admittedly, this is the same logic that leads to unspeakably rude behavior at checkout lines and other signs of society's decline, so tread lightly.) Anyway, I made heavy use of my know-stuff skills, as normal, but then during most of the combats I relinquished the spotlight entirely; I excused my character to "guard duty" in the hall, protecting the rear, and so on, incorporating that quirk into my character. ("Oh, sure . . . I may have *seemed* cowardly, but I bet you would've been thanking me if you all were ambushed in the hallway! Hey, I must've done something right, because no one snuck up on us! Gotta go!")

Since I'm not a huge fan of straight "hack 'til someone falls over" [combat](#), I'm generally more than content to allow the other players who enjoy fighting to do so. But I usually rely on my character's incompetence to ensure that I'm not overshadowing the fighters; this was the first time I can recall where I was actively choosing to avoid combat.

And I realized this was one of the great strengths of a roleplaying game; it's completely adaptable on-the-fly, by both the GM and the players.

I've known for a while on some level that the GM can modify the game to ensure the players are having fun; I've dropped encounters at the end of an adventure because I sensed the game was going too long, I've modified scenarios to beef up bits the players liked, and I've talked in the past about bringing the heroes to the ["edge of defeat" threshold](#). But the players also modify the game according to their own interests and desires. If the players are handed a puzzle and one of the players enjoys solving those out-of-character, then he can have his character solve the puzzle, too; conversely, if none of the players like puzzles, the GM can abstract that obstacle to skill rolls. If players enjoy angst-heavy roleplaying, then it's possible for them to structure their characters and playing style to help ensure they get what they want. (Of course, it helps if the players communicate their wants to the GM as well.)

None of this is a particularly profound revelation, but hopefully stating it will give some players some ideas. Your actions - both in and out of character - can modify the game to something you're more likely to play; if you like interacting with others, shopping, or out-thinking your enemies, you have a fair shot at being able to structure things so that you get what you want. (And, conversely, if you *don't* like doing some of those things, you might consider leaving that portion of the spotlight, in the hopes that the other players will relinquish again when something you're interested in pops up.)

However, what's interesting to me is that adapting an adventure isn't something that the GM necessarily needs to do on the fly. Especially in long-running games, the GM should have a pretty good idea of what his players enjoy, and how

to give them what they want if the adventure threatens to deny a couple of them.

I suspect this is an idea that has existed on the periphery of gaming since the beginning; I believe that the initial groups who played and enjoyed RPGs were primarily interested in tactical combat (given the hobby's origins as an offshoot of wargaming). How was this idea implemented, then? Through the almost-quaint Wandering Monster Table. Think about it; this was a table of encounters that only came into play when *nothing* else interesting was happening. You don't roll on the Wandering Monster Table when you enter a scripted encounter, complete with an interesting room description and set of complications. No, it only comes into play if the heroes are wandering past already-encountered rooms, through unpopulated portions of the dungeon, or otherwise in danger of being bored.

Now, I've never been a big fan of Wandering Monster Tables; I'm usually more content to fast-forward to the next encounter, skip over the "poking every 10-foot section of dungeon with a pole" bits, and go on to the parts I find more interesting. But if the point of an RPG is to provide the players with scenarios to use their tactical might, then these Tables make perfect sense.

But why can't a similar idea be applied to *other* player types? If the purpose of the Wandering Monster Table was to provide combat opportunities when those who like combat might otherwise get bored, the GM should be able to fabricate similar devices for his other players.

Now, I'm not suggesting a Wandering Angst Table. ("You rolled an 87; you just realized that -- being a bloodsucking monster wandering the night --- you'll never again enjoy a Japanese steakhouse for all eternity! Taste the *ennui*!") But the GM might be able to craft similarly "disposable" encounters for his players depending on their style.

For example, let's say you have a player who enjoys playing characters with inner torment. ("You have a player who enjoys pl . . ." oh, knock it off.) At some point it might be wise to give that player some kind of Anguish McGuffin with Cheese, such as a [demonically possessed artifact](#). Then, if the player looks like he might be getting bored, or if events have conspired to keep him from enjoying the game as much as he might, simply have the demon pop up in the character's head and provide him some torment. ("Your friends don't appreciate you . . . I can sense it . . . take your McGuffin, strike them down, and then your transformation to the dark side will be complete!") Yes, it's advancing another subplot, but it can be keyed to provide events primarily for an unsatisfied player.

Or say you have a player who enjoys NPC interaction more than anything else. It might be a matter of creating an NPC ahead of time with a secret -- *any* secret - and be prepared to drop him into the next remotely plausible situation. ("Nothing is happening in the airport, so you wander around waiting for your flight. Suddenly, *you* [rolling random dice, pointing to talky player] see a woman crying and trying unsuccessfully to hide over by the newsstand. 'You've got to get me out of here,' she says, 'before they get me!' What do you do?") You may or may not have an exact "plot hook" in mind at the time, but in many campaigns it isn't a problem to connect the NPC later . . . and it might be easier just to listen to the players. ("Who's after you? Is it the NSA?" "Errrm . . . yep, you guessed it!")

Or, finally, consider the example of a player who enjoys puzzles and problem-solving. In this case it might be simple enough to provide him ahead of time with an incredibly difficult puzzle (such as a cryptogram not in English, but in a language you know he took in college). He probably won't be able to solve it originally, but then you can feed him clues whenever he's looking bored. ("Wandering this dank, uninteresting dungeon has caused your mind to wander laterally and you realize . . . this isn't in English!") Chances are he'll pull out the puzzle and get to work on it again, content to let the other players poke things with sticks while *he* has a new avenue to explore.

RPGs are quite possibly unique because they're so easily adaptable; players and GMs alike can modify the game on the fly to create a more enjoyable experience for themselves and everyone else. Giving that facet a bit more conscious thought can lead to a more enjoyable game for everyone.

And when all else fails, roll on the Wandering Fun Table.

--Steven Marsh

Designer's Notes: Munchkin Monster Manual 2.5

A Guide to the Creation of a Theoretically Funny Collection of Monsters

by John W. Mangrum

Munchkin Master: All right, dude, you're up. What are you gonna do?

Player: I explain the joke!

Munchkin Master: Okay, roll to hit.

Player: (rolls) Natural 20!

* * *

Howdy! Having been given the choice between writing up some designer notes or having my legs broken, I thought that you, the tireless fans of the *Munchkin RPG* (not to mention prospective game designers seeking to learn from a true master), might benefit from a look behind the scenes at how the latest *Munchkin* masterpiece was created.

First, I was assigned the project of writing the book. How did I land the job? The same way *all* freelance authors get work in the RPG industry -- through the trade of unspeakable favors. Ha! I kid. Actually, I got this project because I seem to have done okay with this book's predecessor, the *Munchkin Monster Manual*. That project I *did* land through the trade of unspeakable favors. After that book hit shelves, the fine Texans at Steve Jackson Games probably suspected that my bottomless well of spite was good for at least a few more buckets of snark.

Which leads to what may be a major revelation for some folks: For all the jokes made at munchkins' expense, I actually *don't* "despise" munchkin-style roleplaying, as some readers have claimed. (Well, it was just *one* reader, actually, but let me keep my illusions of having a mass audience.) Personally, I'm too much of a control freak as a GM to be good at running that kind of no-holds-barred campaign myself, but I'm very much of the "whatever everyone at the game table agrees is fun is A-OK" mindset. I simply view many of the running gags (such as the "sexy female NPCs always turn out to be monsters" joke I've dragged across two books now) to be, well, let's just call them *acknowledgements* about certain aspects of games and gamer culture I've experienced over 20 years in this hobby. I get my best material just from listening to gamer conversations, and none of the jokes are meant with malice.

(Oh, except the ones about the gamers who actually took offense at the very *thought* of a *Munchkin RPG*. Those guys need some good ribbing.)

So anyway; now that I'd landed the job, it was time to dig in.

Phase One: Brainstorming

In the beginning, it's just me and a list of monster names. I'm always juggling three basic goals when working on these books. On the one hand, the book needs to be funny. 'Nuff said. On the other hand, I try to be as faithful to concepts in the *Munchkin* card game as I can. And on the third hand (I'm currently in Phase Three on *Star Munchkin*; it comes with the territory), I'm actually a hard-nosed rules stickler, so I also want to provide a solid book of playable monsters folks can actually use in their games. (I said *playable*, not *balanced*.)

As my first step, I chart out what monsters to include. Some monsters are required lest my masters crack their whips, but I can pick and choose among the rest. I assign Challenge Ratings (based on the monsters' levels in the card game), creature types (based on the ol' hairy eyeball), creature sizes (based on height and mass) and alignments (based on

ancient dualistic philosophical concepts), and list all the monsters by each.

My goal is to make sure that I provide a sampling of monsters in every category. Sadly, I actually didn't make my self-imposed quota this time. Yes, it's true. I, the author of a completely satirical book of silly monsters, spend my free time fretting because I wasn't able to fit in a Diminutive monster, a construct, or the "monster that starts with a U."

The creative process starts with a lot of what I like to call mental percolating -- just letting ideas bubble up in a stream of consciousness as I go about my day. If at all possible, I wander around with the actual *Munchkin* cards in my shirt pocket, taking inspiration from John Kovalic's illustrations. (I mean, yes, I do take the cards out and look at them -- I don't mean to imply some sort of art-nipple osmosis process here.) I also carry a small notebook around with me everywhere I go, filling it with the jumbled chicken-scratches of a diseased mind. I might fill pages on such deep issues as, "Should I do a Halliburton joke or a Foghorn Leghorn joke? Could I *combine* Halliburton and Foghorn Leghorn?"

In case you're ever wondering what the guy sitting across from you on the cross-town bus is thinking about, it may well be this:

Notes from a crazy bus-riding man



I have *stacks* of notebooks filled with stuff like this. Kevin Spacey in *Se7en* has *nuthin'* on me.

Phase Two: Gut-Wrenching Terror

Once I actually sit down to write, I like to wade through a few hours a day of sheer panic, convinced that none of my jokes are funny, that the whole book will be a failure, and that no one will ever speak to me again. If I have time, I also like to either shed or pack on about five pounds in the first week, depending on whether I'm forgetting to eat dinner until 4 AM or soothing my nerves with ice cream.

Hmm. "Like to" might be a little strong. "Inevitably" seems to be more apropos, all things considered. What can I say?

I have issues.

Phase Three: The Long, Hard Slog

At long last, I start actually producing legible text. Rather than tackling the monsters in alphabetical order, working from front to back, I jump all around, first writing up the critters I find the most inspiring and working my way down. It's a handy technique I recommend for all freelancers writing monster books, since it helps camouflage my rapid descent from "incredibly clever" to "incredibly desperate." Ha! I kid again! Well, sort of.

The One That Got Away

In the end, books only have so many pages (honestly; you can check them yourself), so inevitably I'll start work on a few monsters that nonetheless never make it off the standby list. In the first *Munchkin Monster Manual*, it was the poor insurance salesmen, lawyers, and shrieking geeks who got left on the bench, so I was glad to get another chance to shuffle them out into the light of day in the *Munchkin Monster Manual 2.5*. Hey, what freelancer *doesn't* like getting paid to start work he's already halfway finished?

This time around, space concerns kept yet another handful of hopeful horrors out of the limelight. For being the sort of folks who *can* laugh at lowbrow jokes, I've leave you with the critter that was at the *very top* of the *Munchkin Monster Manual 2.5* waiting list. (It was going to fill that darn "Diminutive" gap.) Stand by for a *world-wide exclusive*, netizens!

Crawling Hand

Diminutive Undead

Hit Dice: 8d12 (52 hp)

Initiative: +8

Speed: 20 ft. (4 squares)

Armor Class: 19 (+4 size, +4 Dex, +1 natural), touch 18, flat-footed 15

Base Attack/Grapple: +4/-6

Attacks: Slam +10 melee

Damage: Slam 1d2+3

Space/Reach: 1 ft./

Special Attacks: Wedgie of the dead

Special Qualities: Blindsight, talk to the hand, undead traits, with this ring...

Saves: Fort +2, Ref +8, Will +6

Abilities: Str 14, Dex 19, Con , Int 4, Wis 10, Cha 6

Skills: Hide +17, Jump +8, Open Lock +5

Feats: Dodge, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes

Environment: Any nail parlor, poker game, and underground

Organization: Solitary or pair

Challenge Rating: 5

Treasure: No coins, standard goods, standard items (all of it rings, bracelets, etc.)

Alignment: Usually lawful evil

Advancement:

The ooky, kooky forces of evil create these skittering nasties to serve as their minions. Evil clerics and wizards animate crawling claws by pumping necromantic magic into the flayed and desiccated corpses of sock puppets or ventriloquist dummies until they fairly well crackle with negative energy. Crawling hands are unusually powerful for their size, but they're mainly just greedy little pests who always seem to have their hands out, asking for favors.

Crawling hands speak sign language.

Combat

Wedgie of the Dead: When battling an armored (or at least clothed) opponent, a crawling hand can attempt to grab onto the opponent's loincloth in place of dealing slam damage (this requires a successful attack roll as usual). If the hand gets a hold, then on its next turn it automatically yanks the opponent's loincloth up and over his head as a standard action. The opponent must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 16) or be stunned for one round. The wedged opponent also suffers an effective decrease of -2d3 points of Dexterity (to a minimum of 1). This decrease lasts until the victim pulls his loincloth back out of his nether regions, requiring a standard action that provokes attacks of opportunity. However, a victim must first remove all his armor to fix a wedgie.

Blindsense: A crawling hand senses its surroundings through touch, naturally enough, and can sense vibrations up to 60 feet away. The hand is otherwise blind and deaf, and cannot sense creatures that make no vibrations (such as incorporeal creatures) or otherwise make no impact (such as Joe Lieberman).

Talk to the Hand: If a crawling hand's master (see below) is targeted by a creature using a sonic, language-dependent effect, the master can deflect that effect to the hand instead by succeeding at a contested Charisma check with the mouthy creature. The crawling hand is then targeted by the sonic effect as if it were the original target.

Undead Traits: Immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, and disease. Not subject to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability damage, energy drain, finger wrinkling, or death from massive damage.

With This Ring . . .: When a crawling hand is created, the first creature to present it with a gift of a magical ring, glove, or gauntlet wins its undying devotion. Get it? Undying! Har! The hand benefits from whatever magical properties its gift conveys. If the hand's master later takes the magic trinket away again, the hand flips its ex-master a certain gesture believed to date back to the Battle of Hastings and attacks him.

* * *

Munchkin Master: *Okay, you explain the joke. (rolls) The joke fails its Fort save. It dies.*

Player: *Woot! I level up!*

It Came From the Golden Age

by Robert J. Garitta

Sixty years ago, the World seemed to enter a new Dark Age at the same time comic books were entering their Golden Age. Drawing from the sensational pulp magazines and the Sunday funnies, hundreds of characters fought crime and spies at home and Axis evil abroad.

Artwork was often simple or plain bad. Plots just moved the heroes from one fight to another. Characterization was sparse and continuity wouldn't be a concern for years. Inventions that could change civilization were saved from spies and never mentioned again. Some heroes received their powers from incredible devices or formulas they never thought of sharing with the armed forces or industry.

Simplistic? Naïve? Illogical? Sure. Some stories were also jingoistic and racist. But the nation was at war and comics were for kids. Few writers addressed issues such as poverty and war. Stories were usually simple villain bashing and flag waving.

There was no single typical Golden Age mystery man (the term "super-hero" became popular late in World War II). Character types ran from the exceptional human to nearly cosmic beings. Many backgrounds familiar to comic readers today were present: aliens, robots, androids, wizards, jungle lords, and detectives. Some characters received their powers from bizarre formulas or devices. Mutants were nonexistent -- the effects of radiation on heredity were not widely known at this time. Most characters had (weird) science backgrounds, but others derived their powers from magic. Some of the first comic book characters were mages, fighting crime in tuxedos. The bias towards science-based heroes reflected the feeling of the time; technology was improving and it seemed like science could beat any problem. The view that technology was a double-edged sword came later.

The Golden Age heroes had plenty of enemies. Abroad there were the Nazis and the Japanese Empire, while at home crime ran wild. The mad scientist was a fixture along with his counterpart, the evil wizard. The Axis nations regularly employed wizards, scientists, and racketeers as hired muscle or spies. Super-powered criminals were relatively rare during the war years and when they did appear were often given the role of archenemies to the heroes. All of the standard super types fit in a Golden Age campaign with a little tweaking. A few additional types also were popular at this time.

Tanks and Blasters were similar to their modern relatives. The Battlesuit Goon was very rare during the war years, though many heroes had battlesuit trappings, such as rocket packs. Blasters usually had innate abilities. Energy weapons were portrayed as large death ray cannons. Portable energy weapons were rare and usually a villain or hero's special weapon. The Psi was almost never encountered as a straight psychic character in comics of the period. Many supers had telepathic powers as a minor ability especially magical heroes. There is no reason why a Psi couldn't exist. Psychic characters might have very low power levels and augment them temporarily with special formulas (as a plot device). This would give a period feel and also restrict telepathic and clairvoyant plot busting.

Skulkers deserve special mention. While many characters used stealth in their adventures, Skulkers made the underworld fear them. Skulkers were clearly descendants of pulp magazine heroes. They often used guns and lethal force; even the Batman used a gun in his early stories. Some Skulkers had the Confuse power with various limitations. The Skulker laughed ghoulishly or cast a menacing silhouette. Some Skulkers just had an extreme reputation. Skulkers often were crossed with Gimmicks or Gadgeteers, but rarely had super powers.

The Super Normal was probably the most common Golden Age character type. Many characters simply put on a costume and started catching crooks with little or no reason. Some had years of training and others had no experience. Some powerful Supers also had competent (or inept) Super Normals as sidekicks. Strangely enough, even the Lone Avenger had a sidekick. Advantages such as Unfazeable and Hard to Kill are useful. Cinematic campaigns can allow Fast Healing, Slow Regeneration or anything that keeps a character alive in a fight without making him obviously

bulletproof. Many only used their fists and wits to beat armed opponents. In spite of the name GMs might want to allow Super Normals to purchase DR usable only against unarmed attacks. Punches or kicks rarely hurt heroes. Enhanced Dodge, Block and Parry are also useful. Super Normals often had training in various useful fields. Mr. Terrific, Man of a Thousand Talents is an example of the Super Normal.

Non-powered adventurers were common, and many had ridiculously high skills or attributes. The difference between Combat Monsters and Super Normals is how many points go to non-combat skills. Combat Monsters are usually found in frontline adventures; if a character is going to put all his points into combat skills, then the life of a heroic serviceman in the European or Pacific Theatre is the place for him. Air Heroes are Combat Monsters who sink some of their points into aircraft.

The Gimmick was another trademark of the Golden Age. Many Characters built their concept around a signature gadget. Most gimmicks weren't lethal; they usually provided their users with an advantage that would let them close in to pummel armed opponents. Thus the Sandman used a gas gun, while Doctor Mid-Nite used bombs that spewed darkness. Most Gimmicks rarely invented other devices. A Gimmick could take the Trademark disadvantage with his gadget, representing a compulsion to use it in every situation. Gimmicks can buy maneuvers to offset hit location modifiers or Fast Draw skill with their devices.

Pure Gadgeteers were uncommon. Many had powers or were skilled combatants who built gadgets on the side. Many gadgets were plot devices built for a single story and never seen again. For example, the Golden Eagle is an accomplished combat pilot and inventor. He has built a device to make his plane invisible to radar. He also has a secret lab where he experiments on new radar devices. Using his "strato-radar" he detects rockets from Mars that are scouting Earth for invasion. The only advantage of "strato-radar" over normal radar is that it can detect the Martian rockets, and the GM might logically make that ability a freebie or discount (given that it only serves to further the plot). The GM may require devices to be built with either the Fixed or Can Be Hit disadvantages. Plot devices could be built with a massive discount or as one shot wonders that need extensive reworking or rare substances to be re-used.

There are a few variations of basic characters that give them a period feel.

The Flying Hero

There were quite a few mystery men who had flight as their major ability. They might fly with mechanical wings or have the super advantage of Flying. It is very easy to dismiss the Flying Hero as a passe concept. In the 1940s flight was still fairly new and had great allure and mystery. If flight is relatively uncommon among supers then the Flying Hero could contribute to a team as a messenger, scout or point man. Around city buildings a Flying Hero comes into his own. In the 1940s there were no police helicopters; a Flying Hero might be the only person capable of high altitude rescues or chasing the Evil Mastermind's escape plane. Flying Heroes were seldom high-power characters, usually being Gimmick or Super Normal variations. They had very high Dexterity and Dodge scores and some could be built as Combat Monsters. Most flying heroes carried some sort of weapons to even the odds in a fight. Many fliers fought with the savagery and skill of birds of prey, making Combat Reflexes or even Berserker fitting. Hawkman and the Black Condor were winged heroes.

The Patriotic Hero

All World War II mystery men were patriotic. The Patriotic Hero is at the far end of the spectrum. Patriotic Heroes were often Super Normals, Tanks, or Combat Monsters. They wore distinctive costumes that embodied the flag or some other American icon. While they beat up Nazis the usual way, they also upheld American values such as free speech and fair representation. They were the special nemesis of fifth columnists, profiteers and others who would betray the American dream.

Patriotic Heroes had great recognition and high reputation scores. They frequently had loads of military and government contacts and allies. Their Patriotism might be a Higher Purpose or border on an Obsession (or Odious Personal Habit!) and give them extra levels of Will, the Fearless advantage, or even Hyper-Strength or Hyper-Reflexes

when facing enemies of America. Many of these charismatic heroes became team leaders. Captain America and the Flag were Patriotic Heroes.

The Dead Hero

Some normal humans who died found their sense of duty allowed them to return from death as powerful spirits. Dead Heroes were rare, and unless the entire group would like to go with this type there should only be one to a campaign. Dead Heroes varied widely in power; some were permanently invisible and insubstantial. Others could become solid and visible at will or were only visible to a faithful sidekick (keeping a faithful sidekick out of a Mental Hospital might make a good adventure). Some were invulnerable to conventional harm while others could be hurt if they were solid (though presumably not killed). Most were somewhat grim and fatalistic but others rarely acknowledged they were dead. Almost all of them did have a driving mission that bound them to the Earth, which could be bought as an Obsession or Sense of Duty.

Some live heroes also had ghosts as allies. They provided advice or in some cases super powers to their living friends. They might also provide a last minute rescue if the chips were really down. The Spectre was a Dead Hero and the spirit of a colonial ancestor aided the Fighting Yank.

Building Characters

Several advantages and disadvantages are very appropriate to all Golden Age heroes. Daredevil, Fearless and Unfazeable simulate ridiculous courage. Characters should also purchase some level of Luck or Serendipity. Mystery men were often in the right place at the right time and Fate seemed to favor them.

Very Rapid healing and Very Fit are also useful for the more action oriented heroes.

Almost every hero had a sidekick or comic relief character. Most sidekicks were Super Normals or had their mentor's powers at a much lower level. Even the Lone Avenger had a sidekick. They could be bought as Allies or another player could volunteer to play a sidekick. Sidekicks almost always had the Youth disadvantage. They often had Combat Reflexes and a Martial Art to make up for their small size.

Secret Identity was a popular advantage for supers. Except for Overconfidence, mental disadvantages were uncommon for mystery men, who seemed to have both oars in the water all of the time. The angst-ridden troubled hero became popular years after the Golden Age ended. Codes of honor also fit some heroes. The Gentleman's Code works well for Patriotic Heroes.

Karate and Judo were only popular in America after the war. Most mystery men would use Wrestling or Boxing to make attacks and Acrobatics to Dodge. Mystery Men who want to learn Oriental Martial Arts should pay for an Unusual Background. GMs may allow boxers to buy the Trained by a Master advantage and use their Boxing to make Chambara style attacks. Some mystery men could hold off a whole mob with their fists. Boxers Trained by a Master should be allowed to buy Enhanced Dodge, Parry and Block.

Some supers used formulas to gain powers, putting a time limit or a number of charges on their powers. Others had a magic word or artifact that let them turn into their heroic identity. This could let mundane thugs occasionally get the drop on a hero. Powers with charges or limited duration tended to fizzle out at the worst times.

Campaign Style

Campaigns set during World War Two II to address the role of the characters in the war. In a realistic campaign the characters are probably on the home front fighting mundane but dangerous criminals and spies. If they operate abroad they would probably be used as commandos. After all, an artillery barrage will kill a flaming man as easily as a normal soldier. Most attacks by a super at this level will fall short of what a machine gun could do. Stealth and surprise are

necessary to win battles. Many Golden Age characters fit this concept.

Four-color campaigns have more leeway. Many supers are immune to small arms fire, although tanks and heavy weapons will still be tough to handle and will require ingenuity. Many four-color characters stuck to home front stories because their writers did not want to mix their fantasy with the seriousness of the conflict. One question this raises is why supers of this level do not change the course of the war. A team of supers might not be able to take on a tank division but they might be able to infiltrate Hitler or Churchill's headquarters to assassinate or capture the top brass. It is possible that governments would order supers *not* to act directly in the War; a slain or captured super would be of great value to the enemy for propaganda or research. If supers existed for some time before World War II, national treaties may also restrict them from entering combat. Some supers would be more valuable at home. A telepathic hero wouldn't be a combat machine but would be handy for catching and interrogating spies. A hero who controls flames will be more useful in London during the Blitz than in the Commandos.

It is difficult to explain why Cosmic characters don't intervene and end the war. Perhaps there are an equal number of Cosmic level supers on the Axis and Allied sides resulting in a stalemate. Cosmic beings could have superiors and intervention above a local level is forbidden.

Campaigns that simulate the actual comics would be as Cinematic as possible. The Allies were the good guys and the Axis the bad guys without exception. Heroes were rarely hurt and almost never killed. GMs might want to use the Optional Rule: Stun Damage or Damage Reduction (p. SU84) at least for hand-to-hand combat.

Gun toting crooks and spies can be a problem for heroes who like to settle things with their fists. GMs should create opportunities for them to surprise and ambush armed attackers. The GM can also make minor criminals and henchmen roll versus Will to avoid being stunned by the sudden appearance of a super.

Taking on tanks or experimental mecha can also be a problem. Most tanks possess armor that will shrug off punches by anyone whose strength is not in the thousands. Supers with electrical, magnetic, or flame attacks can bypass armor to some degree. However, supers with their strengths in the hundreds must usually overturn tank or rip open hatches to assault the crew. As a Cinematic rule to recreate tank busting without having characters with ungodly high attributes figure an attempt at tank crushing as a STR vs. STR Contest. The effective strength of a vehicle equals the minimum strength needed to lift it using Extra Effort. If the super wins the contest the vehicle must make a HT roll or be destroyed. In a four-color campaign the crew bails out unharmed.

The comic book version of World War II is definitely TL (6+n). In the comics scientists created intelligent robots, genetic modifications and energy weapons. Small elite units could receive some TL8 gear, perhaps a dino laser and a few jetpacks. In general increase weight and volume of high-tech components by 50% per tech level over 6.

TL9 devices are unique prototypes. Their loss would set some research program back years or derail it completely (scientists in the comics always keep terrible notes). TL9 robots and cyborgs are worthy opponents for most supers and probably the result of a one in a million experiment or accident. The same guidelines hold for biotech. This is not to say any of this gear is problem free; it can be bulky, unreliable or require exotic materials ("Curses! My flying disc requires a hundred gallons of mercury to fly!"). Inspiration for weird science creations can be found in various research projects (*GURPS Weird War* is one source) the Allies and Axis were working on. Nikola Tesla worked on many unusual projects during his life, including energy weapons. The comics themselves that featured killer robots, mechanical moles, flying tanks, and wheel-bodied juggernauts.

Golden-age campaigns can assume "real-world" comic books were propaganda. Mystery men view their sanitized and idealized published adventures with amusement or contempt. Allied mystery men sometimes lost and get hurt or killed. Combat is lethal, and heroes have to use their wits to stay alive. The government will replace supers who are killed with doubles to avoid damaging morale. Instead of Axis characters being caricatures, they are as competent and brave as their Allied counterparts. Supers are tough enough to destroy an enemy squad single-handed, but are not impervious to heavy weapons. Super Normals and similar characters would probably carry sidearms at least. Characters must decide whether to live by ideals or just get the war over with as quickly as possible.

Internet Resources

- *Mikel Midnight Golden Age Directory* -- Simply the most extensive set of links to Golden Age Comics you can find. Mikel also writes up timelines for comic worlds, lists of various Supers and comments on many obscure comic publishers and their characters. -- <http://blaklion.best.vwh.net/comics.html>
- *Pure Excitement Comics* -- Dozens of Golden Age stories scanned and on the web. Many obscure public domain characters. Read the stories, learn the mindset. <http://home.attbi.com/~wanolan/index.html>

The Kraken

by Stephen Dedman

Krakens, also known as Triskeles and Tripods, are hunter-killer von Neumann machines, doomsday devices activated in the last throes of the war between two Precursor races. The war was so destructive of both races that little is known about either, but one side seems to have specialized in bio-tech, the other in robotics.

The Kraken were actually created by the biotechnologists, using designs stolen from the robots. They are made of living metal, and when complete, are equipped with nanofacs (pp. UTT21-22) and cannibal nanokits (p. RO69) that enable them to reproduce themselves as well as regenerating. They are programmed with relatively simple orders; their first law roughly translates as "Go Forth and Multiply," their second as "Destroy the Enemy," and their third, "Do minimum harm possible to lifeforms except in defense of yourself and other Kraken."

To the Kraken, anything with a power source equivalent to a D cell or larger, or any metallic construction weighing more than 15 lbs, is automatically an enemy unless it identifies itself as another Kraken. Conveniently, these "enemies" are also the Kraken's "food" -- the building materials for replacement parts or new Kraken. Krakens will automatically attack any large metal object -- spraying it with their cannibal nanokit if it is large enough to be formed into one or more complete Krakens, or disabling it and taking the metals to a cache until it has gathered enough to form another Kraken. They will approach larger "enemies" (300 lbs+) by stealth if possible, and attempt to retreat if they take more than six points of damage. Kraken usually fight singly, though sometimes two or three (never more) may team up to attack a large "food source" such as a vehicle, building, or M-type asteroid: they're designed for commando raids against supply lines rather than all-out assault on hard targets.

Kraken will not ordinarily attack humans -- but few humans realize this, because they will attack robots, cyborgs, people wearing battlesuits or armored vac suits, or anyone carrying a sufficiently heavy or powerful weapon (e.g. anything with more than 14 lbs metal and/or a D cell or larger -- Heavy Blast Rifles, Military Dinosaur Lasers, Assault Chainguns, etc.). They have also killed people by attacking and disabling their vehicles, especially aircraft, spaceships, and boats. The Krakens' creators used mostly biogadgets, bioships, and other living structures (see pp. BIO105-111), so the Kraken may be unaware that they are endangering lifeforms when they chomp holes in helicopters and submarines.

Intact Kraken won't be found in Warehouse 23, though parts of one (or more) might be -- at least, until they come into contact with enough metal to regenerate themselves completely and escape, in search of food and enemies. Any part of a Kraken weighing ¼ lb or more contains enough nanoids to re-create its entire body in time (27 hours to go from one hit point to fully operational, given enough metal). Putting a Kraken fragment in your safe with your coin collection is definitely a bad idea.

It takes two hours and 14 minutes for a Kraken cannibal nanokit to turn 134 lbs of metal into a Kraken; 378 hours, 46 minutes (about 16 standard days) for a Kraken with nanofac to create and assemble the components to make another Kraken; and 1,136 hours 18 minutes (about 47.5 standard days) for a Kraken to create another nanokit inside its nanofac. A Kraken can also use its nanofac to create extra weapons and defensive equipment such as Pulsar Pistols (40 hrs, p. RO28), Force Shields (30 mins, p. UT77), Personal Force Screens (20 hrs, p. UT78), or grenades (various, p. RO25).

Kraken are designed for *Space*, *Supers*, and *Atomic Horror* campaigns, but they may be useful in other settings.

Kraken (TL13)

A Kraken looks fairly harmless to anyone familiar with robots -- a metallic egg with three arms that serve as legs when it's not flying (hence the alternative names Tripod and Triskele). A retractable fourth tentacle-like arm and solar panel -- resembling a black poppy or inverted umbrella -- also sprout from the head when needed, adding to the comic

effect. It can, however, bring up to three of its weapons to bear on one target, quickly reducing it to junk.

Brain: Small brain with neural net, hardened, and +2 DX Booster options (.5 lbs, .01 cf, \$5,000, 70 points), Complexity 7, 10,000 gig memory.

Sensors: Basic sensors with deaf, microscopic vision, no sense smell/taste, peripheral vision, spectrum vision, telescopic zoom x4, and Three-in-One options (.325 lbs, .0075 cf, \$2,000, 88 points).

Communicator: Basic communicator with Long-range radio and Mute options (4.55 lbs, .91 cf, \$1,300, -3 points).

Arm Motors: Three ST 13 arms (each 1.3 lbs, .26 cf, \$ 1,300, .065 KW). One ST 8 arm with retractable, extra-flexible, and micro-manipulator options (.8 lbs, .016 cf, \$12,000, .04 KW, 40 points.)

Thrust propulsion: One reactionless thruster with 5 KW motive power and 100 lbs of thrust with vectored thrust option. (5 lbs, .25 cf, \$500, 5 KW.)

Contragrav: Contragravity generator with 150 lbs of lift (\$500.75, 10.075 lbs, .2015 cf, .15 KW).

Weaponry: Forceblade (1.5 lbs, .03 cf, \$750, LR3); Grav beamer (1 lb, .02 cf, \$1,000, LR3); Plasma Torch (4 lbs, .08 cf, \$187.5, LR4). Weaponry costs 15 points.

Accessories: Spraygun (1 lb, .05 cf, \$50), usually loaded with cannibal nanokit; Suitcase nanofac (30 lb, .6 cf, \$60,000); one set of integral mechanical tools (10 lbs, .2 cf, \$200), one set each of integral armory and electronic tools (each 2 lbs, .04 cf, \$400).

Power: Power requirement 5.835 KW. Energy bank using rE cell (20 lbs, .2 cf, \$2,000, 20 points) with 630,000 KWS stored power. Endurance 29 hrs 59 mins 29 secs if using contragravity and thrust. Retractable solar panel, 5 sf (2 lbs, .04 cf, \$300) provides .4 KW during daylight.

Subassemblies: Four arms (three near base, radial symmetry; retractable arm in head); head with full rotation.

Arm Design: First arm houses ST 13 motor, Plasma Torch, and armory tools (.38 cf). Second arm houses ST 13 motor, Grav beamer, and mechanical tools (.48 cf). Third arm houses ST 13 motor, Forceblade, and electronic tools (.33 cf). Retractable arm houses ST 8 motor and spraygun (.066 cf).

Head Design: Houses sensors, retractable solar panel, and retractable fourth arm (.1135 cf).

Body Design: Houses Brain, communicator, rE Cell, Contragravity, Reactionless Thruster, Suitcase nanofac, and waste space for head rotation (2.1942 cf).

Surface Area (with solar panel retracted): ST 13 arms 4 each; retractable arm 1.5, head 1.5, body 10, total surface area 25.

Structure: Living Metal (45 points), Light frame. (12.5 lbs, \$2,500.)

Hit Points: ST 13 Arms 6 points each; retractable arm 2 points; head 1 point; body 7 points. Total 28 points.

Armor: DR 22 Metal (8.25 lbs, \$165, LR2, 100 points); radiation shielding (12.5 lbs, \$125, LR6, 10 points); sealed (\$250, LR6, 20 points); thermal superconducting (1.5625 lbs, \$1562.5, LR3, 10 points).

Statistics: Design weight 133.4625 lbs (.0667 tons), volume 3.5647 cf, price \$94,690.75. 6'3" tall when walking on hands. Body ST 66, arm ST 13 or 8 (179.5 points); DX 13 (30 points); IQ 11 (10 points); HT 13/28 (105 points). Air Speed in contragrav-assisted vectored thrust flight (with arm retracted) 86.6, can hover (45 points). Legality rating 3. Point cost (without software): 152 points.

Software: Armory/TL13 (Beam Handguns)-14 [2]; Astrogation/TL16-[3]; Beam Weapons/TL13 (Force)-16 [4],

(Flamer)-16 [4]; Brawling-13 [1]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Datalink; Electronics Operation/TL13 (Sensors)-16 [3]; Flight-14 [4]; Force Shield-12 [1/2]; Force Sword-14 [4]; Free Fall-14 [4]; Full Co-ordination/2 [100]; Guns/TL13 (Flamethrower)-15 [2]; Mechanic/TL13 (Robot)-16 [3]; Prospecting-16 [3]; Scrounging-17 [3]; Stealth-13 [2]; Tactics-15 [3]. [158.5 points].

Adventure Seeds

Space: Metal Fatigue. The heroes are on a starship when it receives a distress call from a party of xeno-archaeologists in the jungles on the low-iron planet Ngorongoro. Ngorongoro is a restricted world because of the Precursor ruins, which these scientists have been exploring, and its dangerous wildlife. The scientists' pick-up is due in a month, but the distress call informs the PCs that a Precursor robot has attacked their base, destroying their perimeter defenses, aero-jeep, food processor, and vapor canteen. The only human casualty so far has been Dr. Lee, who shot at it with their laser rifle -- now also missing.

If the PCs try to rescue the party, they'll have to run the gauntlet of Kraken who've already left the planet en route for the asteroid belt, find a clearing large enough for a landing area, and hack their way through the jungle until they meet up with the scientists. The more heavily armed and armored they are, the more likely they are to be attacked by the Kraken; the less they wear and carry, the greater the risk from the local wildlife. After they rescue the scientists, they'll have to escape from Ngorongoro without taking any Kraken with them to wreak havoc on populated worlds -- assuming the robots don't cannibalize their ship en route.

Supers/Atomic Horror: Steel Life. Chen, an absent-minded gadgeteer, discovers the head and arm of a Kraken. A day later, it's fully restored and has begun eating his car. By the time the PCs are alerted, Kraken are devouring a junkyard, and have to be stopped before they spread out to attack nearby railway bridges, airports, and military bases. Unfortunately, some unscrupulous weapon manufacturers are determined to capture one in working order -- at any cost.

Fantasy: The Sword in the Stone. A fortified monastery is threatened by an oncoming well-equipped Megalan force - Heavy Cavalry, Heavy and Medium Infantry, and a few Iron Golems. Local legend has it that the late great geomancer Skeyn trapped a mighty demon with an Entombment spell a century before, but warned that if the demon were to see sunlight again, it would regain all its powers. The demon (a Kraken) was said to be able to fly, breathe fire hotter than the hottest forge, cut through stone, and crush the hearts of heavily armored men with a silent spell from 30 yards away -- but to have never harmed a monk, woman, child, or unarmed man.

The PCs are ordered or paid to unleash the demon -- which requires them find the spot where Skeyn entombed the Kraken, dig a tunnel allowing it to escape, and lead it into the path of the Megalan force. They may still need some way to protect them from wolves, bandits, and Megalan scouts.

Frightful Fiends

Three New Creatures For Fantasy d20 System Games

by Richard Farrese

A wise man once said, "if you meet a shadow fiend, don't run; you're as good as dead." But the unwary would be wise to avoid the dark troll or the unfortunate as well.

-- Morthendar the Wise

Dire Troll

Huge Giant

Hit Dice: 10d8+80 (125 hp)

Initiative: +1 (Dex)

Speed: 40 ft. (8 square)

Armor Class: 21 (?2 size, +13 natural), touch 8, flat-footed 21

Base Attack/Grapple: +7/+21

Attack: Claw +13 melee (2d4+8)

Full Attack: Two claws +13 melee (2d4+8) and bite +11 melee (1d8+4)

Space/Reach: 10 ft. / 20 ft.

Special Attacks: Rend 4d6+12, uncontrollable rage

Special Qualities: Damage reduction 3/--, darkvision 90 ft., low-light vision, regeneration 5, scent

Saves: Fort +15, Ref +4, Will +3

Abilities: Str 27, Dex 12, Con 26, Int 4, Wis 6, Cha 4

Skills: Listen +4, Spot +5

Feats: Alertness, Iron Will, Multiattack

Environment: Cold mountains

Organization: Solitary, pair, band (1-2, plus 1d4+2 ordinary trolls), or pack (2-4, plus 2d4+4 ordinary trolls)

Challenge Rating: 10

Treasure: Standard

Alignment: Always chaotic evil

Advancement: By character class

Level Adjustment: +7

Description

A dire troll is a huge giant driven completely mad by a rare disease that afflicts only their kin. One troll out of 100,000 is born with this ailment, which is known as "the blood that boils" among their people. The disease seems to strike at random, but it most commonly appears within members of the same bloodline, usually skipping several generations before arising again.

This affliction makes the troll grow unnaturally fast, becoming much bigger than the other members of its kin and reaching adulthood within two years of its birth. The creature thus affected becomes stronger and much more prone to violent behavior than the average troll -- which is already a cruel and remorseless creature. The downside, however, is that the troll's brain cannot cope with the accelerated growth of its body, and the poor soul afflicted by the disease quickly loses its mind in the process. Although not completely senseless, a dire troll is unable to grasp the intricacies of languages. They communicate by grunting and gibbering senseless words, which are often wrongly interpreted by their peers. The blood that boils also affects the dire troll's ability to control itself in battle. In the heat of combat, a dire troll cannot tell friends apart from foes and will often attack both without mercy or remorse.

In troll society, members touched by this disease are considered blessed. To most trolls, these creatures have been chosen by the gods to serve some unknown cause, and their constant gibberish is nothing less than their way of communing with their deities. In truth, these fiends are mad beyond reason and may not be cured by any means.

Because of their privileged status, some dire trolls live with other members of their families for a while, but this association is usually short-lived as their maddened minds often push them to commit patricide or fratricide. Sometimes, trolls are forced to rally against a dire troll bent on killing them, forcing it into exile or slaughtering it themselves. When this happens, the actions of the dire troll are regarded as a challenge from the gods; one that only the strong can survive.

Dire trolls look exactly like their mundane counterparts, but they are much bigger. Thick yellowish drool issues from their constantly grinning mouths and their lips seem to be moving ceaselessly, as if praying to some unknown power. Although they appear unable to make sense of their environment and cannot communicate with others, dire trolls that live for many years can, with time, learn a profession. A dire troll character's favorite class is barbarian.

Combat

A dire troll's madness drives it to uncontrollable bursts of rage. In combat, these fiends are recklessly deadly and always fight to the death. Because they do not understand their own limits and are incapable of sizing up their opposition, dire trolls sometime find themselves in perilous situations, and many among them have been bested by greater foes -- some dragons, in fact, have taken a particularly zealous pleasure in keeping the dire troll's population in check.

Although they are usually encountered alone, some dire trolls have been known to lead bands of lesser trolls (or follow these mundane cousins) into battle.

Damage Reduction (Ex): Dire trolls are blessed with a thick hide that absorbs a portion of the damage dealt to them. They have damage reduction 3/--.

Rend (Ex): If a dire troll hits with both claw attacks, it latches onto the opponent's body and tears its flesh, automatically dealing an additional 4d6+12 points of damage.

Regeneration (Ex): Fire and acid deal normal damage to a dire troll. If a dire troll loses a limb or body part, the lost portion regrows in 3d6 minutes. The creature can reattach the severed member instantly by holding it to the stump.

Uncontrollable Rage (Ex): When a dire troll engages an opponent in combat, it automatically enters a frenzied state not unlike the barbarian's ability to rage. While in this frame of mind, the dire troll gains a +8 enhancement bonus to both its Strength and Constitution scores, but suffers from a -4 penalty to its Dexterity score. Effectively, its enhanced Constitution bestows it with an additional 4 hit points per Hit Dice of the creature (so a typical dire troll benefits from an added 40 hit points while in this state), but unlike temporary hit points these are not lost first.

The dire troll's rage is totally out of its control and stays in effect for as long as there are living targets within sight, be they friends or foes. If only friendly creatures remain, the dire troll must succeed at a Will saving throw (DC 20) to break the rage. A failed save means that the creature is forced to continue to attack. When it is engaged in battle against companions, the dire troll is allowed another Will save every minute until it finally shrugs off the effect of its rage, kills everyone in its path, or is itself incapacitated or destroyed.

Dire Trolls As Characters

Dire trolls possess the following racial traits.

- +16 Strength, +2 Dexterity, +16 Constitution, ?6 Intelligence (minimum 3), ?4 Wisdom, ?6 Charisma.
- Huge size: ?2 penalty to Armor Class, ?2 penalty on attack rolls, ?8 penalty on Hide checks, +8 bonus on grapple checks, lifting and carrying limits is four times that of a medium-sized character.

- Space/Reach: 10 feet / 20 feet.
- A dire troll's base land speed is 40 feet.
- Darkvision out to 90 feet and low-light vision.
- Racial Hit Dice: A dire troll begins with ten levels of giant, which provide 10d8 Hit Dice, a base attack bonus of +7, and base saving throw bonuses of Fort +7, Ref +3, and Will +3.
- Racial Skills: A dire troll's giant levels gives it skill points equal to $13 \times (2 + \text{Int modifier, minimum } 1)$. Its class skills are Listen and Spot.
- Racial Feats: A dire troll's giant levels give it three feats.
- Natural Weapons: Claw (2d4) and bite (1d8).
- Special Attacks (see above): Rend (damage $4d6 + 1\text{-}1/2$ times Str modifier), uncontrollable rage.
- Special Qualities: Damage reduction 3/--, regeneration 5, scent.
- Automatic Languages: Giant. Bonus Languages: Common, Orc.
- Favored Class: Barbarian.
- Level Adjustment +7.

Shadow Fiend

Large Outsider (Evil)

Hit Dice: 12d8+48 (102 hp)

Initiative: +4 (Improved Initiative)

Speed: 40 ft. (8 square)

Armor Class: 16 (?1 size, +15 natural), touch 9, flat-footed 15

Base Attack/Grapple: +12/+18

Attack: Bite +18 (1d8+9)

Full Attack: Bite +18 (1d8+9) and two claws +16 (1d6+6); or great spear +18/+13/+8 melee (2d8+6)

Space/Reach: 5 ft. / 10 ft.

Special Attacks: --

Special Qualities: Darkvision 120 ft., deeper darkness, light sensitivity, shadow blend, shadow meld, shadow walk

Saves: Fort +12, Ref +8, Will +9

Abilities: Str 23, Dex 11, Con 18, Int 19, Wis 13, Cha 15

Skills: Animal Empathy +15, Bluff +17, Handle Animal +15, Hide +11, Intimidate +17, Listen +18, Move Silently +15, Sense Motive +14, Spot +18, Wilderness Lore +16

Feats: Alertness, Blind-Fight, Improved Initiative, Multiattack

Environment: Any

Organization: Solitary, pair, hunting party (2-5, plus 1d6 shadow mastiffs), hunting pack (5-20, plus one 15 HD elder, plus 2d6 shadow mastiffs), or clan (20-60, plus 2d4 15 HD elders, plus one 25 HD ancient, plus 4d6 shadow mastiffs)

Challenge Rating: 9

Treasure: Standard

Alignment: Usually neutral evil

Advancement: 13-18 HD (Large); 19-33 HD (Huge)

Description

Shadow fiends are tall, emaciated, humanoid-looking beings that appear to be made out of pure shadow. Their alien features are constantly cast in darkness -- unless they are standing in direct sunlight or are under the effect of a sunlight spell, in which case their pitch-black skin is exposed. A close inspection of a shadow fiend's face reveals a wide jaw, a thick flat nose, and a ridged forehead unlike any other creatures of this world. Small holes on the side of the shadow fiend's head serve as ears and tiny horns protrude just above them, giving the outsider's head a demon-like profile. Within deep recesses burn bright yellow eyes reminiscent of a wildcat or mountain lion. These eyes are as intense and determined as those of the vilest devils.

Hailing from a plane of shadows, these unearthly creatures are ruthless hunters of unfathomable power. Able to manipulate the shadows around them, shadow friends are especially hard to see. Because they can travel through

shadows, they can appear almost anywhere -- an ability that makes them especially deadly in combat, since they relish surprising their prey.

Shadow fiends speak their own language, which no one on this plane understands -- or so it is believed. Some scholarly monks from a remote abbey have devoted their lives to the study of all creatures hailing from the same dark plane as the shadow fiends and the shadow mastiffs. These monks might know the secret tongue of these weird outsiders.

Combat

By nature, shadow fiends are hunters. Originating from the same world as the outsiders known as the shadow mastiffs, these highly intelligent beings train the dog-like creatures to serve them as loyal hounds. They use shadow mastiffs to guard their territories and -- most especially -- to help them hunt. Occasionally, a single shadow fiend hunts with a pack of shadow mastiffs, but most often they hunt in parties or packs.

Shadow fiends are prone to combat. However, because of their sneaky ways and their shadow-related abilities, they usually use stealth and cunning in battle. They seem to especially enjoy emerging from a shadowy corner to catch their preys unaware.

When attacking a large group of creatures, they try to slay the weakest opponents first, often targeting the most lightly armored foes as well as those already wounded. If they are caught in a battle they might lose, shadow fiends do not hesitate to retreat, often using their shadow walk ability to cheat death.

Deeper Darkness (Sp): This outsider can summon deeper darkness three times every day. This ability function as per the spell of the same name as cast by a 15th level sorcerer.

Light Sensitivity: Shadow fiends live in a world of darkness, where they are constantly cast in deep shadows. When they journey out of their native environment, it is to hunt. When exposed to daylight or a daylight spell, a shadow fiend suffers a ?6 circumstance penalty on all attack rolls as well as a ?3 circumstance penalty to all saving throws for one full round. After this initial round, these penalties are each reduced to ?1 and remain in effect for as long as the creature is exposed to daylight.

Shadow Blend (Su): This supernatural ability is always in effect, giving the false impression that the shadow fiends are made out of pure living darkness. During any conditions other than full daylight, a shadow fiend can disappear into the shadows, giving it nine-tenths concealment. Artificial illumination, even a light or continual flame spell, does not negate this ability. A daylight spell, however, will.

Shadow Meld (Su): This supernatural ability allows the shadow fiend to merge its body and the items it carries with the surrounding shadows. The surface in which the creature can sink must be completely covered in shadows and large enough to accommodate its body, in all dimensions. While merged, the shadow fiend becomes one with the shadows, gaining temporary invulnerability. In this state, the outsider remains aware of the passage of time as well as the events that go on around it, but it is impossible for others to discern the shadow fiend from the darkness with which it is melded. Only another shadow fiend can locate one of its kin while it is merged in the shadows.

It takes one full round for the shadow fiend to sink into the darkness and another full round to resurface from it. This ability may be used once per day and lasts a maximum of one hour for each two Hit Dice the shadow fiend has (so a typical shadow fiend can remain merged in shadows for six hours). If the shadows into which this strange outsider has melded disappear -- through either normal or magical means -- the shadow fiend's presence is automatically revealed.

Shadow Walk (Su): Shadow fiends are experts at manipulating the ambient darkness and one of their most impressive talents is their ability to travel from one shadow to the next. This supernatural ability functions as the transport via plant spell except that the journey must take place between one shadowy area to another and the range is limited to one mile. Shadow walk may be used a number of times per day equal to the shadow fiend's Constitution modifier (so a typical shadow fiend can use it four times every day).

Unfortunate

Medium-Size Undead

Hit Dice: 8d8 (36 hp)

Initiative: +1 (Dex)

Speed: 30 ft. (8 squares)

Armor Class: 19 (+ 1 Dex, +3 natural, +5 breastplate), touch 11, flat-footed 18

Base Attack/Grapple: +4/+6

Attack: Claw +6

Full Attack: Two claws +6 melee (1d6+2); or longsword +6 melee (1d8+2)

Space/Reach: 5 ft. / 5 ft.

Special Attacks: Darkvision 60 ft., disquieting moan, spell-like abilities

Special Qualities: Stench, unnatural aura, undead traits

Saves: Fort +5, Ref +3, Will +9

Abilities: Str 15, Dex 13, Con --, Int 17, Wis 13, Cha 16

Skills: Concentration +13, Handle Animal +12, Listen +14, Search +14, Spot +14, Wilderness Lore +12

Feats: Alertness, Iron Will, Track

Environment: Any

Organization: Solitary, pair, company (2-5), band (5-20, plus one 12 HD ancient), or battalion (20-40, plus 1d4 12 HD ancients)

Challenge Rating: 4

Treasure: Standard

Alignment: Always neutral evil

Advancement: 9-15 HD (medium-size)

Description

The unfortunates are unnerving undead creatures that haunt the remote areas of the world. Once part of a powerful humanoid race that dominated the face of the planet, these frightful beings fell into derision, destitution, and despair millennia ago, and soon afterwards their once world-spanning empire was completely obliterated. None knows how these beings called themselves, but historians who studied the dramatic fall of their wondrous civilization dubbed them "unfortunates." Today, vestiges of their technologically advanced empire can be found throughout the world, but none of these people survived the great cataclysm that befell them.

Most sages, historians, and troubadours speak about the fall of the unfortunates in riddles, revealing strange facts and unlikely rumors about these humanoids that lived and died long before the birth of mankind. Although none knows the true reason behind their extinction, the violent upheaval that befell them destroyed everything the unfortunates had built (leaving only ruins) and killed every last one of them in the process. Some unfortunates, however, did not journey to the Underworld with the rest of their peers, but instead transcended unto the undeath state. These beings still roam the planet today, and the traveling adventurer would do best to avoid the disquieting undeads.

Appearing much as they did during their lifetimes, the unfortunates resemble powerfully built elves, with elongated facial features, prominent pointed ears, and wide empty eyes. Their skin, which has now turned into a bluish gray hue, is flaking, much like a leper's. They wear a variety of rotted clothes and suits of armors in dire need of repair, and those unfortunate that were rich during their lifetime occasionally carry magical weapons. Rotting from the inside, these undeads emanate a powerful stink that discourages even the bravest of heroes.

Unfortunates can be found anywhere in the world, but they are most likely to be encountered in dark grottos, abandoned ruins, and large underground dungeons in remote areas . . . places that had once belonged to their kind.

Combat

Although they were once a highly civilized and kindly people, in their undead state the unfortunates exist only to

destroy. Extremely protective of their lairs -- which are often in the remains of buildings from their fallen empire -- unfortunates usually attack on sight, revealing their presence to all intruders daring to invade their private abodes. They attack savagely and without mercy -- almost like cornered animals -- using no particular tactics aside from those that derive from their special abilities.

Occasionally, unfortunates might roam the territory outside of their lairs, and some might be encountered in the wilderness. They rarely venture far from their homes, however, for fear of losing the only thing of value to them. Aware of the beauty, worth, and history behind every work of art, jewel, gemstone, coin, weapon, and armor, the unfortunates bury the riches they stole from their prey under mounds of earth or rocks deep within their lairs.

Disquieting Moan (Su): The unfortunates can emanate a low-pitched moan capable of frightening the boldest of foes. All living creatures that hear this moan, which is reminiscent of confused faraway voices uttering gibberish in a weird language, must succeed at a Will save (DC 17) or become frightened for 2d4 rounds. A frightened creature cannot do anything but run away from the unfortunate for the duration of the effect. After the disquieting moan effect dissipates, the creature thus affected must attempt another Will saving throw (DC 17). With a successful save, the victim has mastered its fear and can confront the unfortunate again, but a failed save results in the victim suffering from a ?4 morale penalty to all attack rolls, Will saving throws, and AC when fighting an unfortunate for the remainder of the day.

A creature that successfully saves against this effect may not be affected by any unfortunate's disquieting moan for a 24-hour period. This is a supernatural, sonic, mind-affecting ability.

Spell-like Abilities: 3/day -- cause fear, chill touch, inflict light wounds; 1/day -- scare, vampiric touch.

Stench (Su): The stink of death and corruption surrounding these creatures is sickening. Those within 10 feet of an unfortunate must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 14) or be wracked with nausea, suffering a ?2 circumstance penalty to all attacks, saves, and skill checks for 2d6+2 rounds.

Undead Traits: Immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, and disease. Not subject to critical hits, subdual damage, ability damage, energy drain, or death from massive damage.

Unnatural Aura (Su): Both wild and domesticated animals can sense the unnatural presence of an unfortunate at a distance of 120 feet. They do not willingly approach nearer than that and panic if forced to do so; they remain panicked as long as they are within that range.

Pyramid Review

Disaster! 1PG Survival Adventure!

Published by [Deep7](#)

Written by Todd Downing & James Stubbs with Gavin Downing, Michelle Downing, Ron Dugdale & Colin Fisk

Cover by Todd Downing

13-page 664Kb PDF document; \$3.95

Disaster! 1PG Survival Adventure! is one of publisher Deep7's older *IPG* titles that has been updated in the wake of the release of [The IPG Companion: A Toolkit For Deep7's Beer & Pretzel's RPGs](#). Indeed this is Version 3 of *Disaster!*, which has been tidied up and given new material that can be used in conjunction with *The IPG Companion*. As its title suggests, the theme of this *IPG* is disaster, specifically the disaster movie of the 1970s, though of course, there is nothing to stop its contents being run in the here and now.

Thus we are in the era of funk and disco, atop *The Towering Inferno*, upside down and capsized in *The Poseidon Adventure*, due to crash land at *Airport '77*, and once off the jumbo jet, shaking all over from the *Earthquake*. Then again, *Disaster!* could be run to the electronic vibe of the latest Technotronic soundtrack, all while the cast is fleeing at *Speed* from *Dante's Peak*, before getting caught in a *Twister*. But really, *Disaster!* is a tribute to the silver screen oeuvre of Irwin Allen.

In comparison with other *IPGs*, *Disaster!* casts the player characters as fairly ordinary folks. In keeping with the genre, foremost among these are members of the Emergency Services: the police, the fire-fighting crews, and the paramedics. Even so, they do not play a main role in all of the scenarios given in *Disaster!* Although only 11 occupations are included on the *IPG's* Background Table, it would be very easy to create more, to match either what a player wants or the demands of the scenario. As with other *IPG* titles, character generation in *Disaster!* is quick and easy, and should never take more than five minutes total.

The referee's advice boils down to keeping the game moving along, ensuring that the popcorn is always fresh, and making sure that the scenario is served with a dollop or two of cheese . . . the latter, of course, because *Disaster!* is a 70s-set game. And because the genre is that of the disaster movie, casualties -- even of the PCs -- should be high. To offset this, players are encouraged to create more than one character.

One thing that the *IPG* line and ruleset never really addressed is the subject of first aid and medical treatment. The "State of Emergency" rules page given in *Disaster! v.3* cover both, including medical care plus the effects severe bodily trauma, bleeding, and infection. The vehicles and crew of both the Emergency Medical Services and the Police are also listed. They are in-line with the vehicle rules from *The IPG Companion*.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The first of the six scenarios in *Disaster!* is "Sandstorm!" written by Ron Dugdale. This has the players cast as guests at the opening of El Dorado, a resort deep in the deserts of Texas. When the area is subject to a freak sandstorm, this turns into a desiccated nod to *The Poseidon Adventure* in which the players must escape from within a pyramid-shaped hotel that is now buried in sand. Gavin Downing's "Flight 666!" is a tale of aerial hijacking, terrorism, and cascading disasters that is more tightly scripted; although it is well done, it is probably best not run in a contemporary setting.

The Towering Inferno gets the nod in Michelle Downing's "Disco Inferno!" Here the cast are the guests, gatecrashers, and employees at New York City 's newest nightclub atop a fully computer-controlled skyscraper. It is New Year's Eve, and when the festivities take a nasty turn in the streets below, the building locks down in the interests of everyone's safety. Unfortunately a fire starts up, and in the ensuing panic, everyone has to get out of the building. "Firestorm!" and its sequel "Reactor!" draw from (again) *The Towering Inferno* and *Dante's Peak* for their inspiration. Both are by Colin Fisk and take place in Irwinville, a small town surrounded by forest in the Rocky Mountains. In the first scenario, a forest fire threatens the town, but what saved Irwinville in "Firestorm!" turns out to be the danger in "Reactor!" These two scenarios work better for their small scale and for being a pair. This allows time for the players to grow attached to their characters, all before they fall victim to the disaster.

The final scenario is James Stubbs' "Incubation!" The derailing of a military train results in the contamination of a small town's water supply, and in a nod to films as diverse as *Outbreak*, *Resident Evil*, and *12 Monkeys*, the town is quickly beset by zombies and quarantined by the US Army. "Incubation!" could be run using *Disaster!* or even Deep7's *Shriek: the Game of Teen Horror 1PG*. This crossover highlights the further possibility of running the scenarios in *Disaster!* using Eden Studio's *All Flesh Must Be Eaten RPG*. Indeed, the game's *The Book of Archetypes* could provide all the ready-to-play characters they need without having to resort to the throwing of dice.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

In order to run *Disaster!* a GM has to handle the pacing of two opposing elements inherent to the genre. One is the desperate and dangerous nature of the action and the disaster, while the other is the over-blown and convoluted nature of the relationships between the characters, done in the style of an Aaron Spelling production or (in the modern era) a Jerry Bruckheimer film. Together the two elements embody the cheese factor that permeates *Disaster!* -- though this a factor that will be need to be held in check if a scenario is not to slip over in to parody a la that of *Airplane!* A GM should also give careful consideration to the sensibilities of his players before running "Flight 666!" as some may find its subject matter distasteful in this day and age. One or two of the other scenarios in *Disaster!* might be regarded as a little underwritten, though this is offset by our familiarity with the genre. Conversely, the genre is not one that is familiar to roleplaying, so *Disaster! 1PG Survival Adventure!* fills a niche previously left empty, doing so in an entertaining and pleasing fashion.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Pick

Attika

Published by [Rio Grande Games](#)

Designed by Marcel-André Casasola Merkle

Graphics by Manuel Casasola Merkle

full-color boxed game with 22 game board tiles, four shrines, 15 wooden amphoras, four player storage boards, 120 building tiles, 60 landscape cards, & rulebook; \$32.95

When you first pull this Rio Grande game out, be prepared for the inevitable snickers and cheers of "Attika! Attika! Attika!" Simply accept that this must be done; once the players have gotten it out of their system, you can get down to business.

The object of *Attika* is to be the first player to connect two temples with a line of your structures or, barring that, to get all your tiles onto the board. *Attika* is designed for two to four players.

The shrines are small cardboard stand-ups on their own hexagonal bases. These abut the game board tiles. Game board tiles are macrohexes -- that is, they are hex-shaped and comprise seven smaller hexes for play. The boards are placed randomly to form the initial playing surface, and each is peppered with landscape symbols showing hills, water, etc. These match the landscape cards; everything you build has a cost in resources, paid by the landscape symbols you build on or by the cards in your hand.

Your buildings are kept face down in four stacks, one with all the main buildings and three with the ancillary structures. Each player has a storage board (not to be confused with the playing boards on the playing surface), a play mat that shows all these buildings grouped into related sets. You have, for example, one section called Roads that contains all the streets and another called Shipping made up of harbors and ships. These are depicted on your mat like a flowchart. A main building sits at the center of the chart, and arrows point to the other buildings in the set. Once you have the main building erected, anything it points to is a free build providing it is placed adjacent to the "parent." Some of these buildings have their own arrows, and done right, this can lead to building several things in a row for little or no cost. (Decentralized builds will cost you extra resources.)

On your turn, you have two options: Draw tiles from the stacks and place them on your storage board (if you don't have the landscape cards to build them) or on the game board (if you do); or take tiles from the mat and build them on the game boards. You're limited to two draws from your stacks, but you may build three that are already waiting face-up on your storage board. Every draw or build you choose to forego earns you a landscape card. Buildings are placed one to a hex, and may be placed anywhere on the board you choose.

If you draw the last counter in one of your tile stacks, you get to draw and place a new macrohex somewhere along the edges of the existing board. Since most of your opponents probably spent the better part of the game trying to disrupt your temple connections, the right placement may reopen a strategy that had been cut off. When you complete an entire set of buildings (everything in the Shipping flowchart, for example), you are given an amphora; these little wooden jar counters can be turned in for another landscape card, draw, or build.

The only noticeable omission is a way to keep track of the buildings you've already built. If there were some way to indicate at a glance what had been played so you didn't spend several moments double-checking to see if another tile draw is worthwhile, it would speed things up a little. Some coins to cover the finished buildings might help, though it

seems against the grain of such an elegant design. The fancy wooden extra-action tokens get used (though rarely) and yet they don't get used: they are awarded but are usually expended in quick succession (you might simply take to using the extras to cover the mat spaces of those buildings in play).

The graphic design in *Attika* is just as simple and graceful as the play; the building pictures are spare, the resource cards functional, and the mats clear. The pieces are all fine quality, and everything is in glorious color. Like many Rio Grande Games, the box has a large black plastic insert that is form-fitted to accept all the bits and prevent them from sliding about and getting mixed up in storage. With plenty of free-flowing strategy packed into a simple set of rules that will appeal to fans of *Settlers of Catan* and similar family-friendly fare, players will have other reasons for chanting "Attika!" the second time you take it off the shelf.

--*Andy Vetromile*

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Morality Bites?

There's an odd paradox in gaming. On the one hand, players like to believe that the world in which their characters adventure is somehow as "impartial" as our own. Players generally don't like the idea of a world existing entirely as a subjective whimsy:

Player: "I kick down the door!"

GM: "Oh, no! You've angered the great god Egress, and your leg splinters into a million pieces!"

On the other hand, players are likely to admit that the game universe *does* exist at one person's whim - namely the guy behind the duck blind . . . the one with the hastily scrawled maps on Pepsi-stained graph paper. And if he decides the door gods have been angered, there isn't a whole lot that can be said otherwise.

Obviously that's an extreme example, and to a large extent games try to work around this contradiction in their own ways. For example, it could be argued that combat rules are merely an extension of attempts to create an impartial gaming universe. After all, if the GM participates with the same zeal for preserving his NPCs as the players do, then the resulting outcome should be fairly impartial within the confines of the rule set. (In actuality, most game systems favor the players in this regard, since the fact that they only have one character each to focus on means they know more of the "tricks" of what works and what doesn't for their characters. But that's beside the point.)

However, the GM is in charge of a *lot* more than tactical combat; he comes up with everything else about how the game world reacts and presents challenges. And possibly the most interesting aspect of this power is how it can manifest itself with the GM's worldview, either how he believes the game world should react or how he believes the "real" world should be. And this perception has the power to significantly alter the game.

For example, let's say the GM believes that, in any crime, there is always *some* piece of evidence that will remain behind that can allow the whole misdeed to be unraveled. So long as the heroes are the ones solving crimes, this facet should serve them well. However, if the party starts *committing* crimes, then this outlook might serve to make the PCs' lives a nightmare. Despite whatever preparations the PCs made and whatever precautions they took, the GM might have an NPC who discovers the one bit they forgot, the one avenue they left open, the one "lucky" break necessary to cast suspicion on the PCs. And then he might use that to complicate the criminals' (and players') lives. How this plays out can determine the extent of the problem. It might be fun for the players to encounter a complication resulting from their seemingly successful crime . . . or it might be completely obnoxious if, against all odds, Officer Fate Accompli keeps stumbling on *exactly* the clues necessary to continue dogging the PCs.

(For those who are wondering how folks could view something seemingly objective as a belief, I would say that people don't even realize what they're saying is a matter of faith. For example, our "crime-can-be-unraveled" GM might defend his actions by saying things like, "There are always clues" or "There's no such thing as the perfect crime." He may even point to real-world cases where the single tiniest bit of information led to the discovery of a massive crime, such as *The Cuckoo's Egg*. These statements provide the justification necessary to allow his actions, even if they seem unrealistic or unreasonable to the players.)

However, the larger - and possibly more common - situation where the GM's and players' view of the world may clash is over outlook and morality. For example, consider any of the following platitudes:

- Good will triumph over evil.
- No good deed goes unpunished.
- Any good deed will be returned seven times over.
- Violence is never the answer.
- Might makes right.
- Fortune favors the bold.
- Love will find a way.
- Crime does not pay. (This is an overarching restatement of the "No such thing as the perfect crime" GM, above)

If the GM follows any one of those to an extreme, it will radically alter the game world.

For example, the old West End Games *Star Wars RPG* had as one of its tenets that no player could continue playing a character who is evil, unless it was for the purpose of illustrating how he might come back to the light. (Any PC who was too far gone was supposed to be given up to the GM as an NPC.) Likewise any campaign focusing on the bad guys either had to end up with them turning to the Light Side, or ultimately getting their butts kicked.

Think about the implications of that. If the game's philosophy was followed, then it would be impossible to be in a campaign where the bad guys get everything they want *and* remain evil. So if a GM who adhered to this outlook sat down at the table with a bunch of unsuspecting players who were looking forward to donning Darth Vader helmets and lopping off limbs with lightsabers, then *someone* was almost certainly going to be disappointed.

Other games have their own imposed moral outlooks within the game; some even have game mechanics behind them. (White Wolf's World of Darkness series is the quintessential example, but there are others.) But even in these games it's possible for the GM to impose his own beliefs. For example, *Vampire* has as one of its core mechanics the Humanity trait. Basically, the more inhuman you act, the more inhuman you become; eventually the vampire becomes a slathering beast (and, again, an NPC).

Now, when I run *Vampire*, I tend to believe the most interesting stories come out of the conflict presented by this mechanic; a small child has just witnessed you drinking someone's blood, and is running to tell the police . . . do you take the expedient path and kill to protect the secret, or do you take a harder path and try to resolve things while clinging to your old human beliefs?

However, I've also played in games that were more "realistic"; situations where one is forced to wrestle with one's humanity were rare, unless someone acted blatantly towards such trials. And I've also seen games where the players and GM discarded the mechanic entirely, allowing themselves to fully revel in being blood-sucking monsters.

Even in the context of the same game, these matters can wildly affect the outlook of any specific campaign. In mine I just decided that it would be neat to have a child witness the crime; I figured that, unless the PCs ensured that nobody could witness the attack, it would be more interesting just to have it happen. In the realistic campaign the GM might assign a one-in-10 chance that someone witnessed it. And in the monstrous campaign the GM might not bother at all . . . unless he thinks the players might enjoy "encountering" a kid. Regardless, a player who was expecting to get away with attacks unscathed would likely be disappointed in my game, and players who want interesting complications are not as likely to enjoy the other two.

Although I don't think I've ever heard it discussed, I suspect many GMs consciously or subconsciously have at least one maxim or worldview that they impose on the game. In fact, I'd argue that even an attempt to have an entirely *objective* game world is its own worldview; in the literary world, such a game might be called realistic or even naturalistic.

In a future installment I'll talk about how these issues might be recognized and, if there's a problem in the game, overcome. But for now I hope it will be enough just to notice the possible complication . . . in this case, the guy with the plastic Darth Vader helmet kicking open doors.

Transhuman Martial Arts

by Peter V. Dell'Orto & Werner H. Hartmann

The solar system of *Transhuman Space* is a place of wonder and technological progress. But it is also a place of inter-group and interpersonal violence. The martial arts have been in constant development for thousands of years, and 21st century was no exception. Numerous martial styles were developed, refined, and taught as man moved off planet. Here is a small sampling of some martial arts that have developed throughout the 21st century and into the early days of the 22nd.

Martial Arts in the 21st

In the first decades of the third millennium the body of techniques collectively known as "martial arts" developed itself into three different directions. The largest, and commercially most successful, was the amalgamation of various martial art techniques and styles with moves from aerobic and dance classes. This resulted in the creation of what would later become known as "fitness arts." Practitioners of these styles are primarily interested in the workout effects of their training and waste little to no thoughts on self-defense -- though there have been some tragic cases of delusional belief in the actual combat value of their chosen sport. The second major direction was somewhat classical: self-defense.

Especially in areas with a strong tradition of strict gun control, many citizens felt the need to learn some ways to protect themselves against physical violence. Like in the latter half of the 20th century, most dojos draw paying customers by offering a variety of "quick and dirty" (or often just quick) self-defense courses, which in turn were derived from certain techniques of the dojos main martial arts (often some form of Karate, Jujutsu, Tae Kwon Do, Hapkido, Escrima, Kickboxing, or Wing Chun).

"Serious" practitioners of traditional martial arts still existed, and often made their living by teaching those self-defense courses, but new styles of any significance were not developed in this environment.

Invention and creativity, however, could be found in the third important area of martial arts development in the 21st century: full-contact blood sports. Born out of the Mu Tau and "Mixed Martial Arts" bouts of the 1990s, such "meatfights" became more and more popular all over the globe between 2010 and 2020 -- even if they were still illegal in many areas. Since many fighters in those days came from a criminal and/or streetfighting background the "creativity" shown in their fights was of a rather primal and brutal conviction, thus keeping the lessons from those tournaments out of any "real" dojo for decades to come. Some of those techniques came full circle during the 20s, 30s, and 40s when civil unrest and wars in various parts of the world -- but especially in Central Africa -- saw the reintroduction of those brutal fighting maneuvers to the urban battle fields of the 21st century.

The true motors of inspiration for the martial arts in the 21st century -- manned space travel, the colonization of deadly environments with non-standard gravitation, and life in small pressurized habitats -- needed almost 50 years for ignition and lift-off. Then, between 2040 and 2080, dozens of new styles seemed to appear all across the solar system, though only a handful of them were really successful on this scale. Many of those styles were also born out of social and political unrest, mainly on Mars and beyond. The Ares conspiracy, the Duncanites, and the bloody history of the Martian Triads are probably the most widely known of these conflicts.

Today, at the dawn of the 22nd century, the "fitness arts" of the 21st have almost completely vanished: thanks to modern biomod citizens of 4th- and 5th-wave nations no longer have any need for them, and those living in poorer areas of the world usually have more urgent needs. Also classical martial arts tournaments in styles like boxing and kickboxing went the same way out like almost all other spectator sports when confronted with upgraded, uplifted, or biomodified contenders. Martial arts as "arts" like many forms of T'ai Chi and kata demonstrations in karate, however, are alive and kicking - as are the deadly and illegal blood sport fights that can be found almost anywhere in the solar system. Dojos that teach martial arts for self-defense still exist but are more common on Mars and in 3rd and 4th wave nations than in the secure and wealthy 5th wave areas of Earth. However, the military forces of the solar system *all*

teach martial art techniques to certain units, and all professional law enforcement personnel -- be it on Earth or beyond -- can be expected to know some form of hand-to-hand combat.

Cinematic Martial Arts in *Transhuman Space*

Cinematic martial arts are canonically non-existent in *Transhuman Space*. The martial arts have always had legends of special abilities attached to them. In the past, masters had many powers attributed to them. Due to the nature and inherent limitations of modern media the public awareness of the distinction between cinematic and realistic martial arts techniques has grown significantly over the past few decades. While InVid productions often feature more outrageous stunts than even the most extreme wuxia movies of the early 21st century, the popular slinky recordings of bloody meat fights are forced almost by definition to present the utmost in realism. A realism that, if rumors are to be believed, results in a small-but-profitable black market in "death match" slinkies. However, even when faced with bleeding facts, humans like to believe the improbable, so that legends and urban myths about "secret techniques" of classic and modern martial arts are still strong and widespread memes. The Cinematic Skills and Cinematic Maneuvers listed can be used for inspiration about the legends ascribed to these new styles. Perhaps in some *Transhuman Space* campaigns, some of these fictional depictions are true . . .

The Styles

The following styles are a sampling of the more important and widespread styles in the early 22nd century as well as a couple of the more unique. This is not a complete listing -- many styles, sub-styles, and syncretions of 20th century styles have emerged.

Bantu Boxing (Bantujutsu) -- Warriorstyle

16 Points

Primary Skills: Boxing, Judo.

Secondary Skills: Body Language, Breath Control, Law, Tonfa, Staff.

Optional Skills: Karate, Meditation (M/H), Autohypnosis, Style Analysis, Sumo Wrestling, other weapon skills.

Maneuvers: Arm Lock [2], Breakfall, Choke Hold, Finger Lock, Ground Fighting (Judo), Head Lock, Hit Location (Boxing), Jab, Neck Snap, Piledriver, Riposte (Boxing), Roundhouse Punch, Slip.

Cinematic Skills: none.

Cinematic Maneuvers: none.

Common Advantages: Combat Reflexes, High Pain Threshold, Toughness.

Common Disadvantages: Intolerance (racial)

Useful Biomods: Bio-Booster, Bone Stimulation, Cell Regeneration, Jointwork, Muscle Reinforcement.

Bantu Boxing -- Chiefstyle

16 Points

Primary Skills: Staff, Short Staff, one of Axe/Mace, Broadsword, Main-Gauche or Tonfa.

Secondary Skills: Body Language, Breath Control, Law, Throwing, one weapon skill not chosen as primary skill.

Optional Skills: As for warriorstyle.

Maneuvers: Aggressive Parry (for two primary skills), Back Strike (Staff), Close Combat (for two primary skills), Feint (Staff), Hit Location (for all primary skills), Off Hand Weapon Training (for Short Staff and the other one-handed primary weapon skill), Retain Weapon (Staff), Sweeping Strike (Staff).

Cinematic Skills: None.

Cinematic Maneuvers: None.

Common advantages: As for Warriorstyle.

Common Disadvantages: As for Warriorstyle.

Useful Biomods: As for Warriorstyle.

Bantujutsu was founded by the famous African martial artist Charles "Croc" Makombo in the 2030s and 40s. He was born somewhere between 1990 and 2000 in Paris. He migrated to NYC in 2018. After a very promising career start in professional Boxing and Mu Tau, he astonished the fans by joining the Central African rebel forces of Colonel Thomas Lefevre in the Congo crisis of the 2020s. He soon became one of the leading figures of the war and was the trainer and commander of Lefevre's personal guard, the Simba. It was thought that he died with the rest of Lefevre's troops in an ambush in 2029, but he reappeared in Montreal in 2041 where he opened a dojo. In 2072 he moved to Marseille, where he opened his second dojo. Over the next 30 years he taught and perfected his new style, which he forbid to be taught to whites or Asians.

On August the first 2086 Makombo retired and left the dojos and his martial art to his nephew Anthony Proudhomme. On August the third 2086 Makombo apparently died while swimming in the Mediterranean sea, but his body was never found. Anthony Proudhomme opened the dojos to students of all ethnic backgrounds, including whites and Asians. Some of Croc's senior students still grumble about this "perversion" and "selling out of" the style to this day . . .

The Chiefstyle version of Bantujutsu will only be taught to advanced students (First Dan or higher) of the Warriorstyle. Bantujutsu is a style that emphasizes physical power, and as such tries to take advantage of a combatant's larger size, body mass, and sheer strength whenever possible. As a result many practitioner's of this style possess a very powerful physique -- either by birth, training, or design.

Among Bantujutsu students exists a rumor about a secret third Bantujutsu style, the Witchdoctor, or Shamanstyle. If this style exists -- and what it consists of -- is left to the GM.

Freefighting

10 Points/29 Points

Primary Skills: Brawling, Free Fall, Judo, Vacc Suit.

Secondary Skills: Acrobatics, Jumping, Shortsword.

Optional Skills: Climbing, Fast-Draw (Knife or One Handed Sword), Karate, Knife.

Maneuvers: Arm Lock [2], Disarming, Knee Strike.

Cinematic Skills: Blind Fighting.

Cinematic Maneuvers: Binding, Enhanced Dodge, Roll with Blow, Sticking.

Special: Normally, vacc suits give a -1 to all DX- based skills and DX rolls. This training includes combat-familiarization which eliminates the penalty to all combat-oriented rolls and the Free Fall skill; the cost is 2 character points.

Common Advantages: G-Experience, 3-D Spatial Sense.

Useful Biomods: Bone Stimulation, Jointwork, Prehensile Tail Graft, Tenjin Biochemistry, Testicle Tuck.

"Freefighting is a simple style meant to tie up and immobilize an opponent. You don't want them drilling a hundred holes into the computers on the bridge with his gun while you tumble around doing jump kicks -- take his weapon away and make him stop!"

-- Sgt. Donald Oldham, US Marines Force Recon HTH instructor

"Freefighting" developed during the mid-21st century amongst long-term low- and no-gravity dwellers. Emphasis in this version of the style is the ability to tie up an opponent quickly with an aim to subduing. Basic punching and kicking techniques are included, and combinations often have strikes aimed at stunning a foe long enough to allow a solid hold to be gained. Training in taking away dangerous weapons -- specially those dangerous to sensitive components -- is emphasized.

Some variations include training with knives to get a quick disabling strike. Shortsword covers use of the baton; advanced stick-fighting techniques are eschewed in favor of simple strikes. Many variations on freefighting exist, much as the name itself implies. "Freefighting" variations on many major martial arts (including especially Escrima, Jujutsu, and Pao Chuan) and fusion styles have also been developed. An interesting fact of this specific style of Freefighting is that a small (but skillful) group among its students, who live permanently in microgravity, had their legs replaced by an additional pair of arms. Those practitioners replace Knee Strike with the special Shuto (lower

arms) maneuver (detailed below). This additional maneuver must be learned separately from and in addition to Shuto.

This style does not contain a large body of cinematic techniques, although legends about fabulous moves pulled off by practitioners of the style are common in popular entertainment. This maneuvers often emphasize the practitioner dodging and weaving with ease -- often using spectacular low-g acrobatics -- while tying up foes with handy cable or cable ties, all the while never losing contact with the foe. Optionally, instead of the Cinematic Maneuver "Binding," a practitioner can pick up the Handcuffing maneuver (see p. C59).

Hishôjutsu ("Flight Art")

13 Points/22 Points

Primary Skills: Acrobatics, Freefall, Jumping, Karate.

Secondary Skills: Shortsword (for Boomstick), Judo, Vacc Suit.

Optional Skills: Short Staff, Performance, Brawling.

Maneuvers: Drop Kick, Feint [2], Hit Location (Sword or Karate), Jump Kick, Kicking [2].

Cinematic Skills: Blind Fighting, Flying Leap, Light Walk, Power Blow, Push.

Cinematic Maneuvers: Acrobatic Kick, Flying Jump Kick, Roll with Blow, Springing Attack.

Special: Practitioners of this style suffer no DX penalty on Free Fall and combat skills while wearing a spacesuit. This is worth 2 points, calculated into the cost of the style. They may also base their Feint maneuver on their Acrobatics skill, if it is higher than their Karate skill.

Note: It is highly recommended to allow Hishôjutsu practitioners access to the styles' cinematic maneuvers, even in a realistic campaign, at least if they are fighting in free-fall or in an environment with less than 80% of their home gravity. This raises the "realistic" cost of the style to 17 points.

Common Advantages: Combat Reflexes, Increased G-Tolerance, G-Experience

Useful Biomods: Jointwork, Nerve Boosting, Tenjin Biochemistry

This style was founded in the 2060s by Paul Sayama, a young master of mixed heritage (his father was German-Japanese, while his mother was of Chinese-Brazilian heritage), who practiced Shorinji Kempo, Wushu, Capoeira, and Savate. He lived on Mars since 2056 and opened his school in Port Lowell in 2063. He worked as a farhauler until 2061, which, together with the increasingly tense situation on Mars since 2058, inspired him to develop techniques to take advantage of the possibilities of a low-g environment. Hishôjutsu in action is a very spectacular style, with lots of wide-ranging jump kicks, somersaults and leaps -- but the training also includes the use of tools as improvised weapons, precise attacks on vulnerable parts of the body (or a vacc suit) and the use of the boomstick, a short rod with an explosive charge at the tip. His style became an almost immediate success, and while there are still martial artists on Earth, who like to belittle Hishôjutsu as a "circus style," today there are enough practitioners of Sayama's art from Luna to the Belt, who will gladly show them that on *their* turf Hishôjutsu reigns supreme.

Military Zero-G

19 Points

Primary Skills: Free Fall, Karate, Knife, Judo, Shortsword, Vacc Suit.

Secondary Skills: Climbing, Jumping.

Optional Skills: Garrote, Short Staff, Stealth.

Maneuvers: Arm Lock, Aggressive Parry Kick, Choke Hold, Close Combat (Knife), Disarming [2]; Head Butt, Head Lock, Knee Strike, Neck Snap, Retain Weapon (One of Pistol, Rifle, or Knife).

Cinematic Skills: None.

Cinematic Maneuvers: None.

Special: Normally, vacc suits give a -1 to all DX-based skills and DX rolls. This training includes combat-familiarization which eliminates the penalty to all combat-oriented rolls and the Free Fall skill; the cost is 2 character points.

Practitioners of this style can learn the other two Retain Weapon specialties at their discretion.

Common Advantages: G-Experience and Combat Reflexes.

Common Disadvantages: Since this style is taught to special operations troops, disadvantages common to Special

Operations troops such as Fanaticism or Sense of Duty are common. See GURPS Special Ops pg 50 for other appropriate disadvantages.

Useful Biomods: Bio-Booster, Bone Stimulation, Muscle Reinforcement, Nerve Boosting, No-Shock Glands.

Military Zero-G developed out of standard military hand- to-hand training as a pragmatic style meant as quick-and-dirty elimination techniques for use in low- or no- gravity situations. Practitioners are expected to close with and attack opponents with great aggression. The style assumes the stylist will be attacked while closing the gap -- kick-jamming techniques, arm locks, and leg grappling are taught to counter such moves. There is no body of cinematic techniques associated with this style. The entire style is centered on getting in tight with your opponent and hammering him or choking him into submission -- or death. The style includes knife, stick, and "boomstick" techniques and counters. The style above is the form used in the US Special Operations community -- variations or similar styles are used by many other military and security forces. Those units and forces without the time to dedicate to this level of training often use Freefighting instead. Some styles still teach limited "sentry removal" techniques, but these are largely legacy maneuvers in an age of high-tech surveillance.

Shan Chuan (Killer Fist Kung Fu)

23 Points/27 Points

Primary Skills: Brawling, Boxing, Karate.

Secondary Skills: Body Language, Physiology, Wrestling.

Optional Skills: Lifting, Running, Stealth.

Maneuvers: Aggressive Parry (Boxing, Brawling, or Karate), Aggressive Parrying Kick, Axe Kick, Eye Gouging [2], Ear Clap, Ground Fighting (Brawling or Karate), Head Butt, Hit Location (Brawling or Karate) [2], Hook Kick, Jab, Knee Strike, Rabbit Punch, Riposte (Karate or Boxing), Roundhouse Punch, Shin Kick, Shuto, Slip, Stamp Kick.

Cinematic Skills: Breaking Blow, Power Blow, Pressure Points, Pressure Secrets.

Cinematic Maneuvers: None.

Common Advantages: Combat Reflexes, High Pain Threshold, Toughness.

Common Disadvantages: Bloodlust, Bully.

Useful Biomods: Bio-Booster, Bone Stimulation, Cell Regeneration, Muscle Reinforcement.

It is hard to find the true roots of this style -- which includes dozens of schools today. It probably developed out of Muay Thai, Bando, some "external" Kung Fu forms, as well as some modernized Pancratium schools and simple Streetfighting techniques. The school described above was founded during the 2040s and 2050s by Dr. John Yueh, an American-Chinese physician. Shan Chuan -- sometimes called "Kill Fu" by both fans and detractors alike -- concentrates solely on the quick and dirty infliction of a maximum amount of damage to the opponent. Students even study anatomy to learn about the best ways to cripple and kill their foes. Students also show a marked preference for speed- and strength enhancing biomods.

There are also schools which concentrate on the use of body-mass and wrestling techniques (Wrestling becomes Primary, Sumo becomes an optional skill, add Choke Hold, Head Lock and Neck Snap to maneuvers, and add Piledriver and Immoveable Stance to cinematic maneuvers and skills), or on devastating kicks (drop Riposte, Rabbit Punch, and Roundhouse Punch, add Kicking, Jump Kick and Sweeping Kick to maneuvers).

While most "legit" practitioners of "Kill Fu" use their skills only in meat-fighting contests, there are also those who have certain real-life applications for this style. Rumor has it that some families of the Maple Syndicate keep teams of Shan Chuan trained Spartan bioroids as enforcers and personal bodyguards . . .

Equipment

Spacer Boomstick [Shortsword or Short Staff]

Type	Malf	Amount	Reach	RoF	Shots	Wt.	Cost	LC
cr	sw	1				1.2	\$50	1

cr		thr	1			
expl.	14	4d(10)!	1	1	1	

! plus 1d concussion damage, doubled for direct contact.

This is the basic boomstick: a short rod, similar to an Escrima stick, with a small impact-detonated explosive charge at the tip. These types of boomsticks are often improvised by terrorists and beltors, who like to use some steel pipes with slightly modified (roll Armoury-3) 15mm HEAT ammo from recoilless rifles to build them.

Spacer Panzerstick [Shortsword or Short Staff]

Type	Malf	Amount	Reach	RoF	Shots	Wt.	Cost	LC
cr		sw	1			1.3	\$100	0
cr		thr	1					
expl.	ver(c)	8d(10)!!	1	1	1			

!! plus 8d concussion damage, doubled for direct contact.

These are professionally made boomsticks, of a type used by -- among others -- the Foreign Legion. They can also be had (for \$140) in a Limpet version with a dial at the lower end of the stick to select detonating times (0 to 11 seconds).

Spacer Burnstick [Shortsword or Short Staff]

Type	Malf	Amount	Reach	RoF	Shots	Wt.	Cost	LC
cr		sw	1			1.1	\$50	1
cr		thr	1					
spcl.	ver(c)	spcl	1	1	1			

These nasty variant of the boomstick is useless against heavily armored opponents, but can come quite handy against unarmored foes, if you don't want to kill them outright (or fast): the heads of these sticks are filled with a dose of Nanoburn (THS p. 158) , which will affect only the person hit by the stick. The can also be had with other type of nanogas -- just change cost and LC accordingly.

Rolling Your Own: Freefighting Concepts

Many styles have been modified into a Zero-G or "Freefighting" variant. The extant term for this is "using Freefighting Concepts." A bewildering variety of styles have had such variants developed, ranging from Chin Na and Escrima to Tae Kwon Do and Wing Chun Kung Fu.

The simplest way to make a Freefighting variant is to add Vacc Suit and Free Fall to the Primary Skills of a style, increasing the cost by 2 points. However, some maneuvers may be less useful against a Vacc Suited foe or in a low- or no-gravity situation. For example, Freefighting styles can make use of grappling -- indeed, "standing" grappling techniques are excellent in Zero-G situations -- but the Ground Fighting maneuver is usually omitted. Other maneuvers that are often omitted include Cat Stance, Eye-Gouging (less useful against Vacc Suit or Goggled foes), and Face Attacks. Maneuvers such as Drop Kick and Jump Kick are sometimes added, as they are more useful in situations where the risk of a painful fall is practically eliminated.

Other New Styles

"Sifu Bruce Lee once said ' . . . unless a human being has three arms and four legs, there can be no different form of fighting. Basically, we have only two hands and two feet.' In the 22nd century, I'm a afraid this is something a fighter can no longer safely assume."

--anonymous JKD instructor.

As Bantu Boxing and Shan Chuan demonstrate, the 21st century is also rife with "new" styles -- often deliberate syncretions of multiple older styles. Styles that take advantage of new biomods, unique abilities of bioroids and bio- or even cybershells may have developed. In addition, after a century many styles developed only recently in the 20th century may have developed in new and surprising ways in the 21st century. For example, instructors staying true to Bruce Lee's concept of Jeet Kune Do will likely have turned it into a very different style to accommodate biomods and variable gravity.

Rules

Shuto (Lower Arms)

Designed for spacers who have replaced their legs with additional arms, this maneuver is identical to the Shuto maneuver (see MA54) however it is executed with the lower arms. Shuto (lower arms) has an additional -1 to Parry (total -3); however Parrying Kicks are executed normally against them (no penalty). This maneuver is distinct from the Shuto maneuver and must be learned separately from it. Very few styles use this maneuver, and finding an instructor can be very difficult. On the bright side, spotting which instructors will not know the maneuver can be rather easy.

Retreating in 3-D

Retreats can be executed in three dimensions in micro- or zero-gravity environments. This means a combatant can retreat "up" or "down" as well as back or the side. This technique is a basic part of Free Fall training. The defender must still move away from the attacker, but can move "up" or "down" a hex as well as moving back -- thus bringing the number of potential retreat hexes from 3 to 9. There is no roll required, but this cannot be attempted with a default Free Fall. All normal limitations on Retreating apply. This can be combined with Acrobatic Dodge (p. B108).

'Tis But A Scratch!

More Non-Generic Damage Rules For GURPS

by Stephen Dedman

There are many ways of knowing whether you're in a movie or the real world. Can you open every door instantly with a credit card? Do all cars explode if they're shot or roll over? Are all Asians trained in martial arts? And the real give-away -- does everyone who survives a fight emerge unbruised and unblemished, with their hair perfectly in place and only a few strategically placed rips in their clothing?

If you're a fan of the cinematic style of roleplaying, a la *Charlie's Angels* movies, the Roger Moore James Bond films, and the rules on p. B183, then you probably don't want the complication of more realistic wounding rules. Indeed, the Flesh Wounds rule is designed to get around this (at least for PCs), and especially if used in combination with the generic damage in the Basic Combat system (pp. B95-101), means that which does not kill you, doesn't really matter very much at all. If this is your preferred option, go straight to Part 2 of this article.

If, however, you'd like to make combat in your *GURPS* games a little more realistic, keep reading.

Idea #1: Unlucky Breaks -- An Optional System For Non-Generic Damage

These rules are designed to be used in conjunction with the effects of crippling injuries in the advanced combat system (p. B127) and the detailed hit location rules from *GURPS* (p. CI52). They make combat more damaging without being more lethal, and may make characters hesitate before starting a fight, leading to more opportunities for negotiation and roleplaying. They may also slow down campaigns by requiring more healing time between adventures, enabling PCs to spend more time "hitting the books" and spending character points on learning new skills or improving the old ones (Bruce Lee did much of the research for Jeet Kune Do while crippled in a hospital bed).

Merciful GMs may also decide to use these optional rules as an alternative to killing PCs outright -- ruling that a head wound has caused epilepsy or temporary amnesia, or lung damage from mustard gas has left a PC Very Unfit rather than Very Dead.

In this system, most hit locations can suffer Crippling Injuries if damage exceeds a particular level -- usually equal to HT after multipliers (p. CII53). Recovery from these Crippling Injuries uses the rules on p. B129.

Hit Location Crippling Injury

<i>Brain</i>	"Crippled" by taking damage equal to more than HT after multipliers. Possible lasting or permanent effects include Amnesia (p. CI86), Epilepsy (p. B28), Flashbacks (p. CI90), Migraine (p. CI82), No Depth Perception (p. CI82), or reduced IQ.
<i>Face</i>	A face that takes damage equal to more than ½ of HT (ignore multipliers) will be bruised or scarred, which will reduce Appearance to Unattractive until the injury heals. Multiple wounds may reduce Appearance further.
<i>Nose</i>	A nose that takes damage equal to more than ½ of HT after multipliers may be bruised or broken, which will reduce Appearance to Unattractive until the injury heals. Other possible lasting or permanent effects include No Sense Smell/Taste (p.29) or Unfit (p. CI85, must breathe through mouth).
<i>Jaw</i>	"Crippled" (broken or dislocated) by taking damage equal to more than ½ of HT after multipliers. Possible lasting or permanent effects include Mute (p. B29) or a speech defect equivalent to Stuttering (p. B29).
<i>Neck</i>	As if the risk of a crushed throat or instant decapitation wasn't enough, a

blow to the neck that does damage equal to more than HT after multipliers may also cause lasting or permanent crippling effects -- Disturbing Voice (p. CI81), Mute (p. B29), or Quadriplegic (p. CI83).

Torso Attacks to the front of the torso may break ribs or damage internal organs; attacks to the back (or blow-through damage) can do the same, and can also result in damage to the spine. Any blow that does damage equal to more than HT may cause any of the possible lasting or permanent effects: Bad Back (p. CI80), Delicate Metabolism (-20 point level, p. CI81) Lamé (Paraplegic) (p. B29), Unfit or Very Unfit (from a punctured lung or similar injury; p. CI85), or reduced HT.

Vital Organs Like torso but more so, thanks to multipliers.

Groin "Crippled" by taking damage equal to more than ½ of HT after multipliers (rupturing, amputation, or just extreme sensitivity that makes any contact too painful to contemplate). Possible lasting or permanent effects are Eunuch (p. B28, human males only) or Sterile (p. CI84).

Example of combat: Kim Yip is walking home from a party when Rex, a slammer (p. UTT91) addict, runs past her and grabs her bag -- which contains her keychain, cell phone, and pepper gas as well as her credcard. She chases the addict to the pedestrian bridge, where he turns around draws a small balisong knife. She's unarmed and unarmored, apart from her light leather jacket and hard boots, but she was in a bad mood already, and she has a green belt in jujutsu (Judo-13, Karate-13), the High Pain Threshold advantage, and the Overconfidence disadvantage. Rex's dose of slammer has given him the High Pain Threshold and Combat Reflexes advantages and Bloodlust disadvantage; he also has the Bad Temper and Bully disadvantages whether he's drugged or not.

Kim aims a kick at Rex's groin, but this is only a feint; her real target is his knee. She does 4 points of damage -- not enough to cripple his leg (his HT is 10), but enough to anger him. He slashes at her face, but she parries the blow and grabs his wrist in an arm lock. She attempts a Disarming maneuver, but fails, and Rex head-butts her in the nose -- an all-out attack doing +2 damage for a total of 6 points. Kim's HT is 11, so this is HT/2; though she makes the HT rolls to avoid knockout and becoming stunned (thanks to the +5 bonus from her High Pain Threshold), her nose begins to swell. Enraged, she twists his knife arm, doing 6 points of damage and crippling it. Rex drops the knife, but Slammer has reduced his IQ to 7, so he's not smart enough to quit. He delivers a roundhouse punch, assisted with brass knuckles, for a total 7 points of damage to Kim's jaw -- enough to cripple it. Kim makes her HT roll not to fall unconscious, then uses judo to throw him -- over the edge of the bridge.

Rex falls 5 yards, landing on his head (see p. B131) and taking 9 points of damage. Subtracting DR of 2 for his skull and 1 for his cloth cap, then multiplying $\times 4$, that's 24 points to the brain. He's automatically knocked out, makes his HT and survives, but suffers a crippling injury -- a fractured skull and brain damage. Fortunately for him, Kim calls for an ambulance once she's retrieved her cell phone.

Each has to make two rolls on HT, using the rules on p. B129 -- Kim for her nose and her jaw, Rex for his arm and his head. Kim makes her first roll, so her nose is only temporarily injured (the swelling will go down when she recovers the 12 hit points she's lost), but the second roll is a 14, so the injury to her jaw is lasting -- it's broken, and won't heal for 1d-3 months. Rex makes his first roll, so his arm is only temporarily crippled, but his second is a 16, so he's taken permanent injury to the brain. Rather than reduce his IQ still further, the GM decides the lesions give him the Epilepsy disadvantage.

Idea #2: Brawling and Blowthrough -- An Optional Rule for Less Lethal Combat

The following rule is suggested as an option to the unrealistic "Stun Point" rules (pp. CII151-152) for cinematic play, with the added advantage that it requires no extra bookkeeping. Assume that all crushing damage in excess of the victim's total DR and hit points is turned into knockback damage *unless* the victim (or the body part hit) is somehow prevented from being knocked in that direction; never hit a head that doesn't have freedom of movement! As with Stun

Damage, the GM can set the rate at which damage points are converted into knockback -- 1 yard for every 8 points, 4, 2, or even 1, depending how exaggerated you want the combat to be. This is particularly suitable for four-color Supers campaigns, but it also suits bar brawls in cinematic Old West, Cliffhangers, or Martial Arts games. Whether this rule also applies to bullet damage is up to the GM.

Combat example: Mount Fuji (ST 188) punches a tough yakuza kickboxer (HT 12, DR 1), doing 42 points of damage. The GM rules that rather than Fuji's fist going right through the kickboxer's torso, the extra 29 points of damage should be converted to knockback at 1 yard for 4 points. The thug goes flying across the street, taking 1d-2 falling damage.

Fuji then deals with the kickboxer's annoying twin by crushing his foot with a stamp kick. The foot doesn't have freedom of movement, so it takes full damage - but after taking 4 points (HT/3), all excess damage goes through to the concrete floor. If Fuji had done the same thing to the thug's head, he would have crushed his skull.

Idea #3: Healing and Surgery -- More Optional Rules

Unlike the rules for First Aid and Physician skills, the rules for Surgery skill on p. B56 are not expanded upon in other chapters. First Aid is useful immediately after for preventing bleeding or for minor wounds. Physician skill is needed for treating disease, poison, and for any hit point damage that couldn't be fixed by the initial First Aid (or by Healing spells or ultra-tech drugs, depending on the campaign). In many *GURPS* campaigns, however, Surgery is treated more as a Professional Skill than something likely to benefit a party after combat.

A possible use of Surgery is to reduce the recovery time for crippling injuries: pinning broken bones, wiring jaws, using cosmetic surgery to hide scars, etc. On a successful Surgery roll, a surgeon can reduce the number of months that a lasting crippling injury takes to heal, dividing it by the number by which he made the roll. GMs may rule that the minimum period of healing remains one month, though (optionally) a critical success may reduce a lasting injury to a temporary one.

Surgery may even reduce a permanent crippling injury to a lasting one -- though this depends on the injury and the TL of available medicine. For example, a surgeon with late TL7+ skills and equipment may be able to use microsurgery to re-attach a severed hand or foot, but unable to repair a damaged spine that has caused quadriplegia. A surgeon from an earlier TL will, at best, be able to preserve enough of the limb to attach a prosthetic; a surgeon at late TL8+ may opt for replacing the entire body, putting the brain into a clone or cyborg. In cases where a "miracle cure" is required and a limb or other body part has not actually been lost, only a critical success will reduce a permanent injury to a lasting one -- but repeated attempts at corrective surgery (though possibly expensive and not without hazard; see below) may be made until a successful treatment is found.

A critical failure on Surgery for a lasting injury should lengthen recovery time; reverse the process above. For a permanent crippling injury, a critical failure on Surgery at TL5 and below may prove fatal, by leading to gangrene or other infection, or releasing marrow or bone chips into the bloodstream. At TL6+, the worst possible result should be that the body part requires amputation and replacement: only if the surgeon also has a critical failure on Physician is the patient in danger of dying.

Idea #4: The High Cost of Living

The economic impact of lasting injuries will vary enormously from game world to game world (or even from country to country, as it does today) and individual to individual. The typical costs for medical care at TL8+ listed in *GURPS Space* (p. S88) show how quickly an injury or illness could bankrupt a character with no medical insurance, and that doesn't factor in lost income for characters unable to work (particularly the self-employed).

GMs who want to use this to cripple a PC financially as well as physically may be able to do so; bad debts can be a useful tool for persuading PCs to go on insanely dangerous but potentially profitable quests. GMs who don't wish to add insolvency to injury (or do the necessary bookkeeping) can find several ways to pay off all or most of the cost of hospitalization, healing spells, bionics, etc.

In TL7+ campaigns, hospital insurance will be available in many societies (see *GURPS IOU* and *GURPS Autoduel*), and may be considered a part of normal living expenses (though not necessarily for the self-employed). Some countries will even provide hospital care free or at a token cost, particularly to victims of crime.

A PC with the Patron advantage is likely to have all medical expenses and lost income covered by the Patron, particularly if the injuries were suffered while the PC was on Duty. This is also likely to be true of anyone with the Clerical Investment, Legal Enforcement Powers, or Military Rank advantages.

Heroes without any of these advantages may be able to rely on charities, particularly if they are devout followers of the appropriate religion, or have a good reputation.

In certain circumstances, PCs may be able to recoup their medical expenses by suing the people who injured them, or by selling their story to the media. This may even prove extremely profitable, enabling them to leave the hospital wealthy as well as healthy, and ready to be injured all over again.

How do Experts get Experience?

by Brian Rogers

The *d20 System*, as applied to most dungeon-crawling fantasy games, lacks a mechanic for non-adventuring advancement. Yes, there are wonderful charts for populating urban centers with NPCs, but no guidance on how those people trained or how they might improve. Non-adventuring and NPC improvement can be an issue, so we need an easy mechanic for finding NPC experience. After all, it's clear that the local cobbler doesn't kill a few goblins to improve his shoemaking skills!

Here's an option: Performing NPC class activities well enough for seasonal economic survival is a CR 1 award. Seasonal success is a Difficulty Class 16 check vs. the most appropriate skill (usually Craft or Profession). It brings experience points and sufficient funds to make a living with profit enough for some discretionary spending and savings. Failure means no experience and no funds, wiping out any savings and diminishing the standard of living. Failures that don't follow successful seasons mean debts and a serious loss of social status, as befits the campaign world.

How NPCs approach these seasonal checks determines how rapidly they advance.

Most NPCs work in small *Groups*. We'll assume a group of four is standard, scaling it to the average adventuring party. This is a small family farm, a master and apprentices, the sheriff and his deputies or the local lord and his retinue. These groups pool their skills, using the Cooperation rules to boost their chances of making the seasonal check. For 1st-level characters, this raises a single NPC's +4 bonus to +8 (with a +4 themselves, on average only two of the three cooperating characters succeed on the test). With attribute bonuses or skill synergies an average group has a +10 modifier. This gives them a 75% chance of success per season. Pooling their efforts cuts into individual experience awards but greatly reduces their risks.

Some NPCs prefer to work alone, taking greater risk for potentially greater benefit. GMs can assume that *Loners* have at least a +1 attribute bonus for their chosen skill, giving a 1st level character a +5 skill, or a 50% chance of seasonal success. Such characters will advance more rapidly, but will likely spend their lives in and out of debt.

We also need to factor in how the NPC approaches risks. The average NPC is *Cautious*, and never tackles challenges more difficult than those required for survival and modest comfort. Such people always take the standard CR 1 seasonal test, seeing their success chance improve as they slowly gain levels. *Cautious* NPCs max out at 9th level, as per the *DMG's* suggestion that CR1 challenges are no longer worthwhile risks past 8th level. Of course, given the rate at which a *Cautious* NPC gains experience, this will only be an issue for *very* long lived races.

Some NPCs are more *Ambitious* in their risk-taking. Engaging in more challenging activities (high court politics, commissions from six-fingered men, etc.) increases both the CR and difficulty: each +1 difficulty equals +1 CR. This increase balances out skill improvements, so the *Ambitious* NPC will always have the same risk he had at 1st level. Undertaking such risks naturally leads to greater rewards: *Ambitious* NPCs gain levels faster and receive rewards greater than survival and modest savings. Of course, failing at these levels has greater risks as well: an aristocrat's CR 1 seasonal failure means disfavor at court or new debts and promises. A CR 6 failure leads to exile to a distant, uncomfortable post, if not prison or death!

This gives us four types of NPCs: *Cautious Groups* who make up the majority of the population, *Cautious Loners* with their periods of feast or famine but greater life experience, *Ambitious Groups* who become dominant forces in their area if their luck holds out, and *Ambitious Loners* who are the best in their fields and are very nearly adventurers in their solitary pursuit of challenge and perfection. This chart provides the years required to reach a particular level, as well as Human age at that point. (Humans become Venerable at age 70, and have a maximum age of 110.)

Years

<i>Cautious</i>	<i>Cautious</i>	<i>Ambitious</i>	<i>Ambitious</i>
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Level	Group	Human	Loner	Human	Group	Human	Loner	Human
1	0.0	16	0.0	16	0.0	16	0.0	16
2	4.4	20.4	1.7	17.7	4.4	20.4	1.7	17.7
3	16.9	32.9	6.2	22.2	11.1	27.1	4.2	20.2
4	40.5	56.5	14.5	30.5	20.0	36.0	7.5	23.5
5	77.5	93.5	27.4	43.4	31.1	47.1	11.7	27.7
6	130.1	*	45.2	61.2	44.4	60.4	16.7	32.7
7	200.1	*	68.6	84.6	60.0	76.0	22.5	38.5
8	306.6	*	101.8	*	77.8	93.8	29.2	45.2
9	486.6	*	154.8	*	97.8	*	36.7	52.7
10	*	*	*	*	120.0	*	45.0	61.0
11	*	*	*	*	144.4	*	54.2	70.2
12	*	*	*	*	171.1	*	64.2	80.2
13	*	*	*	*	200.0	*	75.0	91.0
14	*	*	*	*	231.1	*	86.7	102.7
15	*	*	*	*	264.4	*	99.2	*
16	*	*	*	*	300.0	*	112.5	*
17	*	*	*	*	337.8	*	126.7	*
18	*	*	*	*	377.8	*	141.7	*
19	*	*	*	*	420.0	*	157.5	*
20	*	*	*	*	464.4	*	174.2	*

As the chart shows, Humans working in *Cautious Groups* reach Venerable while at 4th level (higher than the *DMG's* estimate of Commoners only reaching 2nd-3rd level, but not by much). Capping *Cautious* at 9th means longer lived races have higher level NPCs, but not lots of 20th level NPCs. This makes sense; a *Cautious Group* of middle aged elves will be 4-7th level, making them skilled compared to their 3rd level human counterparts, but facing stagnation without greater challenges.

This system abstracts monetary rewards, as it is unlikely you'll track the funds of every NPC on a seasonal basis. The permutations for number of people involved, division of shares (a farm commune might divide equally, while a master would keep the profit while his apprentices get room and board) and recent failures make such a system very difficult. The Profession skill states weekly incomes of ½ the skill check in GP, which makes a good baseline for liquid assets. Assuming this is a CR1 test, multiply the amount earned by the NPCs level for Ambitious types. In either case, skill checks of less than 10 indicate a recent bad patch with the gold being replaced by copper. Unskilled laborers and apprentices likewise carry copper.

Linking level to age and risk-taking is logical; 30-year-old NPCs should command respect from 17 year old freshly-minted PCs . . . at least until young heroes have a few levels under their belts. These rules also provide a benchmark for PCs gaining levels during extended down time. A Fighter made a knight and local lord advances differently depending on whether he has a reliable advisors (*Group* or *Loner*) and whether he oversees a peaceful setting or a violent political border (*Cautious* or *Ambitious*). A few seasons of failed rolls might send your Rogue-turned-bartender back out into the field, or indicate to the order that perhaps the young Cleric's calling really is in defending, rather than promoting, the faith. What better excuses to join their Fighter comrade on the border for a new round of adventure?

Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Pyramid Review

Angel Roleplaying Game: Corebook

Published by [Eden Studios, Inc.](#)

Written by C. J. Carella with Tommy Brownell, Jeremy Hunt, Robert Jonsson, Jack Kessler, Jarrod Moschner, Andy Peregrine, Barbara Pollack and Robert "Hendersonman" Wood

Illustrated by C. Brent Ferguson and John Hodgson

258-page color hardcover; \$40.00

In December 2003, Eden Studios brought another good year to an end with the release of the *Angel Roleplaying Game: Corebook*. This, in its own way is a spin-off to roleplaying's best-licensed RPG of 2002, [Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game](#), just as the *Angel* television series is a spin-off to the highly popular *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* series. Where the latter has already come to an end after seven seasons, *Angel* is still on (for now) with four seasons already under its belt. Again designed by Eden stalwart, C. J. Carella, who also created the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game*, this RPG treatment covers the first three seasons only. In that time, *Angel* has grown away from its roots and shown itself to be a very different animal in comparison with *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. It is much darker in tone and feel, with less of an emphasis upon growing up and female empowerment, and more about an adult world in which the protagonists must deal with demons within and without. Unlike *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, vampires play a lesser role in *Angel*, with the cast interacting with, and often fighting the demon population that lives just outside of the bright lights of Los Angeles. Nor is there a "Big Bad" to face and combat each season, but rather a number of no less dangerous threats and adversaries over the course of said season. Yet prevalent throughout the series to date has been an organization that happily facilitates the existence of evil both in L.A. and literally throughout worlds beyond, Wolfram & Hart. Unfortunately they have the power, the contacts, and the knowledge to get away with this, and were it not for the fact that Angel Investigations is prepared to fight the good fight, they certainly would and still look like a highly successful corporate law firm into the bargain.

Given the differences between the two series, it is no surprise that the *Angel Roleplaying Game* is very different in comparison with the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game*. At the same time, there are a number of similarities, not least in appearance and mechanics. The look of both books is similar, but the *Angel Roleplaying Game: Corebook* uses more sombre shades as opposed to the perkier, more intense color scheme of the *Buffy* line. The book makes excellent use of photography throughout this book and what little original artwork there is, even though it does not match the quality of the *Buffy* line, is decent enough. Naturally, the text is strewn with extensive and appropriately used quotes from the series, (including a personal favorite -- Spike's narration on Angel's action at the beginning of the episode, "1.3 In the Dark").

There is no change in the mechanics powering the two games; still an ultra-streamlined version of Eden's house rules, the Unisystem, other versions of which underlie every one of the publisher's other games except for *Conspiracy X*. What this means is that both the *Buffy* and *Angel* RPGs, along with their supplements, are inherently compatible, and with a little effort upon the part of the Director (as the referee is termed), can also work with, or draw upon, Eden's other RPGs.

The first major difference comes in the types of characters available to play. First, of course, players can be the employees of Angel Investigations and their associates, and full character sheets are given for each, along with their

statistical adjustments from one season to the next. This includes the obvious characters such as Angel himself, Cordelia, Wesley, and Gunn, as well as Fred, Lorne the insightful bar host; the half-demon Doyle; ex-police detective Kate Lockley; Angel's son, Connor; and The Groosalugg, the warrior champion from the dimension of Pylea, where Cordelia was also briefly a princess. Playing the cast is the easiest method of getting started, but alternatively, players can select from one of the archetypes that model various aspects of the series.

A few of the 12 echo particular characters, like the Barbarian Queen, a leader from Pylea trying to find her way in this dimension and reminiscent of the Groosalugg; the Psychic Supermodel who is similar to Cordelia; and the Barrio Defender, who is much like Charles Gunn. Others are all new, and include the Apt Pupil, trained as a magical enforcer by an evil teacher, but now freelancing for the good guys; the Crusading Biker, repentant and on a holy mission; the half-demon Demonic Investigator with a fascination for the occult; the Demon Gangsta with violent tendencies; the Former Cultist blessed with telepathy; the Pyro Girl; the Reformed Assassin; the Rogue Demon Hunter; and the Undead Champion. This last not a zombie, but a spirit able to switch from one body to the next in service to "The Powers That Be," and in game terms, possesses the Revenant Quality. The Rogue Demon Hunter is a nice play upon the first appearance of Wesley Wyndham-Pryce in the first season, being not a hunter of rogue demons (to quote Cordelia, "What's a Rogue Demon?"), but a rogue demon that hunts others of its kind.

The other option is to have players create cast members of their own design. This is a simple process: Determine the character type, and then spend a set amount of points on Attributes, another set on Qualities and Skills, with more points available if the player chooses to take one or more Drawbacks. Each character type determines the points to be spent on the various character elements, but where *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game* has its White Hats, Heroes, and Experienced Heroes, the *Angel Roleplaying Game* has its Investigators, Champions, and Veterans. Of the television cast, Angel is a Veteran character type, Charles Gunn a Champion character type, and Cordelia Chase an Investigator type. In the course of the three seasons so far, many of the cast have progressed from this to be experienced or very experienced characters of their type. The difference between the two series types is that characters in the *Angel Roleplaying Game* have more points to spend on Attributes, Qualities, and Skills as well as having more Drama Points to play with throughout the game.

Both games use the same skill set, and a fair number of the same Qualities and Drawbacks, but unsurprisingly, the *Angel Roleplaying Game* adds a lot more of its own. These reflect the series' more adult nature and setting. They include Cop/Detective, Criminal/Wise Guy, Demon Hunter, Ex-Watcher, Occult Investigator, Rank, Screwed-Up Adolescent, and so on. There is not anything akin to the Sorcery Quality of the *Buffy RPG* as this game is more about the supernatural than it is about magic, and with a modicum of time, research, and effort, anyone can cast a spell. Only a few spells are given, along with a note of the episodes they appeared in, but there is nothing to stop a Director referring to the *Buffy RPG* supplement [The Magic Box](#) for more.

Since demons play such an important role in the show, it is no surprise that the *Angel Roleplaying Game* devotes space to those shown on the show and to both players and Directors creating their own. By selecting the Demon/Half-Demon Quality a player can take a demon that fights for the forces of good, choosing from a species already given, such as the half-Brachen Doyle or Lorne, who has turned his back on his Deathwok origins. Alternatively, they can create an entirely new species, building a package from the many supernatural abilities listed, which is then purchased as a Quality.

Beyond the many, many singular adversaries described in the game, the *Angel Roleplaying Game* provides rules for creating all manner of organizations. These start out with asking the why, when, and what -- goals, history, and current status of such an agency, before assigning a total point value to spent on its various ratings. These include an agency's size, clout (criminal, financial, governmental, and supernatural), and the size of its quarters, security (physical and supernatural), facilities, and weapons. The *Angel Roleplaying Game* gives four examples, beginning with Angel Investigations and Gunn's Gang, and then going to bigger fish such as Wolfram & Hart, and also a medium-sized, non-canon group, The Morningstar Foundation (outwardly a philanthropic and scholarly organization, it helps humanity not just through its charitable work, but also through its paranormal research and monster hunting with the goal of helping "humanity realize its potential free from fear, ignorance, and tyranny"). In the main, these rules are for use by the Director, but in some instances, the players could also participate in the creation process, for example by forming a detective agency similar to that of Angel Investigations.

For the Director the advice given focuses upon the creation of their own series and how to support it with the construction of seasons and episodes. This starts out right at the beginning of the book, with an analysis of the *Angel* series season by season, both from a roleplaying and a Director's standpoint. There is also a discussion on putting together a cast of characters, including the suggestion of having the players take the roles of young lawyers at Wolfram & Hart. The advice addresses a problem inherent to the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game*, that of having a cast consisting of one powerful character and several weaker sidekicks -- in other words, of a Slayer and the various members of the Scooby gang. This is partly handled through the Drama Point system in that game, but in the *Angel Roleplaying Game*, there is room for characters of equal ability to be in the same cast. This is in addition to the fact that the characters are more capable anyway.

Also included is a short guide to the notable occult locations and inhabitants of Los Angeles, from the East Hills Teen Shelter and David Nabbit, financial wizkid and potential patron, to Jenoff's Demon Casino and Captain Daniel Holtz, time-traveling vampire hunter. This along with "A Guide to Angelspeak," and the rest of the Director's support, is finally put into practice with a ready-to-play episode, "Blood Brothers, Part One." As the title suggests, this is the first part of a scenario, one that will be completed with the release of the *Angel RPG Director's Screen*. Although there are notes on how to complete the episode without purchasing this first supplement, the fact that they will need to do so in order to get the most out of "Blood Brothers" will be a detraction for many. The adventure has the cast dealing with a botched summoning ritual that they themselves interrupted, and the ensuing consequences. It nicely feels like an episode from the series and calls upon one or two of the cast members to flex their roleplaying skills.

Fans of the *Angel* television series will find much to enjoy in the *Angel Roleplaying Game*, though doubtless they will find it lacking the depth they might find in more dedicated guides. Of course it is written as a game, but not one designed with the neophyte roleplayer in mind. They would be better off starting with the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game*, and then coming to the *Angel Roleplaying Game* as a spin-off. The point is that although they use the same light mechanics, the *Angel Roleplaying Game* is a very different beast. It is darker in tone, examines more adult themes and calls, for its characters to take a moment or two for personal reflection. Indeed these factors combined with its default set-up make the *Angel Roleplaying Game* more of a traditional horror RPG, while its cinematic playing style sets it apart.

In making a final comparison between the *Angel Roleplaying Game* and its antecedent, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game*, the more traditional feel of this new game and its darker feel, means that it does lack the "wow" factor of its sister -- both in its arrival and the anticipation leading up to that. But this does not mean that it is a poor game, or one that will not be appreciated by the fans of both series. After all, coming from the pen of C. J. Carella, it is no surprise that the *Angel Roleplaying Game* is nothing less than a solid adaptation of its source material.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Loco!

Published by [Fantasy Flight Publishing, Inc.](#)

Game design by Reiner Knizia

Graphic design by Brian Schomburg

Edited by Christian T. Petersen & Darrell Hardy

Full-color boxed game with 30 cards, 25 tokens in five colors, & rules sheet; \$6.95

While board games in the current market get bigger and come with heftier, more involved components, card games seem to be getting smaller, faster, and easier, and none of them seem to suffer a loss in playability from the miniaturization process. *Loco!*, a new card game from the combined efforts of Reiner Knizia, Fantasy Flight Games, and Esdevium Games, keeps the ball rolling.

The object of the game is to collect the most points by taking the most valuable tokens by the end of the game.

Loco! utilizes five colors, matched to both the playing cards and the accompanying chips. These 25 tokens are separated by color before the game begins and placed in the center of the table in five little color-coded piles. The cards are dealt out to the players, and play goes clockwise.

The deck contains a full suit of six cards in each color; these are numbered one to five, plus a Loco!/zero-value card. On a player's turn, he plays a card from his hand to the table, and places it next to the chip pile of the same color (red cards beside red tokens, etc.). He then takes a token of any color from one of the piles (not necessarily the same color as the card he played). If you play the Loco! card, you must say "Loco!" or you lose your token draw.

When, in a later turn, a player plays a card of the same color (he plays a blue card and someone has already laid a blue one down), he partially overlaps the first card with his new card. Players continue to stagger cards in this fashion until someone has played the sixth card of any one color. The sixth card ends the game, and points are tallied.

The most recent card played on a token stack determines how many points a chip of that color is worth; for example, if a red four is the last red card in line, every red chip is worth four. Since Loco! cards are worth zero, playing them last renders the tokens in that stack worthless. The game therefore requires you to step lightly, giving weight to your investment in a stack while trying to reduce the value of your opponents' chips. The highest point total wins. The rules also suggest playing a round for every player present and using the overall total for scoring.

The game is for two to four players, but it works better with more. It may be unlikely one player will receive all six cards of a color in a single deal, but it does happen, and the odds increase with only two participants. A whole suit doesn't guarantee a win, but even then cards are randomly removed from the deck before the deal so there's always an element of uncertainty about whether your opponent has the cards you want or they just aren't in the game.

There isn't much to be said about the game's graphic presentation. The tokens are solid plastic, the rule booklet is small but concise, and the cards are colorful and bright with big, solid numerals. They come in a little box that's conveniently pocket-sized (well, breast or coat pocket, anyway), so you can take it on the road. On the other hand, there's just enough material that it's awkward to repackage when play is over. Having that 25th token makes it one

token too big for the components to be squared off neatly, so the last token gets layered atop the card deck. A ziplock sandwich baggie won't be as pretty, but it may do the job if the owner tires of sliding the pieces in and out of the box.

Learning the rules is lickety-split, and a game -- even a round of games -- takes mere minutes. It's involved enough that parents will find it a worthy pastime, but simple enough that they can play it with their kids. It's a good exercise for teaching math and getting the young 'uns thinking. Reading the rules gives you an idea how much there is to consider in play, but until you're in the game it won't fully hit home how challenging all those make-or-break decisions can be.

The game only has one real failing: That's all there is. It isn't that it has low replay value, but even with the clever strategies it may grow tiresome before too long. More importantly, it's really little more than some playing cards and poker chips. Save for the fifth color, you might already have the components on hand. It seems petty to complain about paying "all that money" when *Loco!*'s price tag doesn't break double-digit dollars, but this is the sort of thing that might work better as a free giveaway to entice people to the Fantasy Flight website.

Still, if you want someone else to do all the heavy lifting for you, *Loco!* is a quick and thoughtful front-lobe workout that comes in at a nice price.

--Andy Vetromile

Our Lady of Bisociation: The Snake Goddess of Boston

"No one knows -- that is, those who must know do not say -- just when or where this figure was found or how it escaped from under the watchful eyes of the Cretan authorities."

-- Mariana Griswold van Rensselaer, "A Cretan Snake Goddess" (1916)

Epimenides the Cretan famously said, "All Cretans are liars," connecting Crete and paradox forever. But was he merely paying homage to the Great Goddess of Minoan Crete, who in her bisociative way, may not have been a Great Goddess, or even a Goddess -- or even of Minoan Crete? One of the most famous depictions of the Goddess is [this statue](#), in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. She proudly displays her breasts in Minoan fashion, and holds out the sacred snakes who serve her. A splendid piece of chryselephantine (gold-and-ivory) miniature, she has decorated catalogs and histories, informed myth and anthropology, and stands alone in the museum and as Boston's "rarest treasure." However, the Snake Goddess of Boston twists into the spotlight from some extremely murky corners indeed. Let's follow her coils, and see where in this labyrinth they lead.

"More cannot be said; but none need regret that the Knossian Goddess -- so admirably reconstituted -- should have found such a worthy resting-place and that she stands to-day as a Minoan 'Ambadress' to the New World."

-- Sir Arthur Evans, *The Palace of Minos*, vol. iii (1930)

Mrs. Henrietta Fitz, a renowned Boston collector, purchased the Snake Goddess for the Museum (for \$950) on July 28, 1914, the day that World War I broke out in Europe. The specifics of the purchase remained murky, as both American and Greek law forbade the trafficking in museum-quality artifacts. By the Museum's hundredth anniversary in 1969, however, the heat was sufficiently off that a curator could reveal a dramatic tale. An impoverished Cretan peasant, on his way to America, befriended "a Greek-speaking Boston lady" on shipboard. The mysterious woman, who apparently possessed a vast store of archaeological knowledge, recognized the shattered ivory and gold fragments the Cretan peasant showed her "in a cigarette tin" and urged him to sell them to the Museum, with which she happened to be connected. He did so, and the Museum's expert restorers pieced together the dramatically modern-looking figure of the Boston Snake Goddess to global acclaim, including the above-mentioned endorsement from the archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans, the great discoverer of Knossos.

"According to information believed to be reliable, it came from Crete, but no details as to the time, place, and circumstances of its discovery have been ascertained."

-- Lacey Caskey, curator of the Classical Department, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in the *American Journal of Archaeology* (1915)

To put it mildly, that story was a tissue of lies. In his compellingly readable *The Mystery of the Snake Goddess*, Getty curator Kenneth Lapatin spells out the real transactions involved, as uncovered in letters, journals, and ship records of the time. There was no female Boston archaeologist in Greece or Crete during 1913-1914, for example. American dilettante archaeologist Richard Seager charmed his way into Evans' company on Crete starting in 1903. Seager obtained the badly damaged Snake Goddess there from someone he identified only as "Jones" (you call this archaeology?), who wished him to sell her to an American museum. Seager transported her to New York in June of 1914, and turned her over to his friend, the respected archaeologist Bert Hodge Hill. Hill's connections with the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston ensured that its classical curator, Lacey Caskey (to whose son Hill was godfather) would buy the piece, using Mrs. Fitz as the seller of record and donor of the purchase price. Shady practice, and conspiracy to boot.

But still nobody doubted the Goddess. The statue was a masterpiece seemingly designed to Minoan specifications, as laid out in Evans' unpublished (but hardly secret) theories of Minoan religion and culture. These theories may have spread both outward and backward, to the world of fashion and into history itself. His lectures and early photographs of "reconstructed" Minoan sites inspired the Spanish designer Mariano Fortuny to create the "Knossos scarf," and the flowing lines Evans saw in Minoan frescoes showed up on the covers of *Vogue* in due course. Some observers, not least Evelyn Waugh, felt the influence went rather the other direction: that Evans was painting his own deeply felt aesthetic into the archaeological record. Evans, who had lost his mother at the age of six, invented a matriarchal

empire and dressed it in the fashions of the day. The interplay between Evans and fashion (both intellectual and couture) is unveiled in Evans' famous "malarial dream" in midsummer 1906 on the steps of the Grand Staircase at Knossos in which he saw "the Priest-King" and "the great ladies, stoled and corseted" march past him. This, suggests one unkind source, may have been inspired by a similarly ecstatic experience enjoyed by the dancer Isadora Duncan, who, while visiting Knossos "could not contain herself and threw herself into one of her impromptu dances" on the same staircase earlier that year.

"Although absolute proof for or against the authenticity of the Goddess is elusive (and probably illusive), the combined evidence of history, style, imagery, technique, and science suggests that she, like the fifteen other unprovenanced 'Minoan' statuettes presented in these pages, is a modern work."

-- Kenneth Lapatin, *Mysteries of the Snake Goddess* (2002)

So the striking affinity between the Goddess and (at the time) leading archaeological opinion becomes a sword that cuts both ways. Still less promising is the mounting evidence that Evans' own personal "restorationist," the Swiss painter and sculptor Émile Gilliéron, may have been involved in (or even masterminded) a massive artifact forgery ring on Crete described by, among others, Sir Leonard Woolley, the excavator of Ur. Gilliéron's involvement would, for example, explain how the Goddess came to so closely embody Evans' theories. And later excavations haven't backed her up where they might. For example, the carefully double-drilled eye sockets of the Goddess simply do not appear in Greek (or Minoan) artworks of known provenience before the 2nd century B.C. The gold bands on the statue are far purer than the gold in other Mycenaean and Minoan artifacts, which are debased with silver. Finally, carbon-14 tests on ivory fragments taken from the same "cigarette tin" that putatively held the Goddess give dates between 1420 and 1635 -- not modern, but not Bronze Age, either. "Jones" or Gilliéron (if they were not the same man) had easy access to older ivory in European warehouses, or might have re-used Turkish ivory from other locations in Crete. But still, the Goddess remains inviolate -- there's no definite proof that the tested fragments came from her original body, or that two sets of fragments might not have mixed together in the Goddess' serpentine path to Boston. Hence, although the weight of the evidence tends toward the forgery theory, we're still left with a mysterious woman, who may or may not be handling serpents.

"And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them."

-- Mark 16:17-18

At the same time that Sir Arthur Evans was digging up, or creating a market in -- or invoking -- the Serpent Goddess, the words of the Gospel of Mark flashed into the head of a bootlegger named George Went Hensley in Grasshopper Valley, Tennessee. In midsummer 1909, he brought a rattlesnake down from White Oak Mountain and founded the Church of God With Signs Following, a Pentecostal movement that lasts to this day. To the noise of cymbals and ecstatic prayer, snake-handling congregations take up serpents to test their sinlessness and to discover the true anointed among them. The movement has outlasted Hensley's death (from snakebite) on St. John's Day, 1955, although even at its peak it had only a few thousand devotees. Modern Snake-handling Pentecostals describe the sensation as "fading into the white," a high "ten thousand times better than" cocaine, and in an oddly Lovecraftian phrasing, "joy unspeakable." This ecstatic experience, of course, recalls the sacred madness of [Dionysos](#), who has his own serpentine qualities. Further, in his enigmatic play *The Bacchae*, Euripides describes snake-handling among the Maenads, the female followers of Dionysos: "First o'er their shoulders they let stream their hair . . . girdling [their clothing] with snakes that licked their cheeks." Alexander the Great's mother Olympias also handled serpents, according to Plutarch, and traces of snake-handling appear across the classical world in Egyptian coronation rites and the Oracle of Delphi alike.

"The figure of the Mother . . . lent itself easily to later abstractions. Themis is one of the earliest, and she attains a real personality; her sisters Eunomia and Dike are scarcely flesh and blood, they are beautiful stately shadows. The 'making of a goddess' is always a mystery, the outcome of manifold causes of which we have lost count."

-- Jane Ellen Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (1903)

And every so often, they can be traced to a goddess. Without translating Linear A, we don't know who or what the Minoans worshipped, but 300 years later they wrote in Linear B and worshiped Potaida, "the lady," eventually perhaps

masculinized as "Poseidon," god of the sea. Potaida may have been a generic title, however, and there are lots of "ladies" in Cretan myth. Later writings give only their names: Britomartis ("bright maiden"), Diktyнна ("the net-maker"), Eileithyia ("she-who-is-coming"), and interestingly Laphria ("she-who-disappeared"). One unknown goddess, the Mother of the Mountains, appears on one shattered seal in Knossos flanked by [griffins](#), in an interesting parallel to Hittite depictions of the night-goddess Shaushka, who we've already tapped as an [Amazon](#) patroness. The Amazons themselves have some odd connections with the island, from the emblems on the [Phaistos Disk](#) to the strange golden nailhead in the Snake Goddess' breast, reminiscent of the supposed Amazon custom of mammary mutilation. Diktyнна herself strongly resembles the Egyptian net-goddess [Neith](#), goddess of weaving, represented by a golden cobra and identified by the Greeks with Athene and the Phrygians with Cybele.

Our whole cast appears onstage together during the Trojan War, when Neith/Athene aided the Greeks, and Britomartis/Artemis impeded them, while Penthesilea and her Amazons fought for Troy for ten long years. No doubt the votive images of the goddesses drank deeply of blood and incense during the struggle. But after the war, something happened. Agamemnon refused to sacrifice to Athene, blaming her for extending the war; Diomedes desecrated Penthesilea's body. The Snake Goddess withdrew; Apollo took over her Oracle at Delphi, and Aesklepios mastered the [snakes](#) of dream and healing. The worship of She-Who-Disappeared disappeared even from the archaeological record. Only [Lamia](#) was left, to suckle at the breasts of her worshippers and steal their children by poison and under cover of night. In the dark of the moon, she could peek out, running with the wolves as [Berchta](#) or whispering secrets into the ears of [Shakespeare](#) and [John Webster](#). And then something happened. Perhaps the spade of Sir Arthur Evans, piercing the sacred labyrinth of Knossos on the vernal equinox, March 23, 1900, opened a crack in history. Or perhaps the earthquake during the November birth festival of Tiamat (subterranean female serpent of chaos) in 1906 acted as a minor [reality temblor](#). (Another such quake rocked the island on Hecate's May feast day in 1508, right in the middle of the Goddess' carbon-dated history.) From Knossos to Kentucky, visionary and ecstatic experience began summoning these entities (facets of a single Goddess? heads of a single Hydra?) back into the world. But unlike the invasions of Dionysos, or the breeding program with Alexander, with this iteration the Snake Goddess worked more subtly, uncoiling through images and dreams, slowly convincing her unwitting cult that she existed.

"How nice the Lady was so well received. I hope She will like her new surroundings as in my possession She was rather a worry and you never know about Goddesses, their temper is so uncertain and she might have thought fit to visit her displeasure, at being so dragged about, on my head."

-- letter of Richard Seager to Bert Hodge Hill, June 29, 1914

Evans, at any rate, remained convinced. Seager, he said, "saw the fragments" of the Goddess "together with a good deal of dust of decayed ivory . . . shortly before the Great War." That phrase, the "dust of decayed ivory" strikes me as not dissimilar in some respect to the "essential saltes" that [Lovecraft](#) (whose whereabouts during the same period are suspiciously undocumented) describes as necessary for blasphemous resurrections. And is it purely a coincidence that ivory is the "gate of lies," through which emerges false dreams? Be that as it may, a number of ivory Goddesses on the pattern of the Boston figure suddenly appeared "shortly before the Great War," turning up in collections in France, Italy, Britain, and Canada. (A German archaeologist, one Georg Karo, was offered a duplicate Goddess in autumn 1914, but temporized -- and Germany lost the War. One shudders to think of the carnage had the Goddess been on both sides, as she was at Troy.) Evans, mysteriously, received a near-duplicate ivory Goddess in the 1920s that he never published, and that did not appear among his effects -- unless it is the very effeminate "Boy-God" currently held by the Seattle Art Museum. Did Evans attempt to mask the Goddess in male robes, just as he had draped Knossos in the silken scarves of his imagination years before? Was he hiding history from the Goddess as Thetis hid Achilles from the Trojan War, in transvestitism and sexual confusion?

Seager himself seemed awfully diffident about his role in the Goddess' emergence, refusing to take even a minimal finder's fee for his role in the transaction (whatever it was) or even let the museum reimburse his train fare. Even more strikingly, he wrote an anguished letter to Evans in 1915 protesting the Goddess' hamfisted "restoration" in Boston while pleading with Evans not to "quote me too much as I don't want to get my name mixed up with Her." But he could not stay away from the court of his Dark Lady; while on a boat returning to Crete from Egypt a decade later Seager suddenly sickened and died almost the moment he came on shore, on May 12, 1925. The Goddess was apparently not sated by his death. Isadora Duncan, who had danced entranced on the Goddess' staircase, was wearing her long, trailing Knossos scarf in an open-top convertible at the moment the full moon passed its peak, on the Ides of

September (the month of Hecate), 1927. It tangled in the wheel of her car, suddenly pulled taut as the car rolled forward, and strangled the dancer in the coils of the Goddess. Which is where we came in.

Pyramid Review

The Encyclopedia Cthulhiana: A Guide to Lovecraftian Horror, Expanded and Revised Second Edition (for Call of Cthulhu)

Published by Chaosium

Written by Daniel Harms

428-page black and white paperback; \$17.95

As any fan of H.P. Lovecraft's fiction (or that of his literary heirs) knows, the so-called "Cthulhu Mythos" is a sprawling collection of loosely connected tales and references. With the proliferation of such stories, keeping track of who's who and what's what in the Mythos can be a rather cumbersome task. Enter *The Encyclopedia Cthulhiana*, a concise yet methodical summary of the creatures, things, places, and personalities found the stories of Lovecraft and his followers.

The encyclopedia begins, as any collection of Mythos material should, with a brief history of Lovecraft's creations and of the work of those who came after him. Exactly what material should be included in the Cthulhu Mythos (a term coined, as the book explains, by Lovecraft's disciple August Derleth) is a matter of great debate. Should the creatures imagined by other authors but that Lovecraft never mentioned, such as Derleth's Elder Gods, be included? What about subjects of stories which are clearly Lovecraftian in style but contain none of Lovecraft's own creations, such as Donald Wandrei's *The Web Of Easter Island*? Mr. Harms address these concerns by stating:

"For the purposes of this book, I defined 'Cthulhu Mythos' as a collection fictional monsters, books, places, people, and other elements appearing the work of Lovecraft and others. It might help to think of Mythos stories as existing in a web strung together with these terms. For instance, Lovecraft's 'The Call of Cthulhu' contains allusions to Cthulhu, the *Necronomicon*, and Professor George Gammell Angell. All stories which include the same elements connect up with 'The Call of Cthulhu,' and are thus part of the Mythos. . . . In this book, I've tried to look for the most important connecting elements and to cover them as fully as possible."

Following these introductory remarks, the main body of the text consists of 362 pages of descriptions of Mythos entities. Each element receives a concise but descriptive entry, which range in length from a single sentence in the case of Jupiter to seven pages in the case of Nyarlathotep. Each entry also includes a list of the sources from which that entry was compiled. These citations include gaming material, which is denoted with (G), and the original source, which is marked with (O). While these sources are not an exhaustive list of occurrences, they do constitute the primary and most definitive sources of information on the topic. (For those who require a more complete list of works in which these various elements occur, *A Cthulhu Mythos Bibliography And Concordance* is recommended.) This section is a 150 pages longer than in the first edition.

Each entry also provides a list of references to other entries in the book, and it here that the author's concept of a web of ideas is put to good use. For example, the entry on Irem, a lost city somewhere in the Arabian Desert, refers to an artifact known as the Silver Key, whose entry explains that it was used by Randolph Carter. From Randolph Carter's entry, paths lead to Arkham, Kadath, Leng, and a number of other destinations. Following these trails of references may be the best way to read the book, as it paints an accurate picture of how these diverse elements are related.

While the book attempts to be comprehensive in its scope, some things get more consideration than others. Unsurprisingly, more detail is given to Lovecraft's works than any other author's, and the majority of the characters from his stories have their own entries. These range from the well known, like Randolph Carter, to the obscure, such as Castro (an elderly sailor captured during a raid on a Cthulhu cult in Lovecraft's "Call of Cthulhu").

This new edition of the book also provides diagrams for a number of the various symbols, signs, and runes that occur in Mythos stories. It also explains where these representations come from. For example, the Elder Sign is never described in any of Lovecraft's stories. August Derleth created the popular star-shaped version of the symbol, unaware that Lovecraft had drawn his own version in one of his letters. The book presents both and explains their histories. In situations such as this, where real-world information is introduced, the relevant text is set off from the main body of the entry by square brackets.

The *Encyclopedia Cthulhiana's* several appendices provide information that is better presented in a longer form than the entry format allows. Included are two sections about Lovecraft's most famous creation, the *Necronomicon*. The first provides a rough timeline of the book's numerous historical appearances, while the second gives a list of locations and owners of the various copies over the years. Finally, the book includes a timeline of the Mythos universe, stretching from the arrival on Earth of the first Old Ones, 4.5 billion years ago, to the far future and the last days of Earth. Each of these appendices provides references in the same format as the main body entries. The book concludes with a select bibliography of Mythos stories and pointers to further information.

For readers of Mythos fiction, the book is a useful resource for unfamiliar or forgotten creatures, places, and things. For *Call of Cthulhu Keepers*, this book is an invaluable reference. It can be a tedious chore to keep track of (or remember) all of the entities Investigators might summon, people they might want to track down, artifacts they might find, or places they might have traveled. *The Encyclopedia Cthulhiana* is an excellent reference guide to the Mythos. It even includes statistics for itself in a *Call of Cthulhu* game. Mythos fans with seven weeks and 2d6 SAN to spare won't be disappointed.

--Paul Tevis

Random Thought Table: Looking Out For Outlooks

[Last week](#), I pointed out a problem, which I shall restate and recap now.

Let's say you wake up one day and you discover you're in a Steven Spielberg movie . . . except you don't realize you're in a Steven Spielberg movie. And so you're muddling along, as best as you can; the camera zooms in on your face as you look at things, the John Williams score twiddles somewhere between "emotionally stirring" and "obnoxiously omnipresent." And all along, you're missing two vital pieces of information: First, scientists are either quirky incompetents or jackbooted thugs. Second, never, ever trust a German.

(That is, admittedly, following the examples of *E.T.*, *Jurassic Park*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *Back to the Future*, two-thirds of the Indiana Jones series, and *Saving Private Ryan*, which taught the lesson that, if you save a German's life, he will come back and kill your friends. *Schindler's List* may or may not confirm this theory more, but it's currently sitting in my "DVDs I just bought" stack.)

Anyway, the point is, one's presentation of a game world can contain rules of behavior and morality that are neither obvious, written, nor possibly even planned.

But what can you do about it?

Well, obviously the easiest and most obvious thing to do is for the gaming group to talk about it. For example, if you are in a gaming group where the GM believes "Love will find a way," but the player would rather play an angsty "Alas! I've lost my love!" character, he may only need to tell the GM that, although his character may complain about him never being reunited with his love again, the *player* is perfectly happy in exploring that. Then there won't be the awkward moment where the GM provides what he thinks the character wants, will secretly disappointing the player.

And sometimes it's just enough to point something out to a gaming group for it to be thwarted, especially if it's subconscious. For example, the GM may be unknowingly following a "No good deed will go unpunished" philosophy not because of any desire to punish the characters, but because the PCs are generally trying to do good things based on what the GM presents, and the GM -- being stuck for other story ideas -- is using that as a springboard for other complications. Once he realizes he's doing it, he can try to get more ideas from other sources. (This is similar to the tenet I was unconsciously following in *Supers* for a while -- "Anyone innocuous but interesting the PCs encounter will return as a supervillain." As soon as the players pointed to one quirky character and mumbled -- correctly -- that "Oh, he'll be back soon. He's gonna turn into a bad guy," I realized what I was doing and took steps to shake up the formula.)

It might be possible to use other techniques, depending on the issue involved and the comfort level of the players. You might be able to restructure the principle so that everyone can be happy. For example, let's say the GM has a tenet that killing sentients is wrong. (In the interest of disclosure, this is one I tend to follow . . . which is why most standard Fantasy dungeon crawls don't have much appeal for me.) If the players *really* want to play a hack-n-slash game, it might be possible to reach a compromise. Speaking for myself, for example, I've approached this in a few different ways. First, when I'm running traditionally games with high expectations of killing, I tend to allow and encourage nonlethal combat techniques. In the Mayfair *DC Heroes* game, for example, most combat -- including gunfights -- were assumed to be nonlethal; it required a conscious decision by one side or the other to enter killing combat . . . *and* the other side could choose to remain attacking nonlethally (and get bonus character points for doing so). In this way the players have all the freedom they would have in other games, while having real incentives to behave as I would prefer.

Likewise "Fortune favors the bold" is a philosophy that's easy to codify within a game. In fact, if the GM wants to make that bias possible while removing it as a general consideration (since not all the players believe it), it should be easy to make it a toggled rule that only applies to certain players. For example, the GM might offer each player the choice of having "safe" or "daring" characters; safe ones are played straight within the game rule system (assuming a non-cinematic game) while daring ones might get a set of modifiers that cancel each other out . . . say, +3 for all

"bold" actions while receiving -3 for all "safe" actions. Theoretically the bonuses the character gets will be offset by the increased danger he places himself in. (Of course, this example *does* assume that there's no corresponding tenet for a player to chose, such as "The safe way is the right way." While it's possible the GM might offer an inverse -3/+3 bonus/penalty, it might be too much to ask him to offer a completely contradictory worldview.)

I also try to determine why a gaming group would be drawn to one behavior or another. For example, to return to our "Killing is wrong" philosophy, most gaming groups I've encountered prefer killing their adversaries not because they're playing psychopaths, but because it makes intuitive sense -- if you kill that group of goblins in the first room by the dungeon exit, you certainly don't need to worry about them attacking you again on the way out. So, if this is the case, just make it known (either in game or out of game) that heroes who incapacitate bad guys *won't* have any further problem with those creatures. And then I stick to that promise.

Alternatively, it might be possible to restructure the game so that the GM changes. For example, I've discerned that I don't like the idea of killing sentients in games because I don't subscribe to the premise that a race of intelligent beings can somehow be inherently "evil" (and thus safe to kill). But a game like *Earthdawn* has as its premise that the only things the heroes are most likely to kill are other-dimensional horrors that *are* inherently evil. This distinction is enough to "trick" my moral compass; I can run an *Earthdawn* game with the understanding that the heroes can kill the designated embodiments of evil, yet needlessly slaughtering more mundane opponents will have repercussions.

Or suppose that the GM follows "Good will triumph over evil." If the players are really interested in playing an evil-based campaign for a change of pace, the GM might be able to allow it, with the understanding with the gaming group that this will be a finite series. He may allow the PCs to accumulate power and resources by any means necessary, all the while causing trouble for the forces of good *and* other evil groups. Then, at the end of that series, the GM may put them in a position of they can get everything they want . . . if they do something *really* evil. And then, if they do, the GM can declare that series over, and have the next batch of PCs in that game world have the *first* batch of PCs as their primary adversaries (the GM having taken control of them, of course).

It's also possible to take a cue from G-rated movies and Saturday morning cartoons and simply "pan away," leaving events up to the GM's and players' imaginations. For example, the Indiana Jones series follows the philosophy that, for the most part, the PCs don't ever *know* if they've killed anyone. Bad guys get shot and fall down (and out of the action), but there's no shower of blood or gore to confirm the death. Or they fall off bridges into the river below; it's easy to envision they sink like stones to a watery grave, or they might flail and swim momentarily for a few frames before the camera pans back to the action. Regardless, the GM can be vague in describing actions he and his players disagree on, so long as each side can envision the scene has he likes.

And, finally, if no compromise or communication works, it may be necessary for certain gaming groups not to play certain games, or to even avoid playing together at all. For example, if one player feverishly believes "All good deeds will be returned seven times over" and the GM adamantly believes "No good deed will go unpunished," then there may be no real way for those two to be resolved. The player will continue doing good deeds, because that's what he's compelled to do, while the GM will continue to punish him because that's what he believes. In that case, there may be no other choice but to go separate ways.

But this is an extreme case, and can hopefully be corrected in other ways. If it's a problem for the game, ask the players for ideas . . . or ask *other* gamers or groups for ideas.

Just don't trust the Germans or scientists to hold the answers.

--Steven Marsh

Lock, Stock, and Five Smoking Hitmen

An Adventure in One-Shot for *Feng Shui*

by Michael Dewar

A dark fable of the Mafia Underworld, a tale of greed and death as hard and cold as the barrel of a .45 semiautomatic, with a liberal base in Tarantino-style action, "Lock, Stock, and Five Smoking Hitmen" details the violent exploits of a group of Chicago nicotine-addicted hitmen who risk their (relatively) stable employment for the ultimate haul: \$12,000,000 on an antique steam train running from Chicago to New York.

This isn't meant to be a happy story. This is a story about five men who kill people for a living, and the way that money splits them apart and causes them to endanger their own lives in the hope of obtaining it. If at least one hitman doesn't die in the attempt, you've missed out on half the impact of the story. This isn't *Ocean's Eleven* -- it's *Reservoir Dogs*.

The Plot

The hitmen are hired to "take care" of the former accountant of mob boss Winston "Big Win" Pestoni. However, when they run said accountant to the ground, the accountant pleads for his life, offering them \$12,000,000 in exchange. It seems Big Win has been secretly dealing with Russian gun-runners -- very against Mafia policy. The accountant found out, thus the hit.

However, the accountant also knows that money heading north to pay the Russians is leaving on a train tomorrow. The shipment is in absolute secrecy, with minimum security, since Big Win is terrified the other bosses will find out, and is trying to keep things low-key.

All the hitmen have to do is get the train, get the money, and get out. Easy.

The Five Nastiest Killers in Chicago (A.K.A the players)

Tim Price -- Professional English Hitman

"There are two ways this can go: the hard way, or the fatal way."

Type: Killer

Melodramatic Hook: Secretly wants to retire

Attributes: Bod: 6, Chi: 0, Mnd: 8, Ref: 7

Perception: 9

Skills: Deceit +2 (10)

Driving +3 (10)

Guns +10 (=15)

Gangland Politics +2 (10)

Fast-talk +4 (12)

Martial Arts +2 (8)

Schticks: Hair-trigger neck hairs: 2

Lightning Reload: 2

Carnival of Carnage: 1

Weapons: Desert Eagle .357 Magnum 11/3/10+1

2 extra clips

Sean Caspian -- Daredevil Irish Hitman

"Ah, shaddup, ya twit. What Captain Wordsmith means is: [BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!] . . . yer're dead. Right, Pricey?"

Type: Killer

Melodramatic Hook: Addicted to the adrenalin rush, secret death wish

Attributes: Bod: 7, Chi: 0, Mnd: 6, Ref: 8

Speed: 10

Skills: Deceit +2 (10)

Driving +3 (10)

Guns +10 (=15)

Gangland Politics +2 (10)

Martial Arts +4 (11)

Schticks: Both Guns Blazing: 3

Carnival of Carnage: 1

Weapons: Dual Beretta 92fs (chrome, of course) 10/2/15+1

4 extra clips

These two gentlemen are the most infamous of Chicago's gunmen. They've worked as a team for years and they're close as brothers -- and argue nearly as much.

They're total opposites in temperament and bicker constantly -- even in the middle of a firefight. Tim Price is marginally more experienced than his partner and rather more calm. He's a Londoner, born and bred, and speaks with a cockney accent. In contrast, the Irishman Sean Caspian is a wild, devil-may-care fellow, with all the stereotypical craziness that his nationality is famous for. More friendly and fun-loving than his reserved partner, he is nonetheless a brutal killer underneath the ready Irish charm.

Tim Price is lean and of average height, with short dark hair and brown eyes. He always sounds vaguely exasperated with the world in general and with Caspian in particular. Sean Caspian is of similar size and build, but his reddish-blond hair and sparkling blue eyes make him a far more striking figure than his partner. He has an easy smile and a great (if inappropriate) sense of humor. He has a blood red convertible (his pride and joy) which the partners use as transport.

Both killers dress similarly, in dark jackets and jeans with plain t-shirts. Caspian smokes Marlboro cigarettes (lighting them with a battered silver Zippo), and Price routinely bums them off him. This is a source of longstanding argument between the two.

Sanchez -- Paranoid Mexican Sharpshooter

"What if the guy has bodyguards? What if they're armed? What if they're expecting us? What if -- [BLAM!]. Oh. He didn't have bodyguards, he wasn't armed and he definitely wasn't expecting us. But he might have been, you know."

Type: Sharpshooter

Melodramatic Hook: Terrified of Carnagan

Attributes: Bod: 5, Chi: 0, Mnd: 6, Ref: 7

Skills: Deceit +2 (8)

Driving +3 (10)

Guns +10 (=16)

Gangland Politics +2 (8)

Sneak +5 (12)

Lockpick +3 (10)

Schticks: Eagle Eye: 3

Signature Weapon: 1

Fast Draw: 1

Weapons: Super Ruger Redhawk 12/3/6
12 rounds loose in pockets

Sanchez makes an unlikely assassin. He's a weedy Mexican with bad skin and greasy brown hair, and in fact looks more like a street-scum snitch than a hired killer. That's what makes him dangerous.

His twitchy eyes never miss a shot, even though his favored weapon, the Super Ruger Redhawk, is so large that it looks as if the recoil could knock him flat. Seeing such a small man with such a large gun, one might be tempted to laugh.

If one wanted a high caliber round between the eyes, that is.

Despite his unquestioned skill, Sanchez is extremely paranoid and nervy, at times seeming to literally buzz with tension. This makes him unpopular with others in his profession, since his constant whining and complaining merely add to the stress of an already stressful existence. It doesn't help that he smokes foul-smelling rolled cigarettes to calm his nerves. No one's ever asked him what he puts in the cigarettes, but the smell could kill a famine victim's appetite.

Jonathan "Carnage" Carnagan -- Psychopath with a Continent-sized Chip on his Shoulder
"This is my friend, Mr Shotgun. I don't have any other friends. Why is that, do you think?"

Type: Big Bruiser

Melodramatic Hook: Crazy as a heavily-armed fox

Attributes: Bod: 11, Chi: 0, Mnd: 5, Ref: 7
Toughness: 12

Skills: Deceit +2 (=7)

Driving +3 (10)

Guns +3 (=10)

Gangland Politics +2 (7)

Martial Arts +5 (=12)

Intimidation +6 (11)

Schticks: Inevitable Comeback: 1 (Uses toughness to replace Magic score)

Signature Weapon: 1

Weapons: Sawn-off shotgun 13/3/2

20 more shells loose in pockets

Meat cleaver +3

Dynamite (4 sticks)

Jonathan "Carnage" Carnagan is not a hitman. He lacks the restraint to be a hitman. Carnie (as he is called by people with a serious death wish) just kills people for money. And the people standing behind them. And the people in the same room. Hell, he'll just blow up the entire building for kicks.

Most major figures in the underworld treat Carnie not unlike a violent wind-up toy. Wind him up, point him in the right direction, and listen to the screaming and watch the blood spray. You may need to buy an umbrella.

Carnagan is a seven-foot monstrosity with a brutish face, long dirty hair and a Southern-accented voice that sounds like he gargles with broken glass. He wears a long brown trenchcoat (stained dark in places) and smokes thick cigars. Oh yeah, and carries a couple of sticks of dynamite in each deep coat pocket. Just in case.

"Frenzied" Freddie Ferdito -- Italian Triggerman with a Hair-Trigger Temper:

"Are you eyeballin' me? Are you eyeballin' me? [BLAM!] What do you mean, he wasn't eyeballin' me? He sure as hell was! Why are ya lookin' at me like that . . . hey, are you eyeballin' me?"

me, pal?"

Type: Maverick Gunman

Melodramatic Hook: Trying to control his hair-trigger temper

Attributes: Bod: 8, Chi: 0, Mnd: 5, Ref: 7

Skills: Driving +3 (10)

Guns +9 (=14)

Gangland Politics +5 (10)

Martial Arts +4 (=10)

Intimidation +3 (8)

Schticks: Both Guns Blazing: 1

Weapons: Dual Heckler & Koch MP5Ks 11/3/30

2 extra clip

Freddie shouldn't be here. He's not a trained killer like the others, or even a card-carrying nutcase like Carnagan. He is, however, the Don's nephew, and so Big Win feels obligated to give him a slice of the action. Freddie could have been a big man in Chicago. His personal drive and close familial relationship to Big Win could have made him a major player. Unfortunately, Freddie has a little self-control problem.

Carnagan may be a psycho, but at least he's consistently dangerous. Freddie is perfectly pleasant -- until someone cuts him off in traffic, or interrupts him in conversation. Or breaths noisily. Then Freddie erupts in an avalanche of rage and violence which lasts until he's done some serious damage, managed to regain his tenuous self-control, or been forcibly restrained.

Freddie is slightly below average height and very sensitive about it. He has short blond hair and a fairly belligerent air to him. That's nothing compared to when he gets annoyed, though. When his temper is stoked, he screams obscenities through gritted teeth and his normally-pale complexion flushes deep red. Oh, and he tends to kill things.

He smokes cigarettes in a long thin cigarette holder, which he thinks makes him look distinguished. It doesn't, but no one dares tell him that.

Pasta and Pistols -- Briefing

The call comes for each of you. It's a formula of sorts, a specific structure of words and sentences -- nothing directly incriminating, but the meaning is clear.

"Mr Pestoni requests the pleasure of your company at Mazarotti's at 9 PM. He has a business proposition of some delicacy that he wishes to present you with. The client is a personal friend, and Mr Pestoni wants to make sure he is taken care of properly."

So here you are, sitting across from Chicago's most infamous mob boss: Winston "Big Win" Pestoni, slumped in a wheelchair, spit dribbling down his collar. Big Win had a stroke last year, so now he rides about in that motorized go-cart all the time.

Big Win's nose twitches and one eye opens. The eye blinks and then its companion opens. Big Win's posture and body language never changes -- unsurprisingly -- but you can feel his attention focus on you. "Boys," he rasps. "A . . . pleasure to see you all here. It's rare to see such . . . celebrated individuals together in one place at one time. And everyone's still breathin', too."

"Someone done me wrong, boys. And what hurts me, is that this somebody is very close to me. You all know Benny Balancesheet, my accountant?" Benny's a tiny little guy who looks exactly like what he is. A boring little putz who does numbers all day long and balances ledgers in his dreams every night. You can't even imagine him being brave enough to mess with the Don. "Well,

Benny has done me great personal injury. So, in turn, I wish to do him great personal injury. I want him taken care of. With extreme prejudice. Kapish?"

Big Win doesn't really want to share much more than this with the hitmen -- the less they know, the better for his purposes.

If asked exactly what Benny did, Big Win claims he caught the accountant skimming off one of his numbers rackets.

He does have one lead on Benny, though. Benny has a weakness for women of Spanish descent, and his girlfriend Maria, a Mexican hooker, keeps a house in one of Chicago's nastier barrios.

Pestoni has one other request. He doesn't want them to go looking for Benny tonight; he wants them to wait until sunrise. He wants people to see the hitmen together, see them find Maria and let them hear the gunshots. This is a message as well as a contract.

Accountants and Ammo: Tracking Down Benny

It's especially hot today, the kind of heat which saps your energy, makes you slow. Makes you dead, in this line of work.

You hunker down in the car as it rolls slowly down the streets of the barrio. It's a real dirt hole -- the smell of urine and old tequila seems as pervasive as the blazing sun. In the road ahead of you, a couple of skinny Mexican kids are playing soccer, but they scatter as the car approaches. In fact, the entire street seems deserted.

It's like that all the way to Maria's house -- empty streets, no one daring to look outside. When the players finally reach the house, it looks much the same as any of the other run-down buildings they've passed.

This single-story house might once have been cream-colored, but now it's yellowed and decaying. Unlike many of the houses in this street, it does have its own garage, attached to the side of the house, and someone has at least attempted to coax life out of the four square meters of garden in front of the door. The windows are shielded by thick brown blinds -- it must be pretty dark inside.

If the hitmen knock, the door is answered by Maria, Benny's girlfriend. Maria's a stunner -- a delicate, doe-eyed beauty with long dark hair and deep golden skin. Unfortunately, she has a temper that rivals Freddie's in its intensity. She's a virulent anti-smoker, and her first action, should any of the characters be smoking, is to snatch the offending butt from their lips and grind it into the dirt.

She speaks heavily-accented English, but reverts to Spanish when she's angry.

Maria's living room is surprisingly up-market. There's a thick leather couch in the center of the room with a widescreen TV in front of it and DVD rack beside it -- all probably presents from her boyfriend. Family photos line the walls, but you notice that none of the pictures have Benny in them. To the left is a small bathroom that looks as rundown as the rest of the house -- obviously Benny hasn't gotten around to renovating this part of Maria's house. The kitchen to the right is equally unattractive; a huge bag of shopping lies on the floor, its contents scattered around in no particular order. Directly behind the TV is a small white door, hanging half-open. It appears to lead to a tiny vegetable garden out back.

Any mention of Benny will provoke a display of truly incandescent rage. According to Maria, she and Benny broke up a week ago. She hasn't seen him since, and doesn't want to, thank you very much. In fact, if the players have identified themselves as hitmen, she'll offer them 20 dollars to shoot him in the groin, just for her.

This impressive display of feminist rage is all faked. Maria is angry with Benny, but she's angry because he's hiding

out in her garage next door, too scared to rent a hotel in case Pestoni finds him. Lurking behind the small white door to the vegetable garden is Tommy Two-Tone, a mobster Benny has paid off, waiting to pop the players if they aren't convinced by Maria's performance.

There are several clues to Maria's lie, any of which can be noticed by a player succeeding on a Perception roll against difficulty 8. First, the toilet seat in Maria's bathroom is up, not down. Second, the shopping bag in the kitchen contains far too much food for Maria alone to eat. Third, there is a cigarette-filled ashtray on top of Maria-the-Militant-Non-Smoker's TV. Finally, especially successful players may notice that the white door to the garden is quivering in the breeze -- but the air is dead calm.

In the event the players notice none of this and are totally taken-in by Maria's story, you can always have Benny trying to sneak out of the garage when they leave.

Regardless, if there's any hint that the players have figured it out, or if they start to behave aggressively towards Maria, then --

The white door at the back of the room seems to tremble slightly -- and then bullets rip through the wood. They whiz past you, shattering windows and punching holes in the walls.

Tommy Two-Tone empties a full nine-mill clip through the door. Sensible hitmen should take cover at this point. Tommy is considered to be behind 50% cover hiding behind the door (difficulty penalty of +2 to hit) -- while the door covers much of him, it's really quite flimsy.

Interesting locations for the players to dive behind include:

- **The leather sofa.** Great cover, plus when hit by bullets, it puffs white stuffing into the air to create a nice snow effect.
- **The kitchen.** Unfortunately, it doesn't have a very good angle on the door, but imaginative players can throw knives, canned food etc. at the hapless Tommy.
- **The TV.** Regardless of whether or not anyone's hiding behind it, a missed shot HAS to plow through this unlucky appliance, causing a dramatic rain of sparks and a corresponding shriek from Maria.
- **The bathroom.** A good position, and particularly cunning players may be able to angle the mirror on the bathroom cupboard so they can see the door without needing to poke their heads out of cover.

Tommy Two-Tone -- Opportunistic Italian gunslinger

Attributes: Bod: 6, Chi: 0, Mnd: 5, Ref: 6

Skills: Deceit +2 (=7)

Driving +3 (9)

Guns +6 (12)

Martial Arts +4 (10)

Weapons: Beretta 92f 10/2/15+1

Maria Estevez -- Mexican Anti-Smoking-Nazi

(Unnamed character)

Bod: 4, Chi: 0, Mnd: 6, Ref: 5

Flail wildly: 7

Benny "Balancesheet" Bernelli -- Two-timing Accountant

Attributes: Bod: 5, Chi: 0, Mnd: 8, Ref: 6

Accounting: 15
Guns: 8

Finally, however, the players bust into the vegetable garden.

The garden is a tiny little pile of dirt with a few veggies stuffed into the grime. It was surrounded by a wire fence once, but the fence is peeling back and has huge hole in it. There's a door to your left, which must lead into the garage . . . WHAM! The door slams open into your face!

Benny, cowering in the garage, makes a break for it. Any character right near the door may literally get banged on the nose as it slams back and he tries to scramble through a hole in the fence. He'll try to get away from the house and run to a junkyard he knows a few blocks down. He's got a car stashed there, hidden among the junked vehicles.

If any of them shoot at Benny and hit him, just let it be an incapacitating wound of some kind. Finally, as they bring Benny down and stalk towards him . . .

*Benny whimpers as he tries to crawl backwards, never taking his eyes off you. "Hey, listen. You don't wanna shoot me, guys. I've got a really good reason why you shouldn't . . . hell, I've got 12 **million** reasons not to shoot me! Just listen, okay? I've got a really sweet deal for you boys . . ."*

Obviously, there is a risk that the hitmen may decide to shoot him and ignore his deal. There's not much you can do to prevent this, but if they go into the garage afterwards, they'll find all the documents Benny was working on -- evidence of Don Pestoni's deal with the Russians and information about the money train.

But with any luck, the players will hear Benny out.

Benny heaves a sigh of relief, and mops his forehead with his shirt sleeve. "Did the boss say why he wanted me dead?"

The players can give whatever excuse you had Pestoni make.

Benny smirks. "I figured that's what he'd say. It's bulls---. I found about somethin', somethin' big, and he's decided that he doesn't want anyone else to know about it. The somethin', I mean."

He leans in conspiratorially, his beady eyes meeting yours. "Big Win's been dealin' with the Russian Mob, boys. He's been buyin' arms from them, despite the fact that all the other crime families are at war with them Russkie scum. He's goin' behind the back of all the other bosses so he can buy weapons cheap. But that ain't all. The Russian's are demanding payment, so Big Win is sending up the money he owes them. It's goin' north, by train, I don't know where. Twelve million dollars. And 43 cents. On one train, with minimal guard. Big Win can't put too many people on the train, 'cause that might make the other bosses wise to his little scam.

"And best of all, if that money goes missin' then Big Win can't do nothin'. He can't send anybody after the thieves, since that would mean explainin' what the money's for. And that would get him dead."

It's a perfect scheme -- or so it appears. Benny's got all the background info he could gather locked up in Maria's garage. It's mostly ledgers and paperwork from the Don's files, all of which would be extremely useful to your average accountant but only useful to your average hitman as a sedative. However, Benny does know that the train is leaving tomorrow, and even has a brochure. The train's some antique reconstruction which Big Win's cousin owns.

The brochure is headed "The Chicago Steam Experience" in a font that looks at least 50 years out of date. Below the heading is a grainy black-and-white photo of an old steam train which looks like Thomas the Tank Engine's older, rustier brother. "Genuine old-style steam engine, lovingly restored!" the brochure burbles. "Entertain friends and family on this delightful ride! Special discount for parties of four or greater!"

"The money's gonna be right in the back, the luggage compartment," Benny whimpers. "The Russians sent down two of their enforcers to keep an eye on it. Alexis and Marx Goravich -- the Brothers Goravich, they call 'em.

"You've heard of the Brothers Goravich. They're mean as hell -- the Russian Mob's private boogiemen."

The brochure includes a detailed map of the train, as well as the route it travels from Chicago to New York.

Steam Shootout: The Great Train Robbery

Armed with their new intel (and lots of guns), it's time for the hitmen to plan the actual robbery:

- **Getting Onboard:** There are still plenty of seats available, and they're dirt-cheap. "The Steam Experience" is just as unpopular as Benny makes it out to be. It is probably possible to sneak onboard, but it hardly seems necessary. There are no metal detectors at the train platform, though there are railway guards.
- **Equipment:** Should the hitmen want to pick up extra guns, Mission Impossible-type gear, explosives, nuclear weapons, etc., it's completely up to the GM what is available within the given timeframe. Remember, the hitmen only have a few hours to plan, so it's easy to just say that their usual gun suppliers need more time. It is quite possible they can do the robbery with their starting gear and nothing else.
- **The Tunnel:** About an hour-and-a-half into the journey, the train goes through a tunnel. Since the train is an authentic steam model, it has no interior lights, so there's a total blackout for about five minutes. Perfect robbery opportunity.
- **Stopping the Train:** If the players want to stop the train to unload the money, they'll need to get the driver's compartment at the front and pull the brake directly. This is an old train -- there aren't emergency brakes like a modern subway train.
- **On-Board Security:** According to the brochure, "Albert, our Helpful Conductor" is the only security the train has. Of course, this doesn't include whatever the Russians have put there.

The Train

The piercing whistle of the train hails you as you walk down the platform towards it, pushing through the crowds of people attempting to board other, more-normal forms of transport. There's something kind of magical about the way the train looms ahead of you, smoke pouring from it into the air, like someone lighting the world's largest Cuban.

It brings back happy memories of old movies you saw as kids, and an almost spiritual feeling of nostalgia fills you.

Okay, enough of the sentimental stuff. Time to shoot some people.

1.Driver's Compartment

At the front of the train is the big black steam engine proper. Just in front of the driver's compartment is the furnace which powers the train, which is constantly fed by the driver's sweating assistant. The assistant isn't just sweating from

the heat, though. Fear also plays a factor, because the regular driver has been locked in a closet and replaced by a Russian bruiser, just in case someone might try to interfere with the running of the train. Like say, some greedy hitmen-turned-robbers.

Past the furnace and through another door is the driver's compartment. The engine room is so noisy that the driver can't hear any arguments or fights that go on outside, for example as the hitmen beat his assistant senseless.

Dramatic tension being what it is, the driver is aware of anyone at the door -- he can see their reflection in the dials in front of him.

Dmitri, the Russian Answer to Oddjob

Attributes: Bod: 11, Chi: 0, Mnd: 5, Ref: 5

Skills: Guns +6 (11)

Martial Arts +7 (12)

2. First Class

This is basically just a long passage with cabin doors on either side. There's hardly anyone in first class, except one elderly couple who're both deaf as posts. If there is any violence here, they bang loudly on the walls and complain about noisy honeymoon couples.

Should the players bust into a cabin, or have bought one, they'll find quite a nice little bed, a tiny bathroom, and a bottle of chilled champagne. Yes, they can use the champagne to make a Molotov cocktail if they *really* want to. But is that any way to treat good champagne?

3. Generic Coaches 1-3

Much like first class, these basically consist of long corridors down which characters can have dramatic firefights and cabin doors running down each side. There are a few guests in these coaches, and the third coach area also has a pair of Russian mobsters leaning against an open window sharing a cigarette. Your hitmen should be able to identify the type 50 meters away -- shifty body-language, heavy accents, and bulky coats with strange lumps.

Generic Russian Mobsters

(unnamed character)

Bod: 6, Chi: 0, Mind: 5, Ref: 5

Guns: 10, Martial Arts: 8

Weapons: Ingram MAC-10 10/4/49

4. Open Seating

This is an especially long coach. The people in here sit on benches opposite one another, like on a subway. Nothing much is happening; the passengers just sit and stare at one another with that slightly embarrassed way people do on trains. Albert, the conductor, meanders from passenger to passenger, checking their tickets with a spectacular lack of enthusiasm. Albert is 70-something and talks like each word is being pulled from him by force.

5. Generic Coaches 4 and 5

You know the formula by now. Long corridors, cabin doors. There are several rooms full of Russian Mobsters, playing cards and drinking Vodka to while away the journey. As many Mobsters as the DM feels are appropriate can be found here.

Generic Russian Mobster

(unnamed characters)

Bod: 6, Chi: 0, Mind: 5, Ref: 5

Guns: 10, Martial Arts: 8

Weapons: Ingram MAC-10 10/4/49

6. The Dining Cart

The people who built this steam-powered white elephant must had limited imaginations -- the dining cart is white. Just white: white tablecloths and walls and seats. It hurts the eyes. And is also really tacky. A retired couple sit at a table in far corner, gazing with near-blind eyes at the scenery, and a bored businessman picks at his food a table away. The only table vaguely active is host to a gaggle of school children, 15 or so, all clustered around a pretty young woman who looks about ready to kill them all.

"Miss, when are we going to eat?" "Miss, can't the train go any faster?" "Miss, can we see the furnace?"

Just past the retired couple, the hitmen can see the door that leads to the baggage cart. There are plenty of seats, and one over-tired waiter will attempt to poison them with substandard food and flat champagne. The kids view any stranger with great excitement, and will wander over to ask the hitmen arbitrary and annoying questions.

7. The Baggage Cart

No passengers are supposed to be allowed into the baggage cart, so the hitmen can't simply waltz in. There's a big sign saying, "No Entry" and more importantly, the waiter in the dining cart will refuse to let them go. If he's unavailable, the children, seeing the sign, will start up an annoying chorus of complaints instead.

So it is effectively only possible for the hitmen to get into the cart by causing a disturbance -- either if they pull out their guns and threaten whoever's telling them not to enter (screams and gasps ensue), or if they simply ignore the waiter/children and a shouting match ensues.

The baggage cart is lit by a few naked bulbs hanging from the roof. They don't so much provide illumination as make the darkness clearer. There are five big shelves in the center of the cart like bookshelves in a library, all packed with suitcases and packages and bags. All too small to carry the cash.

Resting in a rough pile in the back corner are several large wooden crates, piled up.

The crates have been nailed shut, but there's a crowbar leaning against the wall next to them. Unfortunately, the hitman opening the top crate will have to put his gun aside in order to lever the box open. Wood cracks like a gunshot as he slowly works the crowbar under the lid and pulls it away and sees . . .

As the lid falls away, you are bathed in a gentle yellow radiance. Your own stunned reflection stares up at you, repeated a dozen times in a dozen smooth gold ingots. And this is only the first box . . . there must be over a ton of gold here!

Needless to say, this is a serious, and unexpected, problem. It'll take at least three hitmen to carry each crate, and there

are four crates in total. Benny knew the payment was coming through, but he didn't know the currency to be used, and that puts a major wrench in whatever robbery plan the players have worked out.

In the aftermath, this should clearly be the point at which the whole robbery goes sour. Up until this moment, let the hitmen have it fairly easy. The Russians are caught by surprise, the passengers too terrified to move . . . but now the mobsters in the cabins start coming out in force, and the passengers start to panic.

Of more immediate importance, though, are the pair of Russian hitmen watching those players in the baggage cart. The Brothers Goravich have been staying here, watching the gold. When the door opens, they hide among the shelves, but now that the hitmen are standing dumbfounded at the sight of their golden haul, they strike!

Depending on how vicious you are feeling, you may grant the Russians an automatic hit on the hitmen standing over the gold (his back is totally to them). His own blood splatters the gold as they shoot him in the back and open up on the rest . . .

More mercifully, you may have a tell-tale creak give them away and let the hitmen dive for cover as they open up. This gunfight should be a nasty, bloody affair. The Brothers are the best killers the Russian Mob has to offer, and they have surprise on their side.

After the first furious blast of gunfire, they fade away, ducking down between the shelves, forcing those hitmen who survive to cautiously peer around corners and clear corridors walled in by bags. The Russians use their superior cover to full advantage, climbing onto high shelves to ambush from above, or pulling out bags to create peepholes in the shelves through which to fire. The Brothers have been killing together for years, and their familial bond creates an almost psychic link between them. They're creepy, black-eyed angels of death, and the characters should be convinced they're probably about to die.

The Brother Goravich, Bloodthirsty Brother Assassins (Identical Stats)

Attributes: Bod: 7 Chi: 0 Mnd: 5 Ref: 7

Guns +10 (=15)

Martial arts +5 (12)

Schticks: Both Guns Blazing (1)

Eagle Eye (1)

Weapons: Pump-Action Shotgun 13/3/8(Alexis)

Ingram MAC-10 10/4/49 (Marx)

As this gunfight begins, the rest of Russians on the train make a concerted effort to seize control, keeping the other hitmen from going to the aid of those in the baggage cart . . .

The rest of the gunfight can play out as you choose -- the hitmen pinned between the Brothers Goravich and the bulk of the Russian mobsters. The dining cart makes a great location for a major fight, with tables to shelter behind, glasses to shatter, and screaming children to protect/use as bodyshields (depends how truly ruthless the hitmen are).

And yes, they can use champagne bottles as Molotov cocktails. What are you, obsessed?

Speaking of explosions, Carnie's dynamite can add an interesting dynamic to the scene. He's got enough to do some serious damage, maybe even to split the train in two. Unfortunately, explosions start fires, giving them another dramatic hazard to avoid.

The story does focus on the corrupting influence of greed, and the inherent lack of trust between criminals, but it doesn't have to be a total bloodbath either. While letting these none-too-pleasant gunmen get away scot-free and live in the Bahamas isn't exactly a morally-uplifting ending, you can find try to find a balance between the two extremes.

Regardless, it'll be an experience they won't forget.

Why Won't You Die?

Narrating Death in *HeroQuest*

by Roderick Robertson

In *HeroQuest*, the rules state that death cannot result from a die roll, only a deliberate action. The narrator is given some guidelines, but still questions remain: "What is 'helpless' and what is not? Is an injured foe helpless, or even an impaired one? If I used my parting shot to injure them, can I then kill them, or have I blown my chance? What if he surrenders, can I kill him once I have him in chains?"

The life or death decision is ultimately up to the narrator, who should look at a number of story factors when determining if the villain should die.

What type of character is the soon-to-be-deceased? Is this a minor character? No problem; let him die. You might not even need to worry about whether faceless minions are alive or not after the heroes go through them like a dose of salts. Villains with more influence will have more impact if they are killed: feuds, outlawry, bounty hunters, the cultural equivalent of the FBI's Most Wanted . . . not to mention the mess it might make of your carefully laid plot!

What is the situation of his soon-to-be death? Does he still have a sword in his hand, or has he surrendered and now has his hands tied behind his back? Is he asleep, or under the influence of drugs or alcohol? The more helpless he is, the easier it is to come down on the side of death. Perhaps the death of a character is foreordained, and the question is more "What will he do before he dies?" than "Will he die?" For example, a player says: "I'll shoot the guard at the door with my bow, killing him before he can give the alarm." On a complete success, the guard not only doesn't raise the alarm, his body is never found, leading the villains to suspect that he let the heroes in and then ran off. On the other hand, on a complete failure he not only raises the alarm before he dies, but manages somehow to further discommode the hero -- locking and barring the door, or giving an accurate description of his attacker before he gasps his last breath, or a patrol just happens to see him fall and so is ready for the heroes.

What are the cultural ramifications of the killing? Is life cheap? Will the family want revenge or simple wergild? Will the authorities become involved? These are things that the hero would know, but the player might not. A narrator should ensure that the player knows what is the cultural norm. No Heortling will blink if a Humakti kills his opponent, nor will trolls be surprised if a Zorak Zoran berserker fails to observe the protocols of surrender. But a death during a simple cattle raid could involve the hero's clan in a decades-long feud. Every culture has some value that it places on the lives of its members, and often a different one placed on the lives of "outsiders." Before the decision can be made, the player needs to be aware of what his hero already knows.

How determined is the player that the villain die? Does he know the game ramifications of what he is doing? Make sure that he understands what is at stake per note 3. If he still wants to kill the son of the King/General/High Priest/Crime Boss/whatever, even when he knows the consequences, let him. But be ruthless about the revenge taken by grieving friends and family. It can add a whole new subplot to the game as the hero (and his friends) have to keep one step ahead of death squads and bounty hunters!

Finally, does it make sense? You've brought your opponent to -8 AP after a successful parting shot. According to the rules: "His body, pride, or spirit is bruised, bashed, and cut; maybe he has just lost the will to continue. A little time or treatment and he will be as good as new." Depending on the factors above, the narrator has to make a choice. Is this helpless enough to allow the player to say, "I kill him"?

Dice or No Dice -- the Mechanics of the Death Blow

The narrator holds the lives of all the characters in his hands. But there are ways, and there are ways, to kill off a

character.

A character in a particularly helpless situation (tied up, dead drunk, etc.) might be killable with an automatic success: after all, no self-respecting hero can fail to kill a helpless character like this. A faceless minion might also be an automatic kill. No one really cares about him anyway (which is why he is a faceless minion instead of a named character!).

A character in a not-really-helpless situation, or one that has more "game presence" than a faceless minion, may need a die roll to deliver the death blow. You can run this as a simple contest -- on any level of victory, the villain dies. The narrator should probably give the villain "choice of weapons" in the contest -- on the theory that he knows what is about to happen, and tries one last ditch effort to save his own life. The villain can try almost anything: Pleading, ransom, a revelation ("I am your Father"), a sudden bolt for the door, or a grab for a weapon.

Player: "I pull out my knife and cut his throat."

Narrator: "As you pull out your knife, your victim says 'Wait! My ransom is 2,000 Lunars!' You can decide to take his offer, but if you still want to kill him, you have to beat his 18 in Ransom. Oh, and you have 'Greedy,' right? Well, it will act as a negative modifier to whatever ability you use to resist him."

If the hero is defeated in the contest, the narrator has to determine not only why the villain wasn't killed, but what ongoing effects, if any, might come of it. Results should match the ability the villain used. Pleading and whining may make the hero too disgusted to kill the villain, and he might even release him with: "Get out of my sight, you worthless worm." Ransoms may actually be paid (if the villain is honorable), or not (and the hero might have a greater resistance to that sort of plea in the future -- once burned, twice shy). "I am Your Father" might introduce a new supporting character for the hero or give him a new goal in life (rehabilitate daddy, avenge the family name by killing daddy, find his real daddy). Bolting for the door would result in the villain successfully evading the hero, and grabbing a weapon might bring on a new fight -- treat it as if the villain had made a final action and succeeded.

Finally, some villains are too important to allow a simple death. In the style of pulp adventures, soap operas, and superhero comics, unless you see the villain's body burned before your eyes, can you really be sure that he's dead? (Especially in Glorantha, where Resurrection is a distinct possibility.) In this case a Hero Point may be necessary to ensure that the villain is "morally, ethic'ly, spiritually, physically, positively, absolutely, undeniably and reliably Dead."

At the Other End of the Sword -- Death to Heroes!

The villains and narrator characters of Glorantha are not the only ones who face death. The player heroes can also feel the cold breath of the grave. In this case, the narrator must make the decision for the villains. Not only whether they will kill or not, but if they will, how will they go about it? A simple knife across the throat, or a death trap in the best tradition of Batman villains? A narrator should never simply kill a hero -- always allow the hero a chance to escape, even if only a small one. Nothing frustrates players so much as when their heroes suffer Death by Narrator Fiat with no hope of reprieve. A narrator can use the methods detailed above, or simply "hold the prisoner until we get the gallows built," allowing a rescue or escape attempt. If the player or his friends can't come up with a plan, and all else fails, then the long march to the gallows and dancing the hempen jig may be all that's left for the hero; but at least you gave him the opportunity.

Finally, always allow the hero to sacrifice himself for the good of others. The true hero will hold up the collapsing tunnel roof to let his friends escape . . . even though he knows that he won't get out himself; or will hold off the Chaos monstrosity long enough to let his friends close the door . . . with him on the wrong side. These are things that a true self-respecting hero should succeed at, even (or especially) if it means his death. You probably should not even need to make them roll dice for it; self sacrifice for the sake of others is perhaps the one thing no self-respecting hero should ever fail at. As narrator, your job is not always to make the decision, but sometimes simply to respect it.

The Ratpire

by Elizabeth McCoy

She woke up in the clearing, with him standing over her. He smiled, the light of a fanatic in his eyes. "And now you will join our glorious revolution!" he declaimed.

It was best to humor insane kidnappers. She made herself smile back, nodded, said, "Yes, I'm delighted."

*And then she was shrinking, twisting, turning into something **strange**.*

With a horrified squeak, the sleek brown rat skittered into a nearby rat-hole, while the man laughed behind her.

While there are many kinds of vampire, most of them drink blood. Despite being undead -- no pulse, no need to breathe, and all the other usual signs -- the "Ratpire" does not. It's not entirely clear *what* he feasts upon, except perhaps the psychic anguish of his "brood." His undead nature is transferred to his victims not by a bite or exchange of bodily fluids, but by securing their consent (forced, lying, or genuine) and transforming them into rats.

The Ratpire is also, apparently, ravingly insane. He believes himself to be a Robin Hood figure at the best of times, a Scarlet Pimpernel figure other times, and a noble revolutionary the rest of the time. At least once a month -- and often nightly -- he gathers his rat-brood and gives "ringing, rousing" speeches. In truth, they are incoherent yammerings against the establishment or some powerful business of the moment, but most of his brood are so traumatized and afraid of the Ratpire that they react as he expects.

He rarely leads his brood against any given enemy. Rarely, however, does not mean never. When his tunnels are truly full to overflowing with his undead rat-brood, he will lead the squeaking horde to the target, past defenses, and let them rampage as only a swarm of undead rats can. Even assuming that they are not driven back by their target's defenses, many of them tend to die in such raids. The attack ends when the Ratpire, bearing some single target of his anger, calls the brood away again, back to the meadow -- where he will force the agreement of his new victim and change him (or her) into a rat as well.

The Ratpire is a tall, hairy, swarthy man. He looks more like a wild man given clothing than a rat. He strides about with all the confidence (or hubris) of a hero. He is charismatic enough, his voice ringing enough, to impress many people -- until they pay attention to the fact that his inspired oration is actually anti-establishment ravings with no logic to speak of. He is frighteningly strong and fast, but not inhumanly so. He can change, whenever he wishes, into a large, gray rat. He also has no interest whatsoever in anything sexual; male, female, he cares not for anything carnal, but only if they will listen to his ranting.

The Ratpire's brood are were-rats. Their first transformation lasts approximately 24 hours, and after that, they can change into rat form at will. They can only change into human form if they are:

- Underground,
- In darkness (no more than a candle or lantern), or
- At night.

Any one of those three conditions is enough. (The Ratpire's lair includes a cavern large enough for his brood to assume human form -- the better to listen to him rant and rave.)

Besides gaining the power to transform (a process taking a few seconds), a member of the brood has what they call "Ratsight." They can choose not to invoke it, but it requires no concentration or energy to do so. When they do, they see their human forms (their own and others') superimposed over their rat-forms. They hear their squeaks and whiffles

as human voices, understandable even if they would normally be speaking different languages. And while their little paws are still paws, they somehow become more cunning and dexterous while Ratsight is invoked, as if the thumbs they see are actually half-there. They can even carry things and run upright, though more slowly.

Onlookers without Ratsight will only see rats behaving oddly -- though it will be clear enough that they're doing something unnatural if they've got a bundle in their forepaws and are running on their hind legs!

Natural rats, mice, and other animals (including owls) avoid the Ratpire and his brood; they *smell* wrong. A cornered animal will still fight, but half-heartedly, and trying to escape whenever possible. Normal humans notice nothing different about a human-formed brood-member, though. They are masters of the night only between the walls and under the floors.

The power the Ratpire holds over his brood is part psychological and part supernatural. He cannot command them nor force them to obey by his will alone, but many of them will do his bidding in the hopes that he will be able to free them from their undead were-rat state, and let them walk in the sunlight again. And he *can* force them into rat-form. He can also, when they are in rat form, cause their eyes to shrivel in their heads like little gray beads and fall out, blinding the unfortunate rat until he (or she) regains the Ratpire's favor. Even then, they'd better still have the eyes to reinsert.

He can only transform a "willing" victim -- but that "willingness" can be an outright lie, a babbling agreement, or anything else of that sort. Between the initial transformation and seeing what happens to those who get to defiant (blinding), not to mention the "immortal undead" part changing the world around them unrecognizably, most of the brood are gibberingly mad.

The brood lives in burrows (and a cavern) in a meadow. This is where they return in the day, this is where the Ratpire takes his victims, and -- no matter how inconvenient -- this is where their "headquarters" is. Only if it is utterly destroyed will the Ratpire lead his brood -- or at least what's left of it -- away to dig new tunnels and a new "auditorium" cavern.

The Ratpire in Different Genres

Fantasy

The Ratpire has some limited spells -- in *GURPS* terms, he might have One-College (Animal) Magery, or be a Starmage, or both. He's also made a deal with a demon, and his soul is forfeit. But that doesn't bother him, as he plans to live forever. (Unlike many undead, the brood's souls are *not* automatically damned or destroyed upon death. Not that they know that, of course, and may act as if they were already damned.)

Though strong and fast, more sturdy than he looks, the Ratpire is killable. Whether this will free his brood from their curse is up to the GM. That might be sufficient, or they might need to go on some further quest to find the ritual that will sever the last influence of the demonic pact.

Modern Fantasy/Horror

The Ratpire was a powerless lunatic, until he found an old book, an old ritual, and called up that which he could not put down. "Fortunately" for him, the ancient spirit was interested in giving him power. In return, he sends his brood to steal ancient artifacts and tomes, hiding them away in their burrows. And the Ratpire studies, his eyes glowing with unnatural light as the spirit he hosts researches how to gain more power . . .

And as he does, the brood sets up items of power in places of power, to prepare a giant summoning circle . . .

Ultra-Tech

The Ratpire was once a bio-sciences expert, until an employer too good to be true stole his research and left him without the fame and fortune he deserved. Government lawyers didn't help him, no one helped him. No one but the strange old crone he met while waiting for a shuttle, that is. She knew of a strange location, hidden deep beneath the city in the maintenance tunnels and sewers where only (suspiciously healthy) vermin went.

Though she shared the secrets of her own braintape and robotics research with him, his thirst for revenge was transformed. He could have used his robotic rat body to sneak into his former employer's headquarters and reveal how he was wronged -- but he didn't. He wanted nothing less than the overthrow of the entire establishment!

Now he kidnaps people and locks them within the special chambers his crone benefactor developed, placing their minds within rat-robots and holding their time-protected bodies hostage. The crone herself, though, is not dead -- she's merely in suspended animation . . .

In Nomine

The Ratpire is not, actually, an undead. He's a spirit from a dream who somehow taps into the dreams of rats -- he is the Ratcatcher, who entered into assumption combat with a Russian Revolutionary Vampire dream-spirit, and emerged with an even more twisted Image. Rats dream of him with terror, and that feeds him Essence. Now humans dream of him with terror as well.

His brood is primarily composed of ethereal spirits and figments, but a few twisted dream-shades are now in their ranks, as well as two demonlings. His powers allow him, and his brood, to enter dreamscapes and take them over. Sometimes, he can even pull the confused dreamer into a form of lucid dreaming, collapsing their dreamscape around them . . . in rat form, to run with the horde after their Ratpire master.

He aspires to godhood, in his twisted way, with his worshiping rat subjects to provide the energy he needs. He does not follow Beleth, Demon Princess of Nightmares, though his "recruitment" of dreaming "servants" is often nightmarish.

Until someone sees how he rules his ratling brood, he seems to be a relatively "harmless" lunatic. After, however . . . Well, there's a reason Uriel went on a Purity Crusade against the ethereal spirits, and the Ratpire -- though not yet existing for that -- exemplifies that reason.

Haut-Cornet d'Antares

Designed by **Kenneth Hite**
GURPS Fourth Edition Stats by **Andrew Hackard**

Ever since the armies of the Han warlords conquered Europe a century ago, the court of France (and the other, lesser, courts of Christendom) has removed to the new worlds: Mars, Venus, and the Americas. King Louis XXV reigns from Haut-Paris, on the banks of the Martian Grand Canal; his cousins and relations rule the other provinces from Louisiana to Marianne (the rich and decadent spice entrepot in the Venusian jungles). This far-flung Realm is knit together by the Jansenist Order, founded by disciples of Cornelius Jansen, the Bishop of Ypres who discovered "the methods of Necessary Grace" -- psionics -- and published them posthumously in 1638. The Order helps guide and develop inventions, from the steam-car to the crystalwave communicator to the Pascal Drive that propels space frigates between the three planets. It also administers hospitals, performs numberless good works, and trains the royal guards (the only ones permitted to wield the deadly force sword invented by Father Lucien George of the Order in 1799) in the disciplines of Necessary Grace while attempting (with some occasional success) to instill in them morality and respect for righteousness.

One such occasional success, Haut-Cornet Louis d'Antares of Her Majesty's Martian Guards, while on patrol in the Tharsis Mountains, uncovered a ring of slave traders protected by a powerful count. As he investigated further, he discovered that the count was the tool of a hidden figure of vast power, known only as the Voice of the Phantom. This dark entity planned to somehow "shut the gates of the City of God," ending the Jansenist Order's ability to obtain Necessary Grace, by spreading vile practices throughout the court and aristocracy, eventually enmeshing the King himself in their toils. Fortunately, Queen Angeline remained unspoiled by such debaucheries, and with her aid and protection, d'Antares was able to weed out the worst elements from court in a series of duels, social coups, and dramatic showdowns over poisoned wine. With information gathered from the disgraced courtiers, d'Antares tracked the Voice of the Phantom to a hidden fastness in the Gobi Desert, in the center of the Han domains.

The high desert of the Gobi proved little hardship to one used to Martian night patrol, and d'Antares managed to infiltrate the fortress using passwords and signs learned from the Voice's acolytes in Haut-Paris. Once inside, he rescued a number of prisoners from the dungeons, thinking only to profit from the confusion of their escape. Instead, he discovered that they were guardsmen themselves, of an Order called ISWAT, who had tracked the Voice to "this Earth" (which they called "Reality Cyrano") after It had escaped a "quantum prison" somewhere. Rallying them to his Queen's cause, d'Antares led them to the heart of the fortress and, with his aid as a focus for certain Masters of the Jansenist Order (who by this time had also gone over to the offensive against the Voice of the Phantom), they banished the Voice back to its rightful incarceration. On the advice of the General of the Order, Queen Angeline decreed that d'Antares should become her personal liaison with this ISWAT, to keep a watch on the Voice of the Phantom and to guard against any and all other dangers that might threaten the Realm from outside its natural timeline.

Louis d'Antares

250 points

6', 145 lbs. (SM 0).

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 14 [80]; **IQ** 11 [20]; **HT** 12 [20].

Dmg 1d-2/1d; *BL* 20 lbs.; *HP* 12 [4]; *Will* 12 [5]; *Per* 11 [0]; *FP* 12 [0].

Basic Speed 6.50 [0]; *Basic Move* 6 [0]; *Dodge* 10*; *Parry* 12 (Force Sword)*.

Social Background

TL (5+4) [5].

CF France Outremonde [0]; Homeline [1].

Languages English (Accented) [4]; French (Native) [0]; Latin (Accented) [4].

Advantages

Alcohol Tolerance [1]

Appearance (Handsome) [12]

Charisma 2 [10]

Combat Reflexes [15]

Danger Sense [15]

Daredevil [15]

Fashion Sense [5]

Fit [5]

Legal Enforcement Powers [15]

Metabolism Control 1 [5]

PK Talent 1 [5]

Talent (Smooth Operator) 2 [30]

Telekinesis 2 (PK, -10%) [9]

Disadvantages

Code of Honor (Gentleman's) [-10]

Compulsive Gambling (12) [-5]

Duty (To ISWAT; 15 or less; Extremely Hazardous) [-20]

Extra Sleep 3 [-6]

Gregarious [-10]

Insomniac (Mild) [-10]

Overconfidence (9) [-7]

Phobia (Ailurophobia) (6) [-10]

Quirks

Always drinks the best wine available

Considers psionics ungentlemanly

Devoutly believes in monarchy

Flashy dresser (-1 to Disguise and Shadowing, +1 to attempts to identify or follow him)

Trivializes theological concerns (-1 to reactions from overly pious folk and clerical superiors)

Skills

Acrobatics-12 (DX-2) [1]

Autohypnosis-10 (Will-2) [1]

Beam Weapons/TL(5+4) (Pistol)-14 (DX+0) [1]

Connoisseur (Fashion)-11 (IQ+0) [2]

Connoisseur (Wine)-12 (IQ+1) [4]

Current Affairs (High Culture)-12 (IQ+1) [2]

Current Affairs (People)-11 (IQ+0) [1]

Dancing-13 (DX-1) [1]

Fast-Draw (Force Sword)-16 (DX+2) [2]*

Force Sword-17 (DX+3) [12]

Gambling-10 (IQ-1) [1]

Guns/TL(5+4) (Pistol)-14 (DX+0) [1]
Hobby Skill (Martian Orchids)-11 (IQ+0) [1]
Leadership-15 (IQ+4) [2]†‡
Musical Instrument (Harpsichord)-9 (IQ-2) [1]
Rapier-14 (DX+0) [2]
Riding (Hadrosaur)-13 (DX-1) [1]
Savoir-Faire (High Society)-15 (IQ+4) [4]†
Sex Appeal-17 (HT+5) [1]†§
Survival (Desert)-11 (Per+0) [2]
Tactics-10 (IQ-1) [2]

Techniques

Feint (Force Sword)-19 [3]

* +1 from Combat Reflexes

† +2 from Smooth Operator

‡ +2 from Charisma

§ +4 from Handsome

Devious Doors

by S. Deniz Bucak

Are you tired of saying "You see a wooden door"? Here are some trapped and magical doors to liven up a *d20 System* fantasy adventure.

Barbarian Catcher: Set in a recessed alcove, this door has a thin veneer of wood over its steel body (DC 25 spot check to notice it isn't actually wood.) Attempting to smash or open the door sets off the trap. Pointed steel bars shoot out of both sides of the alcove, trapping (and damaging) the intruder, while hot oil or green slime pours from the ceiling.

Game Stats: CR 6; mechanical; manual reset; DC 22 Reflex save for 1/2 damage; 4d6 damage from the bars, 4d6 damage from oil if pinned, no save possible if pinned. No damage from oil if not pinned. See *DMG* for effects of green slime. A pinned character can make a DC 20 Strength check each round to try to escape. Each attempt causes 2d6 damage. Or another unpinned character can free him with a DC 25 disarm traps check. Search DC 25 Disable Device DC 25; DC 30 to break the door; Open Lock DC 25.

Market Price: 20,400 gp.

Thief Catcher: A concealed 10×10 ft. trap door is in front of this door. Anything that's inserted into the keyhole (such as a lockpick set or a "spare" key the dungeon owner might leave lying around) triggers the trap door, which leads to a 30' pit with spikes at the bottom. After six seconds the trap door closes again and locks, capturing whoever is in the pit. The true keyhole is concealed on the wall next to the door.

Game Stats: CR 4; mechanical; touch trigger; automatic reset; DC 20 Reflex save avoids; 30 ft deep (3d6, fall); multiple targets (10×10 area); pit spikes (Atk +10 melee, 1d4 spikes per target for 1d4+3 damage each) Search DC 21; Disable Device DC 20. Opening the trap door after someone has fallen in requires a DC 20 Open Locks roll (-4 to the roll if it is being opened from the inside. This also requires a DC 16 Balance roll.) : hidden bypass (DC 20 Search to find, DC 25 Open Locks, 23 Break DC);

Market Price: 8,000 gp.

Wizard Catcher: When someone attempts to open this door without first saying the password, either through a knock spell or through picking or breaking the lock, the intruder is turned to stone. The door is usually stone with a scowling medusa face carved into it.

Game Stats: CR 7; magical device; proximity trigger: no reset (one shot version) or automatic; spell effect (flesh to stone, 11th level wizard, DC 19 Fortitude save); Search DC 31; Disable Device DC 31. The door is Arcane Locked (DC 35 Open Locks DC 33 Break).

Cost: 3,300 gp 264 XP (one shot) or 33,000 gp 2,640 XP (automatic reset).

Whisperer: When the party stops in front of this door they will hear indistinct muttering and the clanking of arms and armor. Then a gruff voice will say in Draconic, "Quiet! They're right outside." The noises will stop after that. The whisperer is designed to scare away a low-level party from an otherwise unguarded room.

Game Stats: CR 1; magical device; proximity trigger (Alarm); automatic reset; spell effect (Ghost Sound, 1st level wizard, DC 11 Will save negates); Search DC 25; Disable Device DC 25.

Cost: 250 gp 20 XP.

False Door: Designed to delay intruders until guards arrive this "door" is just a wooden façade and will not open. If destroyed it reveals a blank wall behind it. The false door is coated with a potent glue and anyone who touches any part of the door will be stuck to it.

Game Stats: CR 1; mechanical; touch trigger; manual reset (glue must be re-applied); DC 15 Reflex save to avoid being glued. If a character is stuck to the door, it takes a DC 17 Str check to break loose. Otherwise the character cannot move and takes a -2 to attack rolls and a -4 to Dex. Search DC 20; Disable Device NA; Hardness and hp as a wooden door (18 Break DC Hardness 5 HP 15.)

Market Price: 500 gp.

The Guillotine: When this door is opened, unless a hidden catch is pressed, an iron blade falls from the middle of the doorway. The person opening the door either takes damage or, if he leaps out of the way, may be trapped as the blade blocks the doorway.

Game Stats: CR 4; mechanical; location trigger; manual reset; DC 20 Reflex save avoids; 4d6 damage; Search DC 25; Disable Device DC 25; DC 20 Open Locks check to open the door or DC 23 to break. If the character makes the save, roll randomly to see which side of the door he ends up on. If he does not make the save, he is trapped under the blade. It takes a DC 20 Strength check to raise the blade or a DC 25 Disable Device check.

Market Price: 12,800 gp.

The Treasury Door: A sliding panel covering a window to the room on the other side is at eye level in this door. The window has an illusion cast on it, so that when the players look through it they see a counting table with a ledger and stacks of gold and silver coins on the table. On a bookshelf in the back of the room are several more ledgers. Several bags of coins are on the floor. There is actually a monster on the other side of the door, which is fed through the window. The door is enchanted so that no sounds from the monster inside can be heard through the door. Unless the characters detect the illusion, the monster will catch them flat-footed when they open the door. A character with escape artist can actually fit through the window (DC 15). To the other characters he will seem to disappear and they will not be able to hear cries for help or sounds of combat.

Game Stats: CR Monster CR +1; spell; spell trigger; automatic reset; spell effect (permanent illusion, 11th level wizard, DC 19 Will save negates, silence); Search DC 31; Disable Device DC 31.

Cost: 1,000 gp 80 XP for silence, 760 gp for NPC spellcaster to cast permanent illusion.

The Memory Door: A gargoyle carved into the lintel of this door observes all who enter. When a command word is spoken, the gargoyle can recite the names of all those who have passed through it in the last week and the time and day they went through.

Game Stats: CR 3; magic device; proximity trigger (alarm); automatic reset; spell effect (detect thoughts, 3rd level Wizard, DC 13 Will save negates, magic mouth); Search DC 27; Disable Device DC 27.

Cost: 2,000 gp 160 XP

The Screamer: The screamer is enchanted to sound an alarm when opened, unless a password is spoken.

Game Stats: CR 1; magical device; proximity trigger (Alarm); automatic reset; spell effect (Ghost Sound, 1st level wizard, No save); Search DC 25; Disable Device DC 25.

Cost: 250 gp 20 XP.

The Separator: This magical door teleports every other person who passes through it to a locked chamber where guards or a nasty monster is waiting. Passing back through it in the opposite direction teleports you to a different room than the first. Alternately it can be set to teleport everyone after the first person to pass through the door (perfect for the villain's get-away route).

Game Stats: CR 10; spell trap; proximity trigger (Alarm); automatic reset; spell effect (Teleport Circle, 17th level wizard, No save); Search DC 34; Disable Device DC 34.

Cost: 1500 gp 4,540 XP.

The Gateway: Covered with engraved scenes of other lands, this magical brass door is connected to several other identical doorways that can be anywhere in the world or even on other planes. Anyone wishing to go through to the other doorways can speak the appropriate command word, then step through the door and be teleported there. An campaign can be based on exploring a network of gateways with the players having to complete adventures to find the command phrase to take them to the next door. Or it can be used as a plot device to get the players across long distances quickly.

Game Stats: Wondrous Item. Strong conjuration; CL 17th; Craft Wondrous Item, gate.

Market Value: Price 82,000 gp.

The Tapestry: This woven tapestry depicts a life-size door. When the tapestry is hung on a wall and a command word is spoken, it merges into the wall and the door becomes a permanent door leading to the other side of the wall. This magic item can only be used once.

Game Stats: Wondrous Item. Moderate Transmutation, CL 9th, Craft Wondrous Item, passwall.

Market Value: Price 2,500 gp.

The Possessed Door: This is an iron door with a demonic face embossed on it. The face is animated by an actual demon magically trapped inside the door. The face can see, speak, and use any spell-like abilities the demon may possess (except teleportation). The demon is charged with deciding for whom to open the door. It is protected by the hardness and hp of the door (usually 10 hardness, 60 hp), as well as any damage resistance it might have. Damage is applied to the door first, then to the demon. Once the door has taken enough damage to be destroyed, the demon is freed and may either attack the players or depart (at the DM's choice).

Game Stats: CR: as Demon +2 Wondrous Item. Moderate Necromancy, CL 9th, Craft Wondrous Item, magic jar.

Market Value: Price 10,000 gp.

The Living Door: A dense briar forms a wall in the forest. Part of the briar is obviously formed into a door, but living branches of the briar block the way. There is no lock to pick, and any attempt to shoulder it open inflicts 25-AC points of slashing damage to the attacker (as per *wall of thorns*). The party can attempt to persuade the briar, using diplomacy and a Speak with Plants spell, or a Druid can use his pass without trace ability to go through the door.

Game Stats: CR 5 Wondrous Item. Moderate Conjuraction, CL 15th, Craft Wondrous Item, wall of thorns, Intelligent Int 10 Wis 14 Cha 10 Neutral.

Market Value: 5,000 gp

Calendar Door: These doors are enchanted to only open at specific times of the year. They are magically hardened and very hard to lockpick.

The entrance to the temple atop Mount Wasnor is one example of a calendar door. This massive stone door has a carving of the constellations on it that changes to match the season. It only opens when the light of the full moon falls on it during the winter solstice (approximately every 112 years, for 1d6 hours). During this time a druid must perform the Rite of Winter's Appeasement in the temple, or legend has it that Spring will not return to the lands below the mountain until another full moon occurs on the winter solstice. Frost Giants often try to prevent the ritual from being performed.

Game Stats: DR 20/Magic HP 100 DC 40 to pick the lock. Wondrous Item Strong Abjuration, CL 11th, Craft Wondrous Item, stone skin, contingency, arcane lock.

Market Value: 100,000 gp.

Pyramid Review

Dungeons: Vault of the Fiends

Published by [Atlas Games](#)

Designed by Thomas Denmark with Morgan Gray

Illustrated by Thomas Denmark with Ben Van Dyken

110 full-color cards, 9½ by 10-inch 4-page rules sheet; \$19.95

Last year's [Dungeons: Tomb of the Lich Lord](#) was one of the nicest entries into the dungeon crawl genre of board games. Certainly, its rules contained one of the cleverest mechanics seen in the genre for quite a while. As players explored the dungeon with their heroes, they accumulated Glory and Peril Points. A player could then use his Glory Points to give his hero Boon and Treasure cards, and to activate his special ability, while the other players could in turn spend their Peril Points to slap Bane and Encounter cards on that hero during their turn. In this way players take on the roles of both heroes and the Dungeonlord during their turns. Sequels to the game were promised, but these failed to appear after its publisher, Citizen Games, went into dissolution. Thankfully, *Dungeons: Tomb of the Lich Lord* did not go with it, and the game remained in the hands of its creator and designer, the artist, Thomas Denmark. Even better, *Dungeons: Tomb of the Lich Lord* found a second home in the arms of Atlas Games, who have not only re-published the original game in a second edition, but also released the first of several planned sequels.

The background for *Dungeons: Vault of the Fiends* explains that a twisted mage has been banished for his pursuit of heinous experiments. Bent on revenge, he has continued his sordid efforts from within the walls of an impenetrable vault. The result of these experiments are the horrendous fiends of the title, and with these rampaging through the countryside, the people are calling out for heroes courageous enough to enter the vault and put an end to the scourge of both mage and his creations.

Although *Dungeons: Vault of the Fiends* is a standalone game, it is in the main the same game as its predecessor, though with a twist here, and a tweak there. Thus like *Tomb of the Lich Lord*, it is designed for between two to four players, aged twelve years and up, plays like a board game, but comes packaged as a card game, and is won by completing three quests. A game should last approximately 20 minutes per player involved. Physically there are a couple of changes. Gone are the red and green tear-apart counters used to represent Glory and Peril Points, replaced instead by easy-to-use Tracker Charts that fit onto the back of a card. On the other side of the Tracker Cards is either a Turn Summary for the game or reference notes for the game's many symbols. There are six such cards, meaning that there are two left over if the maximum number of players is involved. The inclusion of six Glory/Peril Tracker cards also means that the game could be played with six heroes.

This possibility is further supported by the inclusion of six heroes from which to choose. They include an Elf Assassin, Human Beastmaster, Drakan Sentinel, Gnome Illusionist, Dwarven Runecaster, and Ork Shaman. The choice is split between fighter and spell-casting types, each with their own special ability. For example, the Drakan Sentinel is a fearsome warrior with the ability to literally scare monsters away, while the Illusionist is able to prevent a monster from attacking. Unlike in *Tomb of the Lich Lord*, none of these characters have balanced stats, each preferring to favor two out of the three (Melee, Magic and Speed).

Dungeons: Vault of the Fiends fully consists of:

- Six Hero cards
- Two Cut-Out cards

- 62 Adventure cards
- 20 Map cards
- 14 Quest cards
- Six Tracker Cards

Some preparation is necessary to play. This only consists of taking a pair of scissors to the two Cut-Out cards, which then gives the game its stand-up figures. If there is a problem with these, it is that they store very poorly in the box after to play. In addition, a pair of six-sided dice is needed, as well as two tokens (such as glass beads) for each player. These are used as markers on their Tracker Cards.

The turn order in *Vault of the Fiends* has been slightly altered from its predecessor. After the Reset phase, the current player takes the role of Dungeonlord and spends his opponent's Peril Points to play Encounter and Bane Cards on other heroes. The effects of these cards have to be resolved immediately. A new Map Card is drawn and added to the dungeon, and then the current player's hero is moved. For each new room or passage card the hero enters, they earn both Glory and Peril Points, with the former being spent to gain both Treasure and Boon Cards. If in the right location, a hero can attempt to complete the quests detailed on their Quest cards, or the Global Quest, which *any* hero can attempt. Resolving combat and overcoming threats is a simple process, needing a single die roll, plus the appropriate attribute (as indicated on the Quest, Bane, or Encounter cards). Success will bestow a hero with more Glory or other effects, while defeats will earn them more Peril Points. At the end of their turn, a player discards one card and refreshes back up to a total hand of five. Completing a Quest will usually gain a hero an increase in the level as well as other benefits.

The first major tweak in this incarnation is the inclusion of "Pumpable" monsters, designed to represent a danger to a hero whatever their level. For example, the Iron Golem's attacks always remain on par with a hero's level, while the Enchanted Golem can have its attack pumped up by the expenditure of more Peril Points. The second tweak is a more dynamic playing environment, with actions of a hero in one location having an effect in another area. A hero can, for example, spend Movement points in the Black Cyst location to turn on or off the effects of the Fiery Chasm and the Transdimensional Gate. Although these two tweaks do make a nice addition to the game, there aren't too many of the representative cards. A third addition to the game are passageways with Hazards, which are no danger in themselves, but increase the effectiveness of any traps played by the Dungeonlords. Further, players can keep more monster cards in their inventory to play during their Dungeonlord phase, and both monsters and heroes can now counter attack under certain circumstances.

These changes to the game's play, combined with a rewritten rules sheet, help to give *Vault of the Fiends* a more fluid and interactive style of play that of *Tomb of the Lich Lord*. This still takes place over a tightly designed set of Map cards that consist of only eight corridors and 12 rooms. Offsetting this small area are Bane cards with the Warp and Shift effects that can move heroes and locations around the map. Alternatively, both games could be combined to provide a larger playing space -- necessary if more than four players are involved -- although doing so would weaken the flavor of *Vault of the Fiends*. This is strongly expressed through all of the cards in the game, and not just the Map and Encounter cards. Drawn and painted by Thomas Denmark, all have the chemical and mechanical feel of a laboratory to them. If that feel has any comparison, it is with the *Fighting Fantasy* solo adventure books, several of which have been recently republished and redesigned as *d20 System* adventures.

The rules also include a number of options for advanced play. These include different methods of building the map, looting the bodies of dead heroes, allowing players with dead heroes to re-spawn at the map's entrance with a new hero, and introducing wandering monsters to the game. *Vault of the Fiends* can played as a campaign game in the mode of *Dungeons & Dragons*, with one player taking on the role of the Dungeonlord, and the others working their heroes together as a party. There is even the possibility for play with each participant tailor-making his own set of Peril and Glory decks. This option, however, requires the use of more than one copy of *Dungeoneer*.

Owners of the Citizen Games edition of *Dungeoneer: Tomb of the Lich Lords* will get the very most out of *Vault of the Fiends*. This is because the sequel offers them a redesigned and much improved set of rules, which can also be used with their version of the earlier game. That a second edition can improve the first without invalidating it should be an indication of the soundness of the core *Dungeoneer* design. To this *Dungeoneer: Vault of the Fiends* adds more

options, more interactivity, and more fun.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Review

Michael Feldman's Whad'Ya Know?

Published by [Out of the Box Publishing Inc.](#)

Quiz show concept by [Michael Feldman](#)

Adapted, designed, & illustrated by John Kovalic

Designed by Judith Heise Kovalic, Mark Kovelan, Matt Mariani, Ellen Osterhaus, Mark Osterhaus, Max Osterhaus, & Al Waller

Graphic design by Cathleen Quinn-Kinney & Linsey Sieger

Bobblehead design and sculpting by Tom Meier

Full-color boxed game with 30 answer cards, 200 double-sided quiz cards (400 quiz questions), divider card, 100 plastic scoring tokens, Michael Feldman Bobblehead, & rules sheet; \$19.95

Out of the Box has made its name with small but clever and original games that are as much mental exercise as they are entertaining pastimes. That's what makes *Michael Feldman's Whad'Ya Know?*, a trivia quiz game, such an odd choice for their newest release.

Based on the popular quiz show run by Michael Feldman on public radio, the object of the game is to be the first to reach a predetermined number of points by answering questions.

Four to 10 players take turns playing the host; only the host is allowed to play with the included Bobblehead Feldman figurine. The two players on either side of the host are the contestants, and the remaining players are the audience.

The host pulls one of the question cards out, announces the category, and reads the question. Categories include Science, People, Places, Odds 'n' Ends, and Things You Should Have Learned in School. Each query offers three answers, and members of the audience must each secretly choose an answer with the A, B, and C cards they've been given. When everyone has selected one, the answers are revealed and the audience may now discuss the question with the contestants.

The audience will try to get the contestants to agree with their answers, though the contestants need not do so, nor even wait for discussion. Once both contestants have also selected answers, the host reveals the right answer and points are awarded.

Anyone, contestant or audience member, who answered correctly gets a point. If the contestants both got it right, they and anyone who also got the correct answer scores an extra point. But if the contestants got it wrong, and they both supplied the same wrong answer, they score nothing -- and any audience members who gave the same wrong answer get a point. This means if you can convince the contestants to agree with your answer, particularly one you know to be wrong, you can gain points while depriving them of the same.

Tokens are given out for players to keep score. The more players you have, the fewer tokens needed to win and vice versa. Whoever reaches a predetermined total first wins. The numbers can be adjusted for a longer or shorter game, but an average game lasts about half an hour.

The game looks nice, the irony being that illustrator-by-trade John Kovalic had a heavier-than-usual hand in the game's design, and his drawing abilities were required the least. Hopefully consumers like bright colors and exaggerated designs, because the box seems to mimic a lot of Mr. Feldman's fashion sense, right down to the touristy button-up shirts. If there are any other visual holes in your mental picture in need of filling, the Bobblehead will take care of those. It's a nifty little Feldman statuette, and it's been sculpted with a loving hand (though it makes him look awfully old).

Then again, this could feed into the price tag. *Whad'Ya Know* costs the same as any of their other long-box games, but if they dispensed with the amusing but not-at-all-necessary Bobblehead and the scoring tokens (there's nothing here that can't be accounted for with good old pad and pencil), it would all fit into one of their small-size boxes (like *My Word!* and *Gold Digger*), possibly at a greatly reduced cost.

There are 200 quiz cards in the deck, with a question on both sides (the game even thoughtfully includes a divider card to keep previously asked questions separate from the fresh quizzes). The game is a party game -- or so the top-end 10 player limit would suggest -- but the scoring system seems to keep the number of cards needed for play fairly stable. Nonetheless, a few supplemental card sets like those for *Apples to Apples* would be a welcome sight in any upcoming releases announcements. The questions themselves appear to be designed to provoke more discussion than decision. There are a number of "What percentage of . . .?" questions only a statistician could love, and many obscure bits of information that earn the name "trivia."

By offering such questions, Out of the Box Publishing keeps up that level of player interaction that their more mechanically intellectual properties have fostered so handily. Even the trivia provides more trivia on each card in case the arguments didn't get heated enough.

While not as surprisingly clever as some of the items on the Out of the Box manifest, *Michael Feldman's Whad'Ya Know?* is still a good variation on the umpteen iterations of *Trivial Pursuit* and friends. It adds strategy and player communication to the venerated trivia genre, and even at its inflated price it does so for less than the seemingly standardized \$30-plus price tags on typical party games.

--Andy Vetromile

Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Big Threats Don't Wait Their Turn

In a lot of cases, I suspect that GMs -- myself included -- make things too easy on players. And a lot of this, at least as far as my perceptions go, has to do with my childhood naiveté about our President of this fair country. (I also find myself drifting back to those simpler times of civic thought as I consider that it's another eight months before our country's upcoming election, now in its 40th month of campaigning.)

Anyway, as a kid, I was fairly interested in the news. And I'd hear about some big event or another -- for example, I think there was some kind of crisis in the Middle East when I was a child -- and I'd wonder, "Why doesn't our president try to solve that problem?" And the next night there would be another crisis (unrest in some other country), and I'd think, "Why doesn't our president solve that problem, too?" And so on.

It took me many years to realize that, really, it's a big world . . . and there are *lots* of crises. And even if the President wanted to try tackling all the big problems of the world (the wisdom of which is laughable itself), there simply isn't enough time; if he takes a few days to attend some "Stop Venutian Robots" conference, then that's a few days he's not tackling the "Peruvian Mutant Rat" problem. And so on. Assuming an inhumanly full working schedule, he could only work a maximum of 1,461 days in his term. There are simply too many things going on for the President to try to solve them all.

In looking over my notes and thinking back to past adventures, I realize that the universe is often too kind and considerate. On both a macro and micro level, heroes tend to face difficulties in a nice, linear order. Once they solve Plot Point 1, things move orderly to Plot Point 2, with a possible junction to Plot Point 3 or 4. The seeds for Adventure C are sown in Adventures A and B, and so on. But not only is it possible for more than one thing to go on, it's likely. (At present I've got two weeks to juggle three *Pyramid* issues, two seekret projects, two freelance deadlines, two plays, a "radio" group, my Day Job, and an out-of-town excursion. I am, in a word, near-panic.)

Now, I've talked about complications on a [micro level](#) before; the heroes need to choose between, say, a loved one in a burning building or capturing the Bad Guy before he escapes. But it also applies on a macro level; sure, it's bad if the Forces of Chaos have a big, elaborate plot, but it's even *worse* when the Legions of Order and the Agents of Nihilism also have their machinations proceeding apace. And the legendary realistic wargame *Fortress America* chillingly presaged a nation beset by . . . ummm . . . yellow pieces, blue pieces, and red pieces. I think Saddam Hussein, was involved too. *Fortress America* was also uncannily accurate in its prediction that, no matter how bleak and dark things get, we won't be bothered by Canada.

A lot of game worlds establish multiple threats, but I've seldom seen an individual campaign that took advantage of these multiple threats at the same time; the only one that actively encouraged it that I can recall was *Torg*. I suspect there are a number of reasons behind this. First, ramping up the heat from multiple fronts presumes a campaign that's going to run for a *looooooong* time; it's not terribly satisfying to create four different grandiose threats, only to have the campaign fall apart two adventures later. Second, such a campaign may become as bleak as the real world seems at times; if the world is nothing but an unending procession of problems, only some of which can be solved, it's possible to lose interest; after all, most gamers roleplay to *escape* the confines of the real world.

Such a campaign also requires extensive notes (certainly better than I can [usually manage](#)); after all, if the world is going to appear dynamic and active, then there needs to be an actual progression of plots and events, *especially* against those threats the PCs don't bother with.

And, finally, the heroes may simply not *care* about multiple threats. This is especially true if the players aren't given much control over what kind of missions they tackle next; what difference does it make if rubber-suited monsters, nanites, and ninja are all a threat in the city, if the heroes' involvement to the Anti-Ninja Task Force precludes their choosing which threat they want to tackle?

So let's tackle these in order, shall we?

There obviously isn't much you can do about the length of the campaign, outside of everyone who is part of the game being honest when it comes to the level of commitment they're going to put into it. In my experience, I note that most campaigns I've been involved with have been pretty polar; they either fall apart after two or three sessions (or else it was a [miniseries](#) designed to last that long), or else they go on for a year or more. In general I'd recommend that GMs interested in having multiple threats should avoid turning up the heat *too* much for the first few sessions, until everyone is sure that it's going to be a long-running campaign.

While it's true that a gaming campaign with too many complications *could* become bleak, it doesn't have to. In general I'd point out that most game worlds have other groups that seek to counteract threats; if the heroes can't tackle a problem themselves, then someone else can pick up the slack, at least for *really* big threats. But in most of my campaigns I have an unwritten rule that the heroes will generally do a better job than NPCs . . . not unlike most "automation" buttons in computer strategy games. And if the GM can make the game world more open and available to the heroes, then they can tailor the campaign to their own interests . . . thus negating any ennui of being in a game universe too much like the real world.

Taking comprehensive enough notes can be a problem, and I'm certainly not the right person to ask for advice in that regard. However, I will point out that an easy bit of advice is to create [timelines](#) for each of the major factions; by knowing how the game world will advance (without the heroes' involvement, of course), it's easy to drop hints about what the various groups are doing, and what the consequences of the heroes' actions or noninvolvement will be. It might also be worthwhile to make three timelines for each faction: an "optimistic" one, where things go exactly as they might like; a "baseline" one, where their setbacks and fortune tend to cancel each other out; and a "pessimistic" one, where the faction has been dealt setbacks, either by the PCs or other factions. If you start at the "baseline" timeline, then you can toggle back or forth to the others as the heroes get involved (or get others involved).

Now, how can a GM get the heroes involved and emotionally invested in multiple threats? The answer to that is simple, and is the same as the micro level; make sure the heroes have some control and options. In the same way heroes in a crisis might choose between maneuvering to an explosion across town or continuing to investigate their current crime scene, so too should the players have some kind of choice regarding what threat they want to tackle next.

In some campaigns this is easy. If the PCs are a roaming band of heroes, either on the back of a horse or in a starship, then they're free to choose what threat they want to tackle next. But some game worlds make it difficult to accommodate such freedom, especially if the heroes work directly for an agency or have similar duties. In a lot of campaigns it's easy to tweak the rules and make the heroes "special," somehow. For example, *In Nomine* assumes that the PCs are distinguished, and thus report to their archangel or demon prince superiors directly. And while a space opera campaign might revolve around a Space Fleet that typically assigns missions to its ships, it might also allow a limited number of ships *<koff koff> the heroes' <koff koff>* to operate outside the bounds of the normal bureaucracy.

As another option, however, it might be possible to structure a campaign so that the players participate as both agents *and* those making the decisions. The advice I offered before about giving players [multiple characters](#) can apply here. What if the PCs are playing not only a band of Questing Knights in *Fading Suns*, but also the high-level government officials and diplomats that assign those missions in the first place? Parts of the campaign can resemble a traditional squad-level action-packed adventure, with the PCs dealing with individual crises, while other parts would show the interactions, decisions, and politicking that are behind what crises to tackle. It could be akin to *Mission: Impossible* meets *The West Wing*.

And everyone knows that *The West Wing* is more fun than many bits of the real world . . . such as presidential elections.

--Steven Marsh

Dragon Planet: Part One -- The Trade of Kings

A GURPS Space Adventure

by Stephen Dedman

For this adventure, the GM will need the *GURPS Basic Set*, *GURPS Compendium I* and *II*, *GURPS Space Third Edition*, and *GURPS Ultra-Tech*. *GURPS Robots*, *GURPS Ultra-Tech 2*, *GURPS Biotech*, and *GURPS Vehicles* may be useful, but are not essential. The adventure is designed for 100-point characters and set in the TL10 universe described in *GURPS Space* (p. S132), but can easily be adapted to any *Space* campaign, including the *GURPS Traveller* universe, or to a *Supers* or *Time Travel* (Alternate Worlds) adventure.

The PCs should, between them, have the skills needed to crew a small starship, including Pilot, Astrogation, Engineering, Mechanic, and Gunner. Other useful skills include Free Fall, Vacc Suit, Tactics, Fast-Talk, Survival, and, of course, combat and medical skills.

A House Divided

The adventure begins with the player characters on Nangodai, a frontier world dependent on the black market for its economic survival.

Nangodai was a promising and populous agricultural world until a mutated virus began killing off its imported crops and the animals that ate them. Left with barely enough food to feed its own people, and prohibited from exporting any biological material for fear of exporting the disease, Nangodaian farmers began looking for other sources of income. The world had little mineral wealth or strategic value, but it could offer land cheaply to people who could afford to import food and luxuries. Soon, many successful criminals owned estates there, and the world's black market was notorious across the frontier. Nangodai survives on docking fees from pirate and smuggler vessels, and high sales taxes on hotels, restaurants, and other businesses. It's one place where almost anything can be bought and sold, which is presumably why the PCs are there.

Shortly after arriving on Nangodai, the heroes will meet Sergeant Vijay Singh. Singh is nominally a vice cop: he spends most of his on-duty hours making sure that Turaimugan's brothels are safe and don't cheat their customer's too outrageously, and half his off-duty hours protecting visiting criminals from bounty-hunters and assassins. He's old enough to remember Nangodai's more law-abiding days, and when he hears that one brothel has imported slaves, he decides that this is taking tolerance too far. He asks a male PC to visit the brothel, the Perfumed Garden, and ask for Astrid.

According to the rumors Singh has heard, Astrid is a pale-skinned, blue-eyed slave from Ahto, a restricted world. He instructs the PC that if the madam offers him another girl, he should insist on a natural blond with fair skin (all native Nangodaian are brown-skinned, dark-haired, and dark-eyed). Singh, a fair judge of character, will choose a PC who he thinks he can trust -- and also one that won't arouse much suspicion in a moderately expensive brothel (preferably one with Lecherousness, average or worse appearance, and Streetwise at 10+). He will also ask him to carry a pen with a built-in digital mini-camera to take some pictures of the girl, and an attache case which contains a concealed bioscanner. As long as he comes back with useable pictures and data, the vice squad will pay the Perfumed Garden's extravagant fees.

The Perfumed Garden is one of the most expensive of Turaimugan's many brothels; the exterior, foyer and corridors look more like a small but classy hotel, and all of the women have attractive or better appearance (most of them bodysculpted). If the madam has a poor or better reaction to the PC, she will show him all the Perfumed Garden's available women -- including Astrid and Emily -- but warn him that the "imports" are twice as expensive as the locals. On a bad or worse reaction, she will be suspicious, and will not show him any of the Ahtoan women, and deny any

knowledge of them.

Photographing the girl with the pen-camera will require a roll on Photography/TL10 or default at +1: Singh will encourage the PC to take as many photos (by clicking the top of the pen) as possible. The madam will insist on searching the attache case before letting the PC carry it into the bedroom: fortunately, the bioscanner is well concealed, and Singh has thoughtfully filled the case with women's clothing. The bioscanner is pre-programmed; all the investigator has to do is remember to press a button.

The scan and photos will confirm that Astrid exists and is not a robot; a roll on Physiology/TL10 or Forensics/TL10 will confirm that her bioscan is consistent with her coming from the low-tech, low-iron Ahto. Once he's established this, Singh will ask the party if they'd like to join in on a raid on the brothel: he's already blown his budget by sending a PC in undercover, but he can offer them the use of a police safe-house or a police car for the duration of their stay.

Raiders will be equipped with stunners, Light Clamshell Cuirasses (DR 30), and Light Infantry Helmets (DR 25) and visors (PD 2, DR 8): Singh will allow the heroes to wear their own armor, but not weapons (PCs who want to carry concealed weapons will have to rely on their Holdout skill). The three largest party members will be assigned the job of securing the entrance, the cloakroom (mostly weapons storage), and the fire escape, while Singh and the others search the premises.

Most of the brothel's staff and clients are unarmed and will put up no resistance, except for the madam (who Singh will arrest after he finds the slaves) and the bouncer. Once he has the madam and the slaves, Singh will apologize to the clients for the disruption, and he and the heroes will leave.

Forbidden Planet

Shortly before the PCs leave Nangodai, they will receive a call from Singh, who will say that he's taking a leave of absence from the police and thinking of going offworld; could he book passage on their ship?

If they agree to meet him, Singh will explain that he's been suspended because of his unauthorized raid on the brothel. He will also say that he's established that three of the women there -- Astrid, Emily, and Ulla -- were indeed kidnapped from Ahto, and all told the same story. A group of slavers, the Dragonlords, first came to their islands a few months ago, and announced that they would be taking an annual tribute of the seven most attractive young women. Villages that didn't cooperate were burned. After these three women selected, someone gave them a sleeping potion, and when they woke up, they were naked in a strangely clean and well-lit room, which Singh suspects was a medical clinic. They were then auctioned, and the madam bought the three of them. They don't know what happened to the other women, or who the Dragonlords are.

Ahto (Singh tells the PCs) is a restricted world; there's a research center there, presumably studying the marine life, but scientists are the only people permitted to stay there. It was colonized by people from Earth who wanted to live a medieval lifestyle, and any high-tech items are forbidden: the researchers are supposed to call the Patrol if any unauthorized ships land on the world. Slavery and abduction, Singh adds sourly, are also forbidden. He wants to know what's going on, and asks the heroes to take him to Ahto. According to the files, the research base has a landing strip -- at least, it does during low tide -- and he can pay standard passage.

If the PCs ask Singh what he intends to do on Ahto, he will reply that he hopes to find out why the Patrol hasn't been able to stop the abductions, and he won't know what to do next until he has an answer to that question.

If the heroes don't agree to take Singh to Ahto, or to go there themselves, the adventure is over. If they do, the first sign that something is wrong will be obvious within a few hours of their arrival in the system: though the beacon from the research station can be detected with a roll on Electronics Operation (Communications or Sensors) at +2, there is no other reply to the party's communications.

Ahto's useable land is limited to a small group of volcanic islands near the equator. Most other islands, except those under the ice-caps, are underwater for at least a few hours a day because of Ahto's extremely high tides. Even the

landing strip at the research center (treat as a Class I starport) is underwater for all but two to three hours each night, and the sealed surface is only 150 by 100 yards. The automated beacon broadcasts the tide table, announces when it's safe to land, and plots a flight plan from the north (so the ship won't have to fly over the other islands).

If they land at the Mount Aramis research center, they will find it abandoned: not even a corpse remains. The center is a small, high stone tower atop an island roughly a mile long at low tide, and half as wide. The building is designed to resemble a small monastery, and everything in the gatehouse and most other rooms is either of TL3 manufacture or a well-done TL10 fake . . . but carefully disguised solar panels provide power for a microframe computer, hidden surveillance cameras, a Planetology lab, a large vapor canteen, a long-range communicator, a clothing fabricator, a gourmet food processor, a diagnosis table, and an automedic. All of these ultra-tech items are either well disguised (such as the diagnosis table) or hidden in inner rooms protected by doorwards; the windows of these rooms, if any, are opaque from the outside.

A quick search of the tower will reveal that it was designed to be home to up to 12 "monks" -- not all of them male. It seems to have been hurriedly abandoned and hastily picked over for valuables. There are no small, useful items left apart from a medical pouch and a refill for the automedic. There are also no weapons, except for some kitchen knives and a few other tools. The looters have also left a construction foam sprayer, a decontamination aerosol, 100 yards of 3/8" biphasic rope, eight monks' habits, and six two-man inflatable rafts (2 lbs, hold 480 lbs).

After looking around for half an hour, Singh will open his Forensics kit and examine some of the furniture, walls and floors: any PC with Forensics skill will be welcome to join him. A roll on Forensics at -4 will reveal traces of blood from at least five people, as well as burns that can only have been made by lasers. Psychometry will reveal much the same.

A roll on Electronics Operation (Sensors) will reveal that there are no spaceships in the system except for their own . . . but a mostly wooden sailing ship, roughly 35' high, is approaching the island from the south. At its current bearing and speed (about 8 mph) it should reach the island the next day.

Hacks

Most of the computer software, except for tidal and astronomical databases, are locked by passwords (Computer Hacking -6 to open). Anyone who gets into the computer systems will discover that several gigabytes of information were deleted four standard months ago, but data from some automated sensors are still being recorded. An hour's Computer Operation and a roll against Research skill will reveal that the day before the data deletions, sensors detected a 1,600-ton ship entering the system, approaching the planet, and entering an equatorial orbit. A few hours before the deletion, a 25-ton ship dropped from the larger ship, then landed near the research station. After the time of the deletion, there are no more manual entries onto the computer, only automatic ones from sensors in orbit, on the moon, or at various points in the ocean.

A calendar, undeleted, indicates that this happened 27 days after the last scheduled landing by a Survey Service ship, when five researchers left, three replacements arrived, and a backup copy of all data on the computer was made.

The 25-ton ship returned to the mothership two hours later, returned the next day, and made another 11 trips between the mothership and the island until the mothership left the system five weeks later. No other ship has entered the system between its leaving and the heroes' arrival. The calendar indicates that the next scheduled Survey Service ship is due in five weeks.

An inventory of supplies for the tower reveal that two stunners, a variable heavy laser pistol, an ice gun, two monowire survival knives, an environment suit, two wet suits, two artificial gills, two medium-range communicators, a GPS unit, a Pressure Tent (Base), an electronics mini tool kit, two multiscanners, a micro computer, a biosampler, and several small cameras are missing (the researchers' personal items are not listed).

The computer also has detailed maps of Ahto and a sketchy history (Area Knowledge-14), copies of the Great Book (illuminated Latin facsimile and plain-text English translation), and an Interpreter program with databases of Latin and

medieval French. All of these files were copied to disc a day after the deletion.

A Call for Help

Shortly after midday (high tide), the wooden ship will lower a rowboat, which will tie up to the island's jetty. A sailor in a bronze cuirass and pot-helm -- the first mate, Francisco -- will knock on the door, saying (in Latin) that they have wounded men in need of the monks' help.

If any of the PCs have stayed on Mount Aramis to meet the crew of the wooden ship, they can either open the door or a foot-square panel which will enable them to talk to the sailors without admitting them. The mate will react with suspicion to unfamiliar faces, and even more to any displays of high tech: like all devout Ahtoans, he believes the commandment in the Great Book that any weapon powered by anything more than the strength of a man's arms is a creation of the Devil (-1 to reaction rolls, with a further -1 for every TL above 4). However, because the men need healing that only the "monks" can provide, the party may be able to win him over with medical technology.

Of the eight surviving wounded men, three have severe burns, while the others have what look like normal medieval combat injuries: only examination of the wounds and/or their armor and a roll on Forensics will reveal that the one who has lost his right arm has been cut with a weapon sharper than TL3 could possibly produce -- probably a monowire-edged blade. All of the patients have infections caused either by the weapons or the TL4 medical aid they've received.

The three burns victims have taken 20-30 points of damage, and the man with the missing arm, 18 points; all are lucky to be alive. The others have taken 11-16 points, mostly cutting or impaling wounds.

As per the usual agreement with the "monks," Francisco provides a small amount of food and answers questions in exchange for the healing. Though suspicious of offworlders, he will be more helpful if the PCs can convince him that they didn't kill the monks.

Francisco's ship, the Nina, is the fastest in King Arvin's small navy. Two of the wounded men are Arvin's soldiers, the rest are villagers from Xyston. When a Dragonseer disappeared on Xyston, the Dragonlord retaliated by sending a squad of soldiers and his dragon to loot and burn a village a few miles from Arvin's castle. It was the first time Arvin (or Francisco) had seen the dragon, which killed at least 20 people, not counting the six who died on the voyage to Mount Aramis and the women and children who simply disappeared. A few of Arvin's soldiers tried fighting some of the Dragonlord's raiders, but they had better armor and swords than any of Arvin's men.

Francisco has never seen the Dragonlord himself; as far as he knows, the Dragonlord has never been to Xyston. The tales he's heard say that not only does he command a dragon, he is part dragon himself, more than eight feet tall, invulnerable to weapons, and able to hurl fireballs, cast spells, and see through the eyes of his messengers.

Francisco may be persuaded to take the party back to Xyston (good or better reaction, using modifiers above), but will not suggest it. He will not knowingly allow any ultra-tech equipment -- especially ranged weapons -- onto the ship, and if he finds any after they set sail, he'll throw them overboard. The monks' habits left in the quarters give +4 to Holdout.

Under the Sea

Although it doesn't come into play in this adventure, the research base on Mount Aramis has been set up to monitor a Precursor artifact located on the ocean floor, and all the data that has been deleted concerns this artifact. This is the real reason the planet is restricted.

The artifact, inside a force-field bubble, is a mystery because any probe -- manned or unmanned -- that gets within half a mile disappears completely. Whether it is disintegrated, transported, frozen, or travels in time is unknown, but it may be a convenient way of disposing of greedy villains who find a map of the artifact's location and foolishly try to retrieve it. It may also provide a hook to bring the party back to Ahto for another adventure.

Singh will not accompany the heroes to Xyston, preferring to remain at Mount Aramis and wait for someone to return, rather than risk corrupting the low-tech Ahtoan culture.

The voyage to Xyston aboard the roundship will take two hideously uncomfortable days (70 hours): the PCs will not be expected to help crew the ship, and when not suffering from sea-sickness, will be able to talk to the sailors to learn more about Ahto. None of them know any more about the Dragonlord or the dragon than Francisco does, though some may claim to: the Compulsive Lying disadvantage is rather more common on board than Truthfulness. The only ones to have seen the dragon at close quarters are the burns victims, two of whom swear they fired arrows that bounced from its scales: they describe it as being 30' to 36' long, with huge gray wings, and two great clawed feet that can crush a knight and a horse in a second. Its scaly hide is mostly gray-green, shading from pale sea-green to near black, and it flies faster than anything they've ever seen move.

The Seven Lands

Apart from Mount Aramis, there are only seven islands on Ahto large enough at high tide to be habitable (with tillable soil, permanent fresh water, etc.). In order of population, these are Spathos, Claidh, Falchio, Katara, Xyston, Kamax, and Bolo: their respective rulers are King Hadrian, King Matthias, Prince Kane, Queen Erika, King Arvin, Prince Odon, and Prince Camer. Kane has sworn allegiance to his uncle Matthias, Odon's son Nardo has married Hadrian's daughter Laura, and Camer is loyal to Erika. There is no overall monarch, because none of the kings has ever succeeded in building a large enough fleet to rule the other islands, and the other kings would ally against anyone who tried.

The Great Book of Ahto is a slightly modified Latin Christian Bible, with the Book of Revelations replaced by a third "testament" beginning with the Book of Rebirth, which tells of a second great flood that drowned the high-tech demon-haunted world. A few hundred people fled to the tops of mountains, which became the Seven Lands -- the ancestors of all living Ahtoans. While the Ahtoans have legends of dragons (and stranger monsters), no-one alive remembers seeing one before the Dragonlord first came to Claidh, and everyone assumed they were extinct and that the stories date back to before the flood.

Ahto has no native land animals and only a few shore plants. While the sailors believe (or claim to believe) in great sea-monsters, the most frightening any have ever seen are sea-wraiths, translucent white squid-like creatures which occasionally grow to human size. (Sea-wraiths, which have IQ 5-7, are also the official explanation for Ahto's Restricted status).

The native dialects of Ahto defaults to the campaign common tongue (English, Standard, Universal, etc.) and sometimes each other at -1; high-status individuals also speak medieval French, and the educated (literate) and well-traveled speak Latin. Because metal is scarce and valuable in the Seven Lands, most coins are copper: a copper farthing (.50c) is about the size of a thick dime, with a hole in the center; 400 weigh a pound. The penny (\$2) is about the size of a quarter, also pierced with a hole; 100 weigh a pound. Sailors rarely see silver florins (\$48), much less golden royals (\$960). If the PCs need money and haven't brought anything they can sell, they can try gambling (dice) with the sailors, or other ways of raising money in Port Luisa.

The Nina will moor in Port Luisa, capital of Xyston, which is a town of about 600 people, most of whom work in either the fishing fleet or King Arvin's small castle. Like most Ahtoan towns, Port Luisa is mostly built of stone, brick, and concrete, with thatched or slate roofs: hardwood and iron are precious, and only used when nothing else will do. The streets and people are not quite as filthy as in real medieval towns -- the Great Book contains rules on antisepsis, sanitation, dental hygiene, etc.; treat Ahtoan medical skills as TL5 -- but they smell much worse than the heroes will be used to. It's early winter; temperatures range from highs of around 40° to night-time lows of about 20°. Light rain is common during the day, while nights are dry but cloudy.

Finding information about the Dragonlord in town will be difficult: the only townspeople who know any more than the sailors are the king, his knights, and the Dragonseer.

Dragonseers, Francisco will tell the heroes, are Ahtoans trusted to deliver messages to and from the Dragonlord: they

also serve as tax-collectors and spies. One or two live in each palace, usually sitting beside the throne, but occasionally they have to travel to outlying villages, usually accompanied by a few veteran soldiers.

If Arvin's major-domo has a good or better reaction to the PCs, he will arrange a brief audience with the king. King Arvin is sure that the Dragonlord must have allied himself with another ruler in exchange for a safe haven (true), and he believes that it's King Matthias (incorrect). The Dragonseer and some sailors from other ships in Port Luisa know that the Dragonlord has a refuge in Kamax, but they don't know whether it's the only one, or where the dragon hides. No-one else in Xyston has any better information on the Dragonlord or dragon's whereabouts.

One result of meeting with Arvin is that the Dragonlord will become aware of the party much sooner even if the Dragonseer is not present, as the Dragonlord has bugged the throne room.

If the PCs' ship is in a geostationary orbit above the Seven Lands, it can try scanning for the dragon. There's a 1/6 chance on any night that the dragon will emerge from its cave; if so, it can be detected with passive sensors with an Electronics Operation (Sensors) roll at -5. (From above, the dragon is well camouflaged against either the sea or the forests, and it also takes advantage of cloud cover.) Tracking it back to Bishop Rock will take 1d+1 successful rolls: a failure means the dragon has disappeared and can only be detected again with a critical success.

If the heroes want to lure the dragon and/or Dragonlord out of hiding, they can do so with an obvious display of ultra-tech capability, or an attack on a Dragonseer: combining the two would be even more effective, but both would be firmly discouraged by most Ahtoans, especially those who've seen evidence of the dragon's wrath (such as Arvin and Francisco). Disapproval will probably take the form of an angry mob armed with farming implements, or a knight and a squad of veterans.

Enter the Dragon

Three local days after they come to Ahto, two things will happen. A Dragon Knight, Thanos Flint, will arrive at Port Luisa on a roundship (the Gudrun) to investigate the disappearance of the Dragonseer (he will also bring the gear for a new Dragonseer, as well as a squad of armsmen). A few hours later, another roundship (the Kira) will arrive at Mount Aramis with another patient -- this one a young woman, Giselle, who claims to have escaped from the dragon's lair.

If the PCs are in Xyston and have done anything to draw attention to themselves, Flint will come looking for them -- backed up by a Dragonseer and one veteran soldier for each PC on the island. Flint's intention is to capture two heroes for interrogation -- preferably attractive women -- and kill the others. The party may try to hide or run, but Flint carries a multiscanner (disguised in a hollowed-out book) to try to locate any power cells, chemical slugthrowers, genetically modified humans, etc. Eventually, the PCs will probably have to fight Flint, but they may be able to choose the time and place.

Giselle will be unconscious when the Kira arrives at Mount Aramis, and is at -11 HT and 0 ST, but when she revives, she will tell the heroes where the Dragonlord and his knights take their female captives: Bishop Rock, a natural stone tower off the coast of Kamax, near Prince Odon's castle at Mornharbor. She will describe the tower, her captors, and her escape, as best she can: see Part II.

If the PCs have left Mount Aramis but Singh remains there, he will relay this information to them (if they've remembered to take communicators, of course). If they take no other action, the Gudrun will arrive at Mount Aramis four local days later, and Flint will demand entry. If they don't open the door (2" wood reinforced with bronze: DR 4, 26 hit points), Flint's men will begin hacking it down with boarding axes. His boarding party consists of two knights with monowire-edged thrusting broadswords and BPC armor, and eight veterans (two with boarding axes): though not expecting much resistance, Flint will fight to the death rather than fall back. If Flint and the knights are defeated, the surviving veterans will retreat to the boat and try to escape.

If Flint is defeated, the heroes will notice that his arms and back are heavily tattooed (including a crucifix on his back and a map of Treasure Island on one buttock). If Singh or a PC with a Law Enforcement background examine the tattoos and Flint's face, they will recognize him as "Captain" Thanos Flint, a lieutenant of Malik Dragunov, a criminal

so notorious that he isn't even welcome on Nangodai. The Special Justice Group is offering a \$25,000 reward for Flint alive (10% for proof of his death); the reward for Dragunov is \$100,000. And Dragunov, at 8' tall, fits the description they've heard of the Dragonlord. This is enough to overcome Singh's reluctance to leave Mount Aramis, and he asks the PCs if they'd like to accompany him on an attack on Bishop Rock.

End of Part One . . .

Nangodai (Suuriyan I)

Planet type: Terrestrial

Diameter 5,600 mi.

Density 6.7

Gravity .86

Composition: High-Iron

Axial tilt 15°

Seasonal Variation: Minor

Length of Day: 35 hours

Length of Year: .23 Earth years (57.6 local days).

Atmosphere: Pressure standard (.88)

Type and Composition: 78% Nitrogen, 20% Oxygen (terraformed)

Climate: Earth-normal

Temperatures at 30° Latitude: Low 59°; Average 80°; High 101°

Surface Water: 55%

Humidity: 35%

Primary terrain: Rough

Mineral Resources: Gems/Crystals absent

Rare Minerals absent

Radioactives ample

Heavy Metals plentiful

Industrial Metals ample

Light Metals scarce

Organics plentiful

No moons

Biosphere: Dominant life form: imported terraforming fauna, marine animals, crops, humans, domestic animals.

Civilization: Population 48,000 (PR 4)

Tech Level: 10

Control Rating: 2

Society: Sanctuary, with figurehead Representative Democracy

Starports: Class II at Turaimugan

Installations: Black market; Pirate base.

Economic/Production: Service.

Star Name: Suuriyan

Type: K7V (Dim Orange Main Sequence)

Biozone: 0.5 -- 0.6

Inner Limit: 0.0

Number of Planets: 4

Planet	Orbit	Distance	Type	Diameter	Density	Gravity	Atmosphere	Notes
(Empty orbit)	1	.3						

Nangodai	2	.6	Detailed above					
Chakaram	3	.9	Gas Giant	84,000	1.5	2.88	Hydrogen	14 moons, 7 moonlets
Aniyuuku	4	1.5	Rockball	6,600	3	.45	None	1 moonlet
Aisaana	5	2.7	Hostile ter	4,200	6.5	.61	Thin	HF

Ahto (Epsilon Catus II)

Planet type: Terrestrial

Diameter: 8,800 mi.

Density: 4.5

Gravity: .9

Composition: Low-Iron

Axial tilt: 28deg;

Seasonal Variation: Minor

Length of Day: 28.7 hours

Length of Year: 3.96 Earth years (1209.5 local days).

Atmosphere: Pressure thin (.66)

Type and Composition: 77% Nitrogen, 21% Oxygen

Climate: Chilly

Temperatures at 30° Latitude: Low & 22deg;; Average 44°; High 66°

Surface Water: 97%

Humidity: 59%

Primary terrain: Mountainous islands

Mineral Resources: Gems/Crystals scarce

Rare Minerals absent

Radioactives absent

Heavy Metals scarce

Industrial Metals scarce

Light Metals ample

Organics ample

1 large moon (Waterdwarf)

Biosphere: Dominant life forms: marine plants and animals, imported crops, humans, domestic animals.

Civilization: Population 7,900 (PR 3)

Tech Level: 4

Control Rating: 4

Society: Factionalized Feudal

Starports: Class I at Mount Aramis

Installations: Government research station; Nature Preserve.

Economic/Production: None.

Note: Restricted (potential sapient marine lifeforms). TL3 enclave.

Star Name: Epsilon Catus II

Type: G2V (Bright yellow main sequence)

Biozone: 0.8 -- 1.2

Inner Limit: 0.0

Number of Planets: 5

Planet	Orbit	Distance	Type	Diameter	Density	Gravity	Atmosphere	Notes
Kiputytto	1	.6	Hostile ter	5,900	6.9	.93	CO	
(empty)	2	.9						

orbit)								
Ahto	3	1.2	Detailed above					
(empty orbit)	4	3						
Asteroid belt	5	10.2						
Kullervo	6	19.8	Iceball	3,100	2.2	.15	None	
Tuoni	7	39	Gas giant	74,000	2.5	4.24	Hydrogen	12 moons, 7 moonlets
Tuonetar	8	77.2	Gas giant	68,000	2	3.11	Hydrogen	11 moons, 1 moonlet
Loviatar	9	154.2	Iceball	8,600	3.6	.71	None	
Asteroid belt	10	307.8						
Asteroid belt	11	615						

Cast

Sergeant Vijay Singh

Singh comes from a long line of cops, and is as honest a cop as Nangodaian society will tolerate. He can and will ignore "victimless" crimes as required (especially when they're committed by his fellow cops), but never violent ones. He is unusually scrupulous about gathering evidence and has never framed a suspect, but he's not an angel: he and his fellow cops have "executed" some criminals rather than see them jump bail and escape offworld.

Age 45. Dark brown complexion, long black hair under blue turban (DR 1), neatly trimmed black beard and mustache, dark brown eyes; 6'1", 150 lbs.

ST 12; DX 10; IQ 12; HT 12. Move 5. Native gravity .86 G.

Advantages: Charisma/1; High Pain Threshold; Legal Enforcement Powers [10]; Panimmunity; Reputation (honest cop, +1 to his community, recognized on 7 or less).

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Cop); Dependents (Generic: Ex-wife, children and large family, appear on 6 or less); Disciplines of Faith (Sikh); Duty; Secret (-20); Sense of Duty (fellow cops and innocent people).

Quirks: Coffee addict; Runs a mile every morning, even if it's laps of a starship corridor; Mild thalassaphobia; Dreams of joining the SJG.

Skills: Administration-11; Beam Weapons/TL10 (Blaster, Neural)-14, (Stunner)-13; Breath Control-10; Broadsword-10; Criminology-10; Diplomacy-10; Detect Lies-10; Driving (Car)-11; First-Aid/TL10-11; Forensics/TL10-11; Guns/TL10 (Tangler)-13; Interrogation-11; Judo-10; Karate-10; Law-11; Leadership-10; Professional Skill (Law Enforcement)-13; Research-11; Running-12; Shield-9; Shortsword-12; Streetwise-11.

Maneuvers: Arm Lock-12; Elbow Strike-10; Kicking-9; Knee Strike-10; Spin Kick-9.

Gear: Tight-Beam Blaster Pistol with Neural setting; Neurolash I; Electronic handcuffs; Medium communicator; Pocket pack; Light clamshell cuirass; Nightshades; Light infantry helmet; boots; uniform. Off-duty, wears leather jacket over pants, shirt, and light monocrys vest, and carries sonic stinger. His luggage includes his police equipment and a Criminology kit.

Ahtoan slaves

Most of the Ahtoan women the Dragonlord has abducted and used as slaves are Status 0 from farms or fishing

villages. All are fair-skinned. Astrid is 18, golden-haired, blue-eyed, 5'7" and 130 lbs. Emily is 16, auburn-haired, green-eyed, 5'7" and 130 lbs. Ulla is 17, black-haired, green-eyed, 5'6" and 120 lbs.

Giselle is 19, with strawberry blond hair and gray eyes; 5'3" and 125 lbs. The daughter of a Mornharbor tavern-keeper, she has learned some skills from her clients, that helped her to escape -- including Acrobatics-10; Acting-10; Holdout-10; Pickpocket-10; and Stealth-11.

ST 10; DX 12; IQ 10; HT 12. Move 6

Advantages: Beautiful or Very Beautiful.

Disadvantages: Illiteracy; Primitive (TL3). The three rescued from the Perfumed Garden -- Astrid, Emily and Ulla -- also have Addiction (Barbiturates).

Skills: Agronomy/TL3, Animal Handling or Fishing-10; Area Knowledge (Ahto)-10; Brawling-12; Cooking-10; Language (Standard)-10; Merchant-9; Running-12; Sex-Appeal-11; Swimming-10.

Madam

Vina Karup once had ambitions to become an actress and singer, but when Nangodai's economy collapsed, she found herself looking for a way to make a living. She became an exotic dancer, but her acting skills and a knack for business helped her rise through the profession. She has been the Madam at the Perfumed Garden for 13 years.

52 years old. Olive complexion, off-the-shelf good looks, dark eyes, black hair. 5'5", 125 lbs.

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

Advantages: Attractive appearance (bodysculpted); Fashion Sense; Implant communicator; Longevity; Panimmunity; Voice; Wealth (Comfortable).

Disadvantages: Callous; Greed; Intolerance (Men); Sterile.

Quirks: Mild necrophobia; Secretly gives money to the arts; Thinks gardening is better than sex; Sells drugs, but never uses them.

Skills: Accounting/TL10-12; Acting-13; Administration-11; Advertising/TL10-13; Appreciate Beauty-10; Area Knowledge (Turaimugan)-13; Bard-13; Beam Weapons/TL10 (Neural)-14; Brawling-12; Carousing-12; Courtesan-13; Dancing-12; Detect Lies-11; Diplomacy-12; Erotic Art-12; First Aid/TL10-12; Flower Arranging-12; Gardening-13; Holdout-12; Judo-12; Knife-12; Merchant-14; Poisons/TL10-10; Politics-12; Psychology-11; Running-10; Savoir-Faire-14; Scrounging-12; Sex-Appeal-14; Singing-13; Streetwise-14; Whip-11.

Gear: Nerve Pistol with Type I and II settings, in custom concealed holster; tailored middle-class medium arachnoweave suit (PD 2, DR 8; PD 1, DR 2 vs impaling, 2.5 lbs); neuronc handcuffs (on belt); pheromone spray; boots.

Bouncer

Chander, the brothel's bouncer, is the madam's nephew; he is absolutely loyal to her, and very protective of the women.

22 years old. Scarred dark brown face; bald, with black mustache and goatee; dark brown eyes; 5'11", 160 lbs. Native gravity .86 G.

ST 13; DX 13; IQ 9; HT 11. Move 6.

Advantages: High Pain Threshold; Toughness/1 [10].

Disadvantages: Bully; Proud; Sense of Duty (Perfumed Garden employees); Status -1; Unattractive.

Skills: Beam Weapons/TL10 (Sonic)-13; Boxing-14; Filch-11; Intimidation-11; Karate-15; Knife-13; Running-9 [0.5]; Survival (Urban)-9 [1]; Wrestling-13.

Maneuvers: Arm Lock-13; Back Kick-14; Choke Hold-12; Elbow Strike-14; Head Lock-10; Hit Location (Karate)-13; Jab-11; Jump Kick-14; Kicking-15; Knee Strike-15; Neck Snap-11; Roundhouse Punch-11; Spin Kick-15.

Gear: Stunner; Leather jacket over heavy monocrys vest; small balisong knife; hard shoes (+1 to kicking damage); sap gloves; jeans and shirt.

Francisco

Born poor and fatherless, and orphaned at six, Francisco has worked hard to become steersman and second mate of the Nina. He's respected by his men and liked by his captain, and now rarely leaves the ship except to attend church and visit taverns.

Age 42. Scarred, leathery face; short gray beard and hair; brown eyes. 5'10", 145 lbs. Native gravity .9 G.

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

Advantages: High Pain Threshold; Toughness (DR 1).

Disadvantages: Honesty; Primitive (TL 4); Sense of Duty (to ship and to Xyston); Unattractive.

Quirks: Always polite to women; Incompetence (Sex-Appeal); Dislikes horses; Speaks to cats in Latin and believes they understand it; Doesn't gamble.

Skills: Bard-10; Brawling-12; Broadsword-13; Detect Lies-11; Intimidation-10; Knife-12; Languages (English)-11, (Latin)-9; Leadership-10; Merchant-10; Meteorology/TL3-12; Navitation/TL3-12; Savoir-Faire-10; Scrounging-12; Seamanship/TL3-14; Shiphandling/TL3-13; Survival (Island)-11; Swimming-10.

Gear: Cheap thrusting broadsword; small shield; small knife; Bronze cuirass; Bronze Pot-Helm; Greaves; Boots; Gauntlets; belt pouch with 1d pennies and 2d farthings.

Thanos Flint, Dragon Knight

"Captain" Thanos Flint has been one of Malik Dragunov's most trusted associates for half his life, and has nearly as bad a reputation as a monster. When Dragunov's empire started to collapse, Flint decided to join him in his scheme to take over Ahto and export slaves to Nangodai, which enables him to indulge his sadistic tastes on a large harem of young women.

Age 49. Weathered complexion, graying brown hair, hazel eyes, heavily tattooed arms and back; 5'11", 165 lbs. Native gravity 1 G.

ST 13; DX 12; IQ 12; HT 12. Move 6.

Advantages: Combat Reflexes; G-Experience; High Pain Threshold; Panimmunity.

Disadvantages: Bully; Enemy (Special Justice Group, appears on 6 or less); Overconfidence; Pirate's Code of Honor; Reputation, -3 to Law Enforcement professionals and Bounty Hunters, recognized on 10 or less; Sadist.

Quirks: Loves stories and films of swashbuckling era; Sings when drunk; Intolerance (robots).

Skills: Astrogation/TL10-13; Beam Weapons/TL10 (Blaster, Neural)-16; Boating-11; Brawling-13; Broadsword-14; Detect Lies-10; Electronics Operation/TL10 (Sensors)-11; Fast-Draw (Sword)-13; Fast-Talk-12; First Aid/TL10-10; Free-Fall-12; Garrote-12; Gunner/TL10 (Missile Launcher)-14; Interrogation-13; Judo-12; Knife-13; Language (Standard)-12; Leadership-11; Navigation/TL10-12; Riding (Horse)-11; Piloting (Dracomech)-12; Savoir-Faire-11; Seamanship-11; Shortsword-13; Streetwise-13; Swimming-11; Tactics-10; Vacc Suit/TL10-12.

Gear: Fine Thrusting Broadsword with Monowire edge; Neurolash I; BPC Half Plate (PD 4, DR 29, 35 lbs) over Medium Arachnoweave suit (PD 2, DR 8; PD 1, DR 2 vs impaling, 2.5 lbs); Medium Communicator; IR contacts; small pouch with 1d royals, 2d florins, and 2d pennies.

Dragonseer

Dragonseers are the Dragonlord's spies, envoys, and tax-collectors. Dragunov and Flint recruits them from Ahto's underworld: most are former pimps and fences who worked as thieves or thugs in their younger days. Though they are well-paid and mostly live in the luxury and safety of Ahto's palaces, they are loyal to Dragunov as much from fear as from gratitude.

ST 11; DX 10; IQ 11; HT 11. Move 5.25

Advantages: Wealth (Comfortable or better).

Disadvantages: Duty; Greed or Lecherousness; Primitive (TL3).

Skills: Acting-10; Area Knowledge (Ahto)-12; Brawling-10; Detect Lies-11; Diplomacy-10; Fast-Talk-11; Intimidation-11; Interrogation-11; Knife-11; Languages (Standard)-11, (French, Latin)-9; Merchant-13; Poisons/TL3-10; Riding (Horse)-12; Running-9; Savoir-Faire-10; Shortsword-10; Stealth-11; Streetwise-12.

Gear: Decorated armbands with hidden one-shot gas tubes (produces a one-hex cloud: right contains paralysis gas, left nerve gas); Small knife; Leather jerkin (sleeveless) with light monocrys lining; Medium Communicator; Small pouch with 1d florins, 2d pennies; upper class clothing; boots.

Knights

ST 13; DX 10; IQ 10; HT 12. Move 5.5

Advantages: Combat Reflexes; High Pain Threshold; Status/2+; Wealth (Comfortable or better).

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Chivalric); Duty (to King or to Dragonlord, always on); Primitive (TL3).

Skills: Administration-10; Area Knowledge (Ahto)-10; Armory/TL3-10; Brawling-10; Broadsword-15; Fast-Draw (Sword)-12; Heraldry-11; Knife-12; Languages (French)-10, (Standard)-9, (Latin)-8. Leadership-11; Riding (Horse)-13; Savoir-Faire-11; Tactics-11.

Gear: Good Thrusting Broadsword; Stiletto; Half Plate; Medium Shield; small pouch with 1d florins, and 2d pennies. Knights who have performed well in the service of the Dragonlord may have Monowire-edged broadswords and/or BPC armor.

Veterans

Every king has a few of these fighting commoners to serve as sentries or petty officers in the levies. They are not as well trained or equipped as Knights, but may have seen more combat. Every roundship will also have at least one Veteran, with arms and armor, in its crew.

ST 12; DX 10; IQ 10; HT 11. Move 5.25

Advantages: Combat Reflexes; High Pain Threshold.

Disadvantages: Duty (12 or less); Primitive (TL3); Semi-Literacy. Veterans chosen by the Dragonlord are likely to have disadvantages such as Bad Temper, Bloodlust, Greed or Lecherousness.

Skills: Axe/Mace-12; Brawling-12; Broadsword-14; Crossbow-13; Detect Lies-10; Fast-Draw (Sword)-12; Gunner/TL3 (Ballista or Catapult)-12; Knife-12; Language (Standard)-10; Leadership-9; Savoir-Faire-9; Scrounging-12; Stealth-10; Survival (Forest)-11; Tactics-8.

Gear: Cheap thrusting broadsword; small shield; small knife; TL2 Bronze cuirass (p. CII42), Helmet (p. CII40) and Greaves (p. CII46); Shoes; Gauntlets; Personal basics: if prepared for battle, they carry **ST 12** composite crossbows (3d+2 imp; see p. CII22) and quivers. The veterans on the Kira have BPC helmets (PD 3, DR 27, 2.75 lbs).

Recruits

These are the army's raw and green troops; most are young and fresh off the farm, and in any battle on Ahto, they outnumber veterans 10 to one. These are foot soldiers, but the template can also be used for villagers, young sailors, tavern brawlers, etc. Most Ahtoan archers will have similar statistics and equipment, with a longbow and quiver instead of a spear or axe, and Bow skill of 12-14.

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

Disadvantages: Duty (6 or less); Illiteracy; Poverty (Poor); Primitive (TL3).

Skills: Axe/Mace-11; Brawling-10; Knife-9; Language (Standard)-10; Running-8; Seamanship-9; Spear-10; Thrown Weapon (Axe or Spear)-10.

Gear: Spear or Axe; cheap small knife; Cloth armor; leather helm; shoes.

Different Callers of Cthulhu

by **Loki Carbis**

Looking at the inevitable fate of the Mythos Cultist, a sane person would have to ask why so many people find it such an attractive lifestyle. I mean, we're all familiar with totally bluggo foaming at the mouth nutsos, but that's just your plain vanilla Mythos Cultist. They can't *all* be mad, right? At very least, they can't all have started out mad. But what could induce a reasonable, intelligent person to devote themselves to the Outer Gods? Well, maybe they're just not all mad in the same way.

Individualizing the cultists your investigators encounter in this fashion will make them all stand out a little better, and prevent the boredom that can result from putting down one insane cultist after another.

This article looks at a few of the other reasons people might get involved with the Mythos, and which particular entities each type is likely to find themselves invoking. Also included under each heading are notes regarding type of activities each type gravitates to (read: plot hooks) and fictional examples of the type drawn from both Mythos and non-Mythos sources. The information here should be useful in almost any horror or conspiratorial game -- it is not limited to *Call of Cthulhu*.

The Criminal

There are those for whom worldly power isn't enough, or those willing to look outside the normal bounds for shortcuts to worldly power. These cultists tend to be among the most rational -- they think of themselves as businessmen making deals, and try not to think too hard about the deals they make and the things they make them with. At the end of the day, for these cultists, it's all about power. Their involvement with the Mythos provides them with ways to do what they want more easily, whether it's disposing of rivals (a Hunting Horror makes a great hit man) or merely becoming respected (or at least, feared) by those around them.

Criminals are very particular about who and what they work with; they want to know what's in it for them. Nyarlothotep is a common choice -- he's the most approachable and (by human standards) the most rational.

Examples:

- Tiger Transit, from *Delta Green: Countdown* (a borderline case that also qualifies as Political)
- Benny Solomon, from *Promethea* by Alan Moore and John H. Williams.
- Alex Abel and the New Inquisition, from *Unknown Armies* and *Lawyers, Guns and Money*
- The Nazi agents from *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*

The Jaded

Some people have had too much of pleasure, and even of pain. Their atrophied palates crave something even more exotic -- and all the better if it has a whiff or more of danger. Such people are among the most amoral of cultists, since they have often reached a point where the only thing that matters is the satisfaction of their own whims. Even power is more a means than an end, valued not for its own sake, but for its ability to make things happen. The Jaded tend to be wealthy and powerful members of society, sometimes even celebrities. As such, they engage in relatively little cult activity other than exceedingly decadent orgies. However, it is not unknown for a group of Jaded to stage live hunts for human prey, or even abduct innocents for their entertainment. Nearly any type of cultist can become Jaded if they survive long enough, but the Criminal is the most likely too. Entities likely to attract the worship of the Jaded include the King in Yellow, Hastur, and Shub-Niggurath. Also, the Jaded are prone to experiment with unusual sexual acts and drugs -- the potential connections to many of the groups in *Delta Green: Countdown* should be obvious.

Examples:

- Any character from *The Masque of the Red Death* by Edgar Allan Poe
- Most characters from the movie *Society*
- Most characters from *Coldheart Canyon* by Clive Barker

The Lost

Unknown to the modern world, the Lost are whole tribes or societies that have worshipped one or another of the Great Old Ones from time immemorial. Typically, they are devoted to one or another member of the Mythos to the exclusion of all others. Most servitor races fall into the category, especially the Deep Ones and the Tcho-Tchos. Most of them will be technologically inferior to modern society, although they are almost always superior in magical skill and might. Once such a tribe becomes less lost, they often become Political or Criminal, or both.

Almost any of the greater entities is a suitable object of worship for a group of Lost cultists. Occasionally, a lesser entity, such as a shoggoth or Deep One may find itself worshipped by such a group.

Examples:

- The native tribe in the original *King Kong*
- The Sand Dwellers and the Serpent Men
- The Morlocks from *The Uncanny X-Men* comics (not so much lost as rejected)

The Mad

The Mad are the classic variety of Cthulhu cultist; they're doing it for reasons no one would ever understand, and they won't stop unless you kill them. But the Mad don't always work together -- a deranged but spiritual serial killer might also be Mad. Nor are the mad always gibbering freaks. Sometimes they can be sophisticated, highly educated and perfectly capable of passing as normal in human society, at least for a while.

The Mad are the one type of cultist that could be worshipping anyone -- or anything. Since they are not rational, there is no need for any rational justification for their choices. What they get out of it is the divine ecstasy of communion with their (real or imagined) god.

Examples:

- John Doe, from the movie *Se7en*
- Jason Voorhees, from the *Friday the 13th* movies
- The Whateley family

The Political

Sometimes, a cult can be a secret society with other goals that has acquired a veneer of worship. Many of the native uprisings of the colonial era fell into this mould -- an explosive mixture of spirituality and nationalism. Although such groups have become less common in the modern era, there are still a few of them. For a political cultist, the worship of an entity is either an important part of their cultural heritage, or a symbol of their aspirations. (Those for whom it is a means to an end are classified as Criminal rather than Political in this schema.) Political cultists are the only kind who are idealists.

Which entities are worshipped will depend a lot on the cultural background of the group. Note that such groups will almost always be ethnically or religiously determined. In this, they are much like the Lost, except that they are a part of the modern world.

Examples:

- Majestic-12 from *Delta Green* (a borderline example that qualifies as Criminal too)
- The Skoptsi from *Delta Green: Countdown*
- The Congolese natives from *Than Curse The Darkness* by David Drake
- Tyler Durden, from either the book or the movie of *Fight Club* (Durden may actually be some sort of Mythos entity)

The Questing

The Questing are usually people who've had an experience with the Mythos but don't realize the true nature of their experience; they are a danger to themselves and everyone around them. In their maniacal desire to learn the truth, they may well become increasingly amoral. More than any other type of cultist, the Questing believe that knowledge is power, and are likely to deal with any entity who can lead them to greater knowledge, or read any tome, no matter how blasphemous or forbidden. (For this very reason, many of them become ghouls after reading "The Ghoul's Manuscript.") A Questing can show up nearly anywhere doing nearly anything so long as it is connected, however tenuously, to their quest for knowledge.

The Questing are not drawn to particular entities *per se*. Rather, they are drawn to the blasphemous tomes of forbidden lore, or the arcane reaches of science. The entities they get involved are thus whichever ones they find there.

Examples:

- Herbert West, Re-Animator.
- Fox Mulder from *The X-Files* (the very archetype of the modern Questing)
- Professor Challenger from *The Lost World* and other stories by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle
- Most characters in the *Hellraiser* movie series

The Rebellious

Usually young and not fully aware of what they're messing with, the Rebellious are generally clueless. The first successful summoning they do usually ends with whatever they've called up either killing or maddening them. The real danger posed by the Rebellious is more mundane. Since they often believe in all the gaudy ritual of the Hollywood version of black magic, they're likely to abduct young virgins for sacrificial rites. They also engage in blasphemous vandalism -- if you ever saw the Yellow Sign inexpertly spray-painted onto a subway wall, it was probably put there by one of the Rebellious. This type works better in more modern day games, not being quite so prevalent in the 1920s or 1930s. On the other hand, there are always places to find them: Weimar Germany in the twenties, or the USA during the Reconstruction, for example. Rebellious often mature into other types of cultist, especially Criminal, Political or Vengeful.

Entities favored by the Rebellious are the big names of the Mythos -- reputation rather than actual power or nature is what attracts the Rebellious. Cthulhu is the most likely object of worship, although Nyarlathotep has been known to amuse himself by toying with Rebellious cultists, often appearing as "Satan."

Examples:

- Jonathon, Andrew and Warren, the self-proclaimed "evil geniuses" from the sixth season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*
- The young witches from *The Craft*
- The fans of the Vampire Lestat, from Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*. (These fans would also qualify as Unknowing.)

The Unknowing

Among the most sympathetic of cultists, the Unknowing don't realize what they're doing. Maybe they're a new age cult that thinks Bast is a benevolent goddess. Maybe it's a single Unknowing with mental problems whose dementia inadvertently benefits the entities of the Mythos. Whatever it is about them, they're doomed, but not through any fault of their own. Indeed, Unknowing cultists can be allies of the investigators, or even members of the party: there's nothing stopping them from being heroes before they meet their tragic end.

Almost any entity will work for the Unknowing, so long as they do not realize the true nature of the entity. Nyarlothotep is an excellent choice for the role -- set-ups like this seem to appeal the beast's twisted sense of humor. Other likely candidates include Bast and Nodens.

Examples:

- Charles Dexter Ward
- Londo Mollari from *Babylon 5* (in the first two seasons; he later becomes Vengeful)
- Any character who welcomed the aliens in *Independence Day*

The Vengeful

Vengeful cultists are always interested primarily in the acquisition of power, with which they intend to smite their foes. They can be further divided into two types: Those who contact entities to make deals for power; and those who utilize servitor entities to strike at their enemies directly. The former tend to gravitate to Nyarlothotep, and to various imprisoned entities of the Mythos, many of whom will make such deals in order to effect their freedom. The latter most often avoid dealing with the Outer Gods and Great Old Ones, instead learning the various summonings and bindings they need to control various servitor creatures.

Examples:

- Sutter Kane, from *In The Mouth of Madness*
- Dr Anton Phibes, from the movie *The Abominable Dr Phibes*

Obviously, as some of the examples above show, these distinctions aren't hard and fast. Some cultists may fall into more than one category; Unknowing and Questing is a likely combination, for example. A Rebellious who survives their own foolishness may well become Vengeful or Mad. And nearly any cultist will eventually become Jaded after long enough in the service of the Mythos.

All That Slithers

The Snake and Serpent Toolkit for the *d20 System*

by Owen K.C. Stephens

*Author's Disclaimer: I am not a herpetologist. In regards to snakes I'm at best a slightly educated layman. While an effort has been made to produce accurate information regarding snakes, the focus of the article is to provide a toolkit for building interesting animals and monsters for **d20 System** games, rather than a primer on any real-world creatures.*

Snakes and serpents are mainstays of fantasy and adventure gaming. In mythology, snakes can represent knowledge, power, health, or rebirth. They can also represent death, evil, and deceit. In adventure fiction snakes are frequently the focus of major action scenes as dangerous predators in the wild or guardians of a temple's treasures. Unfortunately, in the core *d20 System* rules, snakes are represented by only two types (constricting and poisonous, with no differentiation between poison types) and a few sizes. While few snakes are actually venomous or constrictors, focus on these two types is understandable as they make the best foes. However, no allowances are made for spitting snakes, snakes with blinding strikes, or snakes that simply fall outside the norm.

This article allows a GM to custom-build snakes to fit his adventures. Familiarity with the basic rules of monster design and creation (as outlined in the 3.5 edition *MM*) is crucial, as issues like the die size of an animal's hit dice are not covered in this article.

While true snakes should fall into a realistic range of abilities in order to remain of the animal type (even strange snakes from lost civilizations or alien worlds), a snake-like magical creature (hereafter referred to as serpents) can also be designed using this toolkit. Serpents may also have other supernatural abilities (ice-based poison, mesmerizing gaze, stone scales), but the range of such possibilities is so great no article could hope to outline them all.

The Basics

Snakes are legless reptiles closely related to lizards. Legless lizards (such as glass lizards and worm lizards) also exist that are very similar to snakes, but these are technically different creatures. Snakes are known to vary in size from Fine (such as the 4.25-inch thread snake) to Huge snakes as long as 32 feet (one example of Reticulated Python found in Celebes, Indonesia). In the *d20 System*, snakes are assumed to be coiled when figuring space and reach, which is why a 32-foot-long snake takes up a 15-foot space. In fantasy settings a serpent could certainly grow to tremendous length, allowing for Gargantuan or Colossal serpents.

Many species of snake are venomous (meaning they inject venom with a bite), as opposed to being poisonous (which means they are dangerous to eat). Snake venoms vary from being mildly toxic to lethal, and some snakes have venoms deadly to some species but not humans. Most venomous snakes must bite an opponent to inject venom into the bloodstream, though some snakes have primitive fangs unable to inject venom (the snake must hold its target until venomous saliva gets into the bloodstream) and a few species are able to spit venom at a target at range.

The base CR of a snake is equal to one-half its hit dice (minimum $\frac{1}{3}$, round up). This assumes it has either one standard poison bite or a constriction attack and falls in the typical ranges (given below) for speed, AC, attacks, skills and feats. Each category gives a CR modifier for values outside the normal range, as do the special ability and special quality entries.

Type: Snakes are animals. Serpents are magical beasts. (If using the 3rd edition rules, a snake that doesn't represent any real-world type, or a beast with an Int of 2 or less and no supernatural powers, may be a beast.)

Hit Dice: Snakes can have anywhere from ¼ HD to 12 HD depending on size (as listed below). CR is calculated directly off hit dice. For serpents with 15 or more hit dice, add only +1 CR for every 3 HD above 14.

Size	Minimum Hit Dice	Maximum Hit Dice
Fine	¼	2
Tiny	½	4
Small	1	6
Medium	2	
Large	4	
Huge	4	
Gargantuan*	12	
Colossal*	24	

*Snakes of this size fall into the realm of the theoretical, and are most appropriate for games not set in the real world.

Speed: A Tiny or smaller snake has a 15 foot base speed, while bigger snakes have a 20 foot base move. A snake can have up to double this speed, which is worth +½ CR.

Not all snakes can swim, though the *d20 System* core rules gives all of them a swim speed. A snake can either have a 15-foot or 20-foot swim speed or none. Swim speed has no affect on a snake's CR unless it cannot swim in a water-heavy environment, in which case it's worth -½ a CR.

Not all snakes can climb well enough to qualify for an innate climb rate, though the *d20 System* core rules gives all of them a climb speed. A snake that does have a climb speed has the same climb rate as its base move.

A serpent may move twice as fast as a snake, which is worth +½ CR (for a total of +1 CR if this is four times the snake's listed base move) for each increased rate of movement.

Armor Class: A snake's AC is based on its Dex and size modifiers and its natural armor bonus. The normal natural armor range for a snake is ½ its hit dice, modified by size (as listed below). A natural armor bonus up to 2 higher is worth a +1 CR adjustment, and a natural armor bonus up to 5 higher is worth a +2 CR adjustment. A natural AC bonus at least 2 less than the standard lowers CR by 1.

Size	Natural Armor Bonus
Fine	+2
Tiny	+2
Small	+3
Medium	+3
Large	+2
Huge	+2
Gargantuan*	+2
Colossal*	+2

*Snakes of this size fall into the realm of the theoretical, and are most appropriate for games not set in the real world.

Attack: All snakes have a bite attack. Damage dealt is determined by size and whether or not the snake is a constrictor, as detailed below. All snakes add 1½ times their Str modifier (if positive) to bite damage.

In the real world, non-poisonous snakes tend to have underdeveloped teeth rather than the impressive fangs of the poisonous breeds. A snake with neither the venom nor constrictor abilities that has a bite at least two sizes weaker has its CR lowered by 1.

Size	Bite Damage	Constrictor Bite Damage
Fine	1 pt.	1 pt.
Tiny	1 pt.	1d2

Small	1d2	1d4
Medium	1d4	1d4
Large	1d4	1d6
Huge	1d6	1d8
Gargantuan*	1d8	2d6
Colossal*	2d6	2d8

*Snakes of this size fall into the realm of the theoretical, and are most appropriate for games not set in the real world.

Special Attacks:

The standard CR ratings for a snake assume the snake has either a poison bite or the constrict ability. A snake may have both, with the listed CR adjustments. A snake with neither has its CR cut in half (after all other calculations).

Constriction: A constrictor snake has the constriction special attack, allowing it to automatically deal damage with a successful grapple check. Damage dealt is the same as the snake's bite damage (though it's bludgeoning damage). Constrictor snakes also gain the Improved Grab ability, allowing a snake that hits with its bite attack to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and can constrict.

Constrictor snakes have increased bite damage and higher Str scores (as detailed in the entries for attacks and ability scores). Adding the constriction ability to a venomous snake is worth a +2 CR adjustment.

Intimidating Display (Ex): Snakes have a number of possible ways to make themselves seem more intimidating, from hoods, hissing and bright scale patterns to rattles and aggressive postures. A snake with the intimidating display ability can make an Intimidate check to demoralize opponents against all targets within its threat or strike range as a standard action. The snake makes a single Intimidate check, and it is opposed by each target's level check (as described in the Intimidate skill). Most snakes with an intimidating display also have a racial bonus to Intimidate (ranging from +2 to +8), and gain Intimidate as a class skill.

Intimidating display adds +½ a CR to a snake.

Spitter: Some snakes spit their venom, allowing them to hit targets at range. A spitter fires its poison at a target's face, though it is equally effective if it gets into a wound. This attack requires a ranged touch attack. An uninjured character may make a Reflex save (DC 10 + snake's Dex mod + ½ snake's hit dice) to prevent the venom from entering his eyes. An injured target cannot avoid the poison in this way.

The poison has the same attributes as the snake's normal toxin (see venom, below), but also has secondary damage of permanent blindness. The maximum range a snake can spit its venom is based on size, as determined by the chart below. A target with waterproof covering on its eyes cannot be blinded by this attack.

Being a spitter is worth a +½ CR adjustment.

Snake Size	Venom Range
Fine	10 feet
Tiny	10 feet
Small	15 feet
Medium	20 feet
Large	30 feet
Huge	40 feet
Gargantuan*	50 feet
Colossal*	60 feet

*Snakes of this size fall into the realm of the theoretical, and are most appropriate for games not set in the real world.

Strike (Ex): A snake's strike is a special charge it can make once a round. The snake may either strike as a standard action, or as an attack of opportunity, but it may only make one strike each round. Thus a snake that strikes during its action cannot use the strike as an attack of opportunity until its next move. A snake's strike has a listed range (which cannot exceed its base move), which is the maximum distance it can make a strike from. A snake may strike even after taking a move action (the snake is not be restricted to moving in a straight line, and can strike without making any previous move, unlike a normal charge).

A snake threatens all the squares it can strike into if it hasn't used its strike yet in the round. Thus a snake with strike (20 feet) threatens all creatures within 20 feet, allowing it to either attack on its round or take an attack of opportunity against creatures that provoke on within its strike range.

A snake gets the +2 attack bonus when striking, but does not take the -2 penalty to AC. A snake may only make its strike against targets within the listed range. The snake does not provoke attacks of opportunity from targets by moving out of their threatened areas from movement taken during a strike.

Having a strike is worth a +½ CR adjustment.

Toxin Potency (Ex): Snake venom often has little to do with size, as some of the deadliest snakes in the world are among the smallest (or at least not among the largest). Snakes may have toxin potency of +1 to +6, which increases the save DC of all poison attacks made by the snake (see *Venom*, below).

Toxin potency increases a snake's CR by ½ the value of the potency bonus.

Venom

Snake venom is highly modified saliva with proteins and enzymes that make it harmful to creatures when it enters their bloodstream. Not all snake venoms are created equal. In addition to having varying degrees of lethality and potency, different snake venoms work in totally different ways. The complexities of all different venom types are beyond the scope of this article, but the following information is as accurate as a layman's understanding can convey to other laymen.

Realistically, snake venom should have an onset time that varies by species, seriousness of the bite, and size and activity of the target. To simplify game stats the following toxins are written in the standard initial damage/secondary damage format used by the *d20 System* core rules. More realistically, a GM may decide to vary onset time by species, and allow poison to deal its secondary damage at each multiple of this onset time, based on target size. For example, a GM creating the white mamba snake could decide it has a poison onset of 15 minutes, and deals secondary damage every 15 minutes after that to a maximum of 8 times for a Medium size target, +2 times for each size below medium, -2 for every size above Medium. These rules make poison easier to deal with magically (as the onset time is longer), but also make it far deadlier if untreated (though secondary damage can be as low as 1 ability point for multiple-secondary damage poisons).

A venom may note it doesn't affect some species with a parenthetical statement. A creature of the listed type is immune to the poison in game terms; the venom may cause slight swelling, but nothing worth game penalties. A poison may also note it only works against certain creatures in a parenthetical statement, in which case all creatures not of the listed type are immune. A snake with venom that doesn't affect the most common PC races has its CR reduced by 1.

If a snake doesn't have true hollow fangs, but instead just grooved fangs, it can't get much venom into a victim with a single bite. A snake of this type has (grapple only) noted after its poison attack. The target of such a snake's bite need not make a save vs poison unless it is successfully grappled during a bite attack.

The base save DC of a snake's venom is figures as 10 + ½ snake's HD + snake's Con modifier. A snake's venom may be particularly potent if the snake has toxin potency.

A venomous snake normally has only one kind of venom. A snake may add another venom type (even if it's a constricting snake) at a cost of +1 CR per poison type added.

Cardiotoxic: Cardiotoxic venoms slow and stop the heart.

In game terms cardiotoxic venoms deal primary damage of 1d6 Con and 1d6 Str, and secondary damage of death.

Cytotoxic: Cytotoxic venoms attack tissue directly, causing irritation, pain and swelling.

In game terms, cytotoxic venoms deal primary and secondary damage of 2d6 hp. Additionally, the great pain of the bite causes a victim of a cytotoxic bite to suffer a -4 penalty to all attack, skill, and ability checks, as well as saving throws, until the poison is neutralized or has run its course. A Concentration check (DC 20) allows a victim to overcome this penalty.

Hemotoxic: Hemotoxic venoms attack the victim's blood, breaking down capillary walls and destroying red blood cells. This causes swelling and hemorrhaging, which is both damaging and painful. Hemotoxic venoms can cause gangrene, degrade motor skills, and require an affected limb be severed.

In game terms, hemotoxic venoms deal 1d6 Con as primary and secondary damage.

Neurotoxic: Neurotoxic venoms attack the body's neurons, preventing chemical signals (neurotransmitters) from going from neurons. All a creature's sensations and actions (muscle control, respiration, hunger, anger, etc.) are controlled by neurotransmitters. The toxins do this either by targeting neurons that send messages within the body, or by blocking neurons designed to receive these messages, or both. These toxins can cause pain (often described as a burning sensation), paralysis, respiratory failure and death.

In game terms, neurotoxic venoms deal primary damage of 1d6 Dex and secondary damage of 1d6 Dex and paralysis for 1d4 × 10 minutes.

Special Qualities

Arboreal: An arboreal snake must have a Climb speed. When moving through foliage (including tree branches) an arboreal snake moves at its climb speed as if flying with perfect maneuverability.

Being arboreal is too minor to be worth a CR adjustment.

Scent: All snakes have the scent ability. Snakes smell by flicking out their tongue to pick up a scent, then running it over a sensory organ located in the roof of their mouth.

Tremorsense: Snakes can pick up vibration in the ground. In most species this ability is too crude to qualify for tremorsense, but it's possible for a very sensitive snake (usually smaller ones) to qualify for the ability. Tremorsense is an extraordinary ability that allows the snake to detect and pinpoint any creature or object within 60 feet in contact with the ground.

Tremorsense is worth a +½ CR adjustment.

Abilities: The standard abilities of a snake are based on size, as defined below. A true snake can't vary by more than 4 points from any of these abilities, and every 4 point increase in abilities is worth +½ CR adjustment. Constrictor snakes are considerably stronger than typical venomous snakes, and have the Str listed in parentheses. This is part of the construction quality, and the CR value of it is covered under the constriction entry.

To remain an animal, a snake can't have an Int of more than 1. Snakes have low Con scores because their organs are all (of necessity) elongated and cramped for space. A snake has only one full-sized lung, and may not have a second lung at all. They tire easily, and even large snakes aren't particularly tough. A true snake can't increase its Con score by more than +2.

A serpent can vary its abilities by any amount with the same CR adjustments.

Size	Str	Dex	Con	Int	Wis	Cha
Fine	2 (11)	17	11	1	12	2
Tiny	4 (13)	17	11	1	12	2
Small	6 (15)	17	11	1	12	2
Medium	8 (17)	17	11	1	12	2
Large	10 (19)	17	11	1	12	2
Huge	16 (25)	15	13	1	12	2
Gargantuan*	22 (31)	15	13	1	12	2
Colossal*	28 (37)	15	15	1	12	2

*Snakes of this size fall into the realm of the theoretical, and are most appropriate for games not set in the real world.

Skills: The class skills for snakes are Balance, Climb, Hide, Listen, Spot, and Swim. As animals, snakes get 2 + Int Mod skill points per hit die (minimum of 1 per hit die). Snakes receive a +4 racial bonus to Hide, Listen and Spot checks, and a +8 racial bonus to Balance checks. A snake with a natural Climb or Swim rate receive +8 bonuses to those skill, and may always take 10 with those skills.

Serpents are magical beasts, and also gain 2 + Int Mod skill points per hit die (minimum of 1 per hit die). A serpent without the snake's racial skill bonuses receives a -1 CR adjustment.

A snake may have a greater than usual racial bonus to a skill. A snake particularly well camouflaged for its environment, for example, may receive a +8 bonus to Hide checks. For every two skill that receive a greater bonus (no more than +4 higher than normal) the snake receives a +½ CR adjustment.

Feats: All animals and magical beasts receive 1 feat, +1 feat per 3 hit dice. Snakes and serpents generally take their feats from the following list: Agile, Alertness, Blind-Fight, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Run, Skill Focus (any class skill), Stealthy, Toughness, Weapon Finesse, Weapon Focus (bite).

Though a few snakes are given Endurance in the core *d20 System* rules, a true snake's low stamina should prevent any from having this feat (along with Great Fortitude). Replace it with Power Attack if the snake qualifies for it, or Weapon Focus (bite).

A snake may receive bonus feats. Every 2 bonus feats are worth a +½ CR adjustment.

Challenge Rating: The CR of a snake or serpent can be determined by using the formulas given in each entry. Since no CR system is perfect, the GM should compare his final creature to other monsters of the same CR to make sure it's in keeping.

It's possible to have a very high CR venomous snake that isn't much threat if spotted by a party at a distance. Such snakes should depend on stealth to get near a group and then strike. Once a snake's venom is running through a PC's veins, the threat of the encounter is realized even if the snake is quickly killed.

Sample Snakes and Serpents

The following creatures were all built using the rules in this article.

Coral Assassin

Small Animal

Hit Dice: 6d8 (28 hp)

Initiative: +5

Speed: 20 ft. (4 squares), climb 20 ft.

Armor Class: 22 (+1 size, +5 Dex, +6 natural), touch 16, flat-footed 17

Base Attack/Grapple: +4/+0

Attack: Bite +12 melee (1d2-2 plus poison)

Full Attack: Bite +12 melee (1d2-2 plus poison)

Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Intimidating display, spitter (15 ft.), strike (15 ft.) venom potency (+6)

Special Qualities: Scent

Saves: Fort +5, Ref +10, Will +3

Abilities: Str 6, Dex 21, Con 11, Int 1, Wis 12, Cha 2

Skills: Balance +14, Hide +10, Intimidate +6, Listen +6, Spot +6

Feats: Skill Focus (Hide), Weapon Finesse, Weapon Focus (bite)

Environment: Any desert

Organization: Solitary

Challenge Rating: 7

Advancement: 7 14 HD (Small)

Coral assassins are deadly desert snakes whose coloring causes them to blend into the shifting sands of their homeland. They normally feed on small lizards and insects, but when food is scarce have been known to bring down a horse. A coral assassin also attacks when it feels threatened. Unfortunately they often feel threatened when Medium or larger creatures move close to their hiding place,. Resulting in travelers being bitten before ever realizing they're in danger.

Skills: In addition to the normal snake bonuses, coral assassins have +8 racial bonus to Intimidate checks.

Poison: A coral snake's poison is both cytotoxic and heomtoxic. It has a save DC of 19, initial and secondary damage of 1d6 con and 2d6 hp, and the great pain of the bite causes a victim to suffer a -4 penalty to all attack, skill, and ability checks, as well as saving throws, until the poison is neutralized or has run its course. A Concentration check (DC 20) allows a victim to overcome this penalty.

Dirt Snake

Large Animal

Hit Dice: 9d8+3 (43 hp)

Initiative: +3

Speed: 20 ft. (4 squares), swim 20 ft.

Armor Class: 19 (-1 size, +3 Dex, +7 natural), touch 12, flat-footed 17

Base Attack/Grapple: +6/+10

Attack: Bite +12 melee (1d4)

Full Attack: Bite +12 melee (1d4)

Space/Reach: 10 ft./10 ft.

Special Qualities: Scent

Saves: Fort +6, Ref +11, Will +4

Abilities: Str 10, Dex 17, Con 11, Int 1, Wis 12, Cha 2

Skills: Balance +10, Hide +9, Listen +9, Spot +9, Swim +10.

Feats: Alertness, Lightning Reflexes, Skill Focus (Hide), Toughness

Environment: Any temperate

Organization: Solitary

Challenge Rating: 2

Advancement: 10 18 HD (Large)

Dirt snakes are dull brown in color, and can grow to be 20 feet long. They aren't a serious threat to prepared humanoids, though a child or someone badly injured might be at risk. They are surprisingly tough, and an unprepared individual is best served by fleeing such a creature. Dirt snakes are mostly scavengers, eating carrion and small injured rodents.

River Serpent

Gargantuan Magical Beast

Hit Dice: 14d10+31 (108 hp)

Initiative: +2

Speed: 20 ft. (4 squares), swim 40 ft.

Armor Class: 17 (4 size, +2 Dex, +9 natural), touch 8, flat-footed 15

Base Attack/Grapple: +14/+36

Attack: Bite +24 melee (2d6+15)

Full Attack: Bite +24 melee (2d6+15)

Space/Reach: 20 ft./20 ft.

Special Attacks: Constrict 2d6+15, improved grab

Special Qualities: Scent

Saves: Fort +10, Ref +11, Will +5

Abilities: Str 31, Dex 15, Con 13, Int 5, Wis 12, Cha 2

Skills: Balance +11, Hide +11, Listen +10, Spot +9, Swim +11

Feats: Alertness, Blind-Fight, Power Attack, Skill Focus (Hide), Toughness

Environment: Any freshwater

Organization: Solitary

Challenge Rating: 8

Advancement: 15 28 HD (Gargantuan)

River serpents are voracious, aggressive predators that attack anything smaller than themselves, including rafts and canoes. They are equally comfortable on land and in water, though they prefer to hunt in rivers large enough to allow them to maneuver.

Constrict (Ex): On a successful grapple check, a river serpent deals 2d6+15 points of damage.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, a river serpent must hit with its bite attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and can constrict.

Pyramid Review

The Psychic's Handbook (for d20 System)

Published by [Green Ronin Publishing LLC](#)

Designed by Steve Kenson

Edited by Dale Donovan

Art by Todd Lockwood, Drew Baker, Jonathan Kirtz, Kent Burles, & James Smith III

80-page b&w softcover; \$16.95

It's not entirely clear in what order Green Ronin is trying to present its products, but it's covering its bases. The psionic creature collection *Monsters of the Mind* came before its related setting, *Mindshadows*. Now that there's a place to set the game and a book of foes to put there, [The Psychic's Handbook](#) finally gets around to giving Green Ronin's version of how mental abilities ought to work.

To be fair, this latest volume draws a distinction between the psionics of the original *Dungeons & Dragons* game and *Mindshadows* and its own psychic powers, but the differences are fairly cosmetic. Both are still powers of the mind, but they aren't managed in the same way.

Part of Green Ronin's Master Class series, the book starts with the psychic, the basic class for having psychic powers. A character must have the Psychic Ability feat to have and learn additional psychic feats and powers. Unlike *d20 Modern*, which treats psionic powers like spells in many ways, *The Psychic's Handbook* treats psychic powers as skills. A feat that gives you access to psychic skills is called a talent; once you've bought the Telepathy talent, you can buy ranks in any of the skills that sit under it, like Domination and Empathic Projection.

By default, psychic powers are the purview of the psychic class and its associated prestige classes. Any other class may purchase the appropriate talents and skills, but psychic abilities will always be considered cross-class skills for those characters.

The powers are fairly standard literary fare. Telepathy, telekinesis, pyrokinesis, and psychokinesis are all present and accounted for. There are a few other esoteric items like Dreamwalk (which the book likens to astral projection), and Psychic Weapon that allows you to wield a weapon made of psychic energy. There are powers to let you drain or implant memories, feelings, or character statistics, and a slew of Psychometabolism powers that give you control over your bodily functions.

Not all feats are simply doorways to getting the skills. Some allow you to fine-tune the use of your powers, such as Apport Arrows that lets you teleport an incoming missile out of midair; or Mind Trap, which gives you a reactive attack against another psychic attempting to invade your mind. In the same vein as metamagic feats, there are metapsychic feats that boost the power of -- or defray the cost of using -- psychic skills. You can increase the range of powers, target more people with a mental attack, or reduce the effort required to summon your abilities. The effort is strain, and strain is taken as normal, nonlethal damage to the character.

The prestige classes fall mostly into two categories: those who concentrate on one or a few psychic powers as their shtick, such as Pyrokinesis, healing powers, or Psychometabolism; and psychics who hunt, usually seeking rogue

psychics, demons, ghosts, and other psychically attuned beings.

While there's not much to stop the reader in his tracks in the psychic skills and feats sections, the campaign suggestions are a different matter. It discusses some creative ways to use the powers listed, and how to make the abilities a part of the plot instead of just a tool for fixing the bad guys' wagons. The use of psychic skills in combat, especially when mentally "grappling" a foe, gets a lot of text, and there are scads of rules that significantly change the use of psychic powers. Whether you want them to be easier to use or harder, the book has your number.

The problems of having psychics wandering your game world -- from finding murderers with a quick mental scan to chopping up enemies at a distance with a telekinetically wielded axe -- are deftly handled. How-tos (and how-not-tos) are mixed in with psychically involved groups that may hunt, help, or even worship those with great mental strength. Throw in some psychic equipment, psychic creatures, and constructs, and some fabulous material on psychic viruses, and you have a fairly complete view of how to run a campaign based on these powers or how to effectively mix them into an otherwise-unrelated game.

The artwork is a pleasure to view, and it uses evocative pencil drawings to provide creative stimulus without being too obvious or fanciful. A few of the boxed sections come dangerously close to losing bits of text in the swirling vortex pattern, and some of the section and subsection headers could be a bit more distinct, but the book's look is overall quite favorable.

With clearly defined rules that read well and sound like someone actually considered all the angles when meshing (and testing) the material, *The Psychic's Handbook* takes a popular subject and makes sure the *d20 System* has a workable, worthwhile set of guidelines for putting them to good use.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

50 Fathoms (for Shane Lacy Hensley's Savage Worlds)

Published by [Pinnacle Entertainment Group](#)

Written by Shane Lacy Hensley

Front Cover by Zeke Sparkes

Rear Cover by David Deitrich

Illustrated by Cheyenne Wright

144-page b&w hardcover; \$29.95

Some years can be defined by their genre, a happenstance that can come about by design, such as everyone releasing World-War-II-related games and supplements in 2001, and by synchronicity in 2003, with a treasure chest full of pirate-themed releases reaching the shelves of your local and virtual games emporia, all helped along with the blockbuster movie, *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse Of The Black Pearl*. Which gives the gaming consumer a welter of choice when it comes to running up the Jolly Roger and sailing the Seven Seas in search of plunder. Living Games provided a fantastical approach for the *d20 System* with the release of *Pirates!*, while Deep7's double reprint of *Shriek/Bloode Island 1PG Double Feature* gave us the fastest and most accessible choice. Green Ronin Publishing, in addition to continued support for their [Freeport: City of Adventure](#) with the scenario anthology [Tales of Freeport](#), brought out what was arguably the best treatment of the genre, [Skull & Bones: Swashbuckling Horror in the Golden Age of Piracy](#). This combined a detailed and realistic look at the Golden Age of Piracy with a dark streak of voodoo, again for the *d20 System*.

The last of 2003's piratical releases again gave a fantastic treatment of the genre, but rather than being a generic supplement whose contents could be applied to any setting, *50 Fathoms* comes with a setting of its own and both a campaign *and* a plethora of adventure hooks to support that setting. *50 Fathoms* is a source and campaign book for [Shane Lacy Hensley's Savage Worlds](#), the pulp-action orientated generic RPG based on [The Great Rail Wars Miniatures Battle Game](#), the miniatures skirmish rules for the *Deadlands RPG*, again written by Shane Lacy Hensley. It is the second release for *Savage Worlds*, following on from *Evernight*, the campaign in which the characters save their home from an alien invasion. Where [Evernight](#) involved the traditional elements of fantasy roleplaying, elves, dwarves, and so on, *and* it was also traditional in its pre-structured and plotted format, *50 Fathoms* is something of a move away from such traditions. In this it combines elements of the film *Waterworld*, time travel, an alternative world, magic, *and* piracy! And although *50 Fathoms* comes with a plot, its structure is very loose and only partially pre-plotted.

The setting is Caribdus, a once-prosperous world made up of small continents that in the last 13 years has had much of its surface drowned under 50 fathoms of water. Natives of Caribdus say that the source of this is the Sea Hags who caused continuous rain to fall then, and do so to this day. They were once three sisters, triplets accused of dark sorcery and tried in their home city of Ograpog. As they were sentenced to death by drowning, the trio cursed both their homeland and their king. When they died, it began to rain, not stopping since.

The Sea Hags now have their lair in the Devil's Cross which lies at the center of the Flotsam Sea. This is a region some 60 leagues in radius, battered by constant storms and rife with scurvy pirates, horrors from the deep, and ships

crewed by ghosts. Drawn into the area is a morass of flotsam and jetsam, the wasted remains of a drowned world.

While the Flotsam Sea is the home to a great evil, it is perhaps the source of Caribdus' salvation. Visitors from another world say that a mysterious crying girl drew their ships into fierce storms, and when they emerged they found themselves in the Devil's Cross. They have come from a world with a variety of nations and from across three centuries of history -- from 1500 to 1815. They include Spanish Galleons, Chinese Junks, English Men o' War, and Dutch Merchantmen. It is said that a stranger from Earth will come to save Caribdus.

Caribdus is now home to the British East India Company, the Pirate King, Blackbeard, Quakers of New England (who have settled in Dunwich, no less), the Spanish Guild of New Madrid, and -- worse still -- the Inquisition, led by Tomas De Torquemada. His hatred of this new world's strange magic has made the profession of elementalists a dangerous one indeed.

Thus with *50 Fathoms*, it is possible to play anybody from Earth between the years 1500 and 1815 who might have reason to be aboard a ship, as crew, passenger, soldier, slave or merchant. On Caribdus they can explore a new world, trade cargoes, turn to piracy, hunt for whales, search for the salvage or treasure of a ruined world, or even become a Questor and seek to end the Sea Hags' curse. Unlike Earth, Caribdus is home to several races, most very different. The Atani are tall, thin glider folk, who live in the only remaining tree top city in the last un-drowned Carroway forest. The Doreen, or "gray folk," are semi-aquatic sea hunters capable of holding their breath for up to 15 minutes and the natural enemies of the Kehana. These are sharp-clawed and toothed fishermen who like to eat their food live, "raw and wriggling." The Grael are squat and powerful gray-skinned humanoids protected by a thick layer of blubber; given to brawn rather than brains, they can also hold their breath for a long time. The Kraken, tall humanoids with red skin and squid-like features are a mysterious and aloof lot, with a natural talent for magic. The Masaquani are the dominant race on Caribdus and are like humans, but with a greater variety in skin and hair color as well as body types. The leading Masaquani nations prior to the flood were Ograpog and Kiera; though only the former survives, the rivalries between their two peoples continue to this day. Red Men are savage and brutal Neanderthal barbarians. Hated by all, but sometimes forcibly mating with humans or Masaquani, the results are Half-Ugak, tough, strong, yet clueless creatures popular with pirate crews because they follow orders. Finally, Scurillions are an arch-mage-created race, crabs given sapience. They are unsocial creatures, but with the pincers, shell, and telescopic eyes of the crab and a keen mind for numbers that makes them capable navigators, accountants, scientists, and quartermasters.

There are essentially two major changes to *Savage Worlds* character generation for *50 Fathoms*. The first is designed to encourage a reckless and daring style of play and allows players to select a Seasoned Edge rather than just the Novice Edges normally allowed during the generation process. The other change is that the Arcane Background, which in the basic game includes Magic, Miracles, Psionics, Super Powers, and Weird Science, but is here restricted to Magic only. At the time of creation, a magic-using character specializes in any one of the four elements and gains access to a limited selection of spells. Water Wizards are popular aboard ship for their ability to heal, provide clean water, and control sea creatures, while Fire Mages are feared for their destructive spells, some of which can burn a ship to the keel. Earth Mages cast defensive spells and can help a party survive the rigors of exploring the thousand isles, and Wind Wizards are adept at keeping a ship moving or becalming a foe. With only 10 spells, an elementalists will quickly run out of options, but can go on to master another element and then another. This is difficult, and in game terms comes with a small penalty, but eventually it can pay off. A mage can learn all four elements and thus become an Archmage. There is only one of these known in Caribdus, Tressa the Red.

In keeping with the reckless nature of *Savage Worlds*, *50 Fathoms* moves briskly through all you need to play. Everything is covered, from buying and selling goods and equipment, rules for handling, managing, and fighting with ships, and a guide to the elemental magic of Caribdus. And the players' section is rounded out with a gazetteer of the Thousand Isles and a short guide to pirate lingo.

The remainder of *50 Fathoms* is given over to the Captain's Log, and is specifically for the GM. It begins with a more detailed history of the last 13 years or so, and then gets to the real difference between *50 Fathoms* and the average campaign. *50 Fathoms* is designed to be what is called a "Plot Point" setting rather than as a linear campaign. Instead of the linear campaign, *50 Fathoms* provides further information on the many locations across the Thousand Isles, some of these accompanied by blocks of text marked with a crossed arrow symbol. They indicate the presence of a

"Savage Tale" linked to that location, the block of text giving a short description of the Savage Tale and a page number. Turning to that page finds more information about the lead given in the location, which can be as long as a quarter-page to two whole pages or more. There are over 40 of these Savage Tales, but *50 Fathoms* is not just a setting and a collection of semi-random encounters.

There are an additional nine encounters or adventures which are the Plot Points of *50 Fathoms*. Marked in the location descriptions with the symbol of a skull wearing an eye-patch and a tricorn hat above crossed knife and pistol -- *50 Fathoms'* equivalent to *Savage Worlds'* Smilin' Jack (though he does appear to indicate the settings' wildcard NPCs) -- they are specifically tied into the back story of the setting. When played in order, these Plot Points, beginning with a simple foraging trip into the jungle for a ship's crew in "Maiden Voyage," takes the player characters on a long journey back and forth between the Thousand Isles, which will hopefully end with the defeat of the Sea Hags.

The advice for the GM is not to push these Plot Points, and to let the players dictate much of the action, running a Plot Point adventure as and when the campaign calls for it. The loose structure supports this, and is aided by notes on random encounters and subplots. The result is something of a hybrid born of the linear campaign and the source book.

Physically *50 Fathoms* is a well-done hardback up to the standards of *Savage Worlds* and *Evernight*. The layout is clean and tidy, benefiting by the interior "AAAART" (sic) of Cheyenne Wright. But there are a couple of problems with *50 Fathoms*. First is the map, which is printed in black and white, and on a single page at the front of the book, where its placement is just enough to make it awkward to use when running a game. It also feels very constrained at only one page and really should have been placed as a double-page spread inside the front and back covers. This could have afforded it more detail and possibly allowed it to be rendered in color. The second is more irritating, and is one that also beset Hensley's *Evernight*.

Where *is* the introduction? How do you use this book? What is this book about? These are not questions properly answered in *50 Fathoms* until pages 74 and 80. Why does the author keep the whole concept of *50 Fathoms* hidden until halfway through the book?

Putting this odd failing aside, *50 Fathoms* is a well-executed realization of what is the campaign/sourcebook hybrid. Its pulp action treatment of piracy and the Golden Age of Sail makes for an easily accessible playing style and the combination of familiar history injected into a fantasy world makes the Thousand Isles of Caribdus just as accessible. The generic nature of the *Savage Worlds* rules means that *50 Fathoms* could as easily run with other generic systems such as *GURPS* or *Fantasy Hero*. Other choices include *7th Sea* or *Skull & Bones*, though these would require some work to model the setting's fantasy elements.

Of all the pirate-themed supplements and RPGs published in 2003, *50 Fathoms* is the most self-contained, offering both a setting and a loosely structured campaign through which the players are free to set sail for any direction that they want.

--Matthew Pook

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



A-Hunting He Will Go: Herne the Huntsman

*"There is an old tale goes that Herne the hunter,
Sometime a keeper here in Windsor forest,
Doth all the winter-time, at still midnight,
Walk round about an oak, with great ragg'd horns;
And there he blasts the tree, and takes the cattle,
And makes milch-kine yield blood, and shakes a chain
In a most hideous and dreadful manner."*

-- William Shakespeare, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, IV:iv:24-30

So rarely is William Shakespeare a reliable source for anything that it is with some trepidation one notes that he is the earliest -- and only -- reliable source for the 16th century Berkshire legend of Herne the Hunter. *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was first performed at Windsor (on the illuminated date of May 23, 1597) before the Queen and her court, and Shakespeare filled this "made to order" sequel with authentic local lore for the authentic local lords. The Earl of Sussex supposedly saw the ghost of Herne during the reign of Henry VIII, and obviously sightings continued down to Shakespeare's day. Elsewhere in the play we read that Herne's Oak lies hard by a Fairy Pit, another local landmark within Windsor Forest that shows up on maps (though not always labeled as such) down to the 18th century. Herne's Oak was, in fact, a specific oak widely regarded as haunted and somehow tied to the English throne (being, after all, in the forest of Windsor Castle). It became a minor tourist attraction in the centuries following Shakespeare's play, and was cut down by mistake in 1796. Later, a different oak nearby was identified as Herne's Oak; this one blew down in a storm in 1863. The superstitious Queen Victoria had it replaced with a different oak, itself removed when the true site was rediscovered, and replanted, by Edward VII in 1906. In the modern era, Herne has been seen most recently by a Windsor Castle guardsman in 1976, and was blamed for the death of a prankster in the forest in 1962. Other sightings are reported going vaguely back to 1910 or so -- or around when Edward replanted the Oak in the proper spot.

Herne, according to the consensus legend, was a royal huntsman or gamekeeper in Windsor Forest. Through some mischance, he incurred the royal wrath and, wearing antlers, hanged himself from the oak tree with a chain. His body disappeared in a lightning strike, but he returns on midwinter nights to roam and wreak havoc. The most famous version of the story, in W. Harrison Ainsworth's late Gothic (1843) historical novel *Windsor Castle*, casts Herne as the chief huntsman to King [Richard II](#). He saves the king's life from a charging stag, but falls mortally wounded. A local wizard named Philip Urswick conveniently rides by and promises to heal Herne, requiring antlers be tied to his head. For murky reasons, in the process Urswick deprives Herne of his skills at hunting. Herne, driven mad by his fate, hangs himself with his royal chain of office, still wearing the antlers Urswick affixed to his skull.

"He who has once closed hands with Herne the Hunter cannot retreat. . . . And now to the chase. I promise you it will be a wilder and more exciting ride than you ever enjoyed in the king's company. To the chase! To the chase, I say!"
Sounding a call upon his horn, the light instantly reappeared. All was stir and confusion amid the impish troop -- and presently afterwards a number of coal-black horses, and hounds of the same hue, leashed in couples, were brought out of one of the side passages. Among the latter were two large sable hounds of Saint Hubert's breed, whom Herne summoned to his side by the names of Saturn and Dragon . . . The whole scene seemed to dance around him; the impish figures in the lake, or upon its bank, assumed forms yet more fantastic; the horses looked like monsters of the deep; the hounds like wolves and ferocious beasts; the branches of the trees writhed and shot forward like hissing serpents; and though this effect speedily passed off, it left behind it a wild and maddening feeling of excitement."

-- W. Harrison Ainsworth, *Windsor Castle*

And, in Ainsworth's telling, Herne emerges to lead the Wild Hunt. This [spectral band](#) of huntsmen, horses, and hounds roams the earth (or flies across the sky) hunting the souls of the wicked (or witches, or the unshriven, or anyone outside) and generally raising Hell. The band might be ghosts, or fairies, or humans cursed with immortality, or all three. The Wild Hunt rides during the winter (especially on [Twelfth Night](#)), when Herne walks, and the Huntsman is occasionally depicted as wearing horns, or antlers like Herne. The Hunt's ride traditionally ends on [Walpurgisnacht](#), at the close of winter, and in some versions of the story, the Huntsman is a Huntswoman such as Berchta, Herodias,

Diana, or Venus. However, in most versions, the Huntsman is male -- emphatically so, given the phallic headgear -- and identified variously with King Arthur, Gwynn ap Nudd, Dietrich of Bern or "Wild Edric" (the German and Saxon versions, respectively, of Theodoric the Great), Cain, the Devil, the [Wandering Jew](#) (who, like Herne, is sometimes said to bear a chain and walk in circles), King Herod, Roland, Charlemagne, Valdemar of Denmark, Sir Francis Drake, the archangel Gabriel, or St. Hubert, patron saint of huntsmen.

*"I am called Grim,
I am called Gangleri,
Herian and Hjalmbéri,
Thekk and Thrídi,
Thund and Ud,
Helblíndi and Har . . .
By one name
I never have been called,
since among men I have gone.."
-- Odin, in the Poetic Edda*

Although Ainsworth seems to be the original source conflating Herne with the Wild Huntsman, it's not impossible that some prior connection between the two figures exists. Some 20th-century Herne sightings do include the sound of hounds and horns, for example. Ainsworth might well have stumbled upon some now-forgotten archive or local tale while doing research -- or have availed himself of the magical insights of his good friend the Rosicrucian novelist Edward Bulwer-Lytton. Because the most common leader of the Wild Hunt, bar none, is Odin or Wotan, or Woden, or Wod. (Herne and Odin also have the whole hanging themselves from trees thing in common.) And Odin, as it transpires, is known as Herleke (meaning "commander of the host") and Herian ("warrior"), among his other titles. Herleke became Herlechine in medieval France (from whence, oddly enough, came [Harlequin](#), after suitable domestication), and perhaps ties in with the mythical Saxon King Herla who leads a troop of undying horsemen out of Fairyland, but Herian became Horn in Jutland. Coming at it from a different angle, a series of reliefs and carvings depicting a cloaked rider (occasionally holding a snake) dates back to perhaps the 4th or 5th centuries B.C. in Thrace and the Danubian countries generally. Known to archaeologists as the "Thracian Rider" or the "Danubian Rider God," he was known to at least one group of worshipers (in the Greek colony in Ptolemaic Egypt) as Heron. (One meaning of the word *herne* is "heron," a bird kept near Windsor Forest.) Two key attributes of Odin, of course, are the cloak and the horse -- could Heron be the true name of Odin the Unnameable?

*"Those antlers are nigh on a hundred years old. If you want the man who killed that stag, you'll have to dig him up."
-- Edward of Wickham (Jeremy Bulloch) in the "Lord of the Trees" episode of [Robin of Sherwood](#)*

People looking for other derivations for Herne needn't travel to Thrace. "Herne" may come from the Anglo-Saxon *hyrne*, meaning corner, or angle, or curve -- something like, say, antlers, or a horn (*horn* in Anglo-Saxon, conveniently enough). Hence, Herne may merely be "the horned one" -- which would equate him, perhaps, with another antlered figure, Cernunnos. This name (meaning "horned one" in Gallo-Roman) was carved over an antlered, bearded god bedecked with torcs on an altar stone discovered beneath Notre Dame in Paris. The name has been applied to similar antlered gods depicted in the Celtic world from the Gundestrup Cauldron in Denmark to a Roman mosaic in St. Albans, England. Interestingly, like the "Thracian Rider," the Gundestrup antlered god is clutching a peculiar horned snake which the inventive Eric L. Fitch, in *In Search of Herne the Hunter*, considers eerily similar to the "chain" borne by Herne. From the complex of snakes, gods, oaks, and lightning, one can hunt in all manner of directions. Erichthonios, the snake-legged (as in some depictions of Cernunnos) founder of Athens, who planted sacred oaks and invented metal-working (which ties both to Herne's chain and to sometime Wild Huntsman St. Hubert, also the patron saint of metal-workers) was killed by lightning. Asklepios, the snake-handling healer, was disintegrated by lightning (just like Herne's body was) but still [appears](#) in (ghostly?) dreams. Further, his Latin name, Aesculapius, seems cognate with *aesculus*, the winter oak.

"[S]uddenly -- in a lightning flash as it were -- 'fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake'. To all appearances it was a perfectly insane and abject terror, without ostensible cause, and only to be accounted for, to my perplexed imagination, by some damnéd shape squatting invisible within the precincts of the room, and raying

out from hi fetid personality influences fatal to life."

-- Henry James, Sr., *Society, the Redeemed Form of Man*

Henry James had the above experience -- "in a lightning flash as it were" -- in May of 1844 (the year after Ainsworth's successful invocation of Herne as the Wild Huntsman). He eventually identified it as a type of spiritual encounter known to Swedenborg as a "devastation" or "vastation" -- a brush with some vast, unknowable elemental entity. Interestingly, his vastation came in a hunting-lodge in Windsor Park perhaps a hundred yards from Herne's Oak. Windsor Park (specifically Herne's Oak) is at the nexus of a pair of ley lines, one of them (the Devil's Highway) a common site for Wild Hunt encounters, as well. The oaks at Windsor go back to Anglo-Saxon times; they give their name to the county. (Berkshire derives from *bearuc* or "bare oak.") Tacitus tells us that the Semnones, "the most ancient" of the Germans, committed human sacrifice in a wood, "consecrated by . . . ancient terror" as the residence of the god and the heart of their kingdom. (Interestingly in Herne's context, the Semnones believed you could only approach the sacred wood wrapped in a chain.) The pagan Saxons might equally well have hung human sacrifices to Odin from the oaks of royal Windsor in midwinter -- and in May, when Henry James had his vision. May is Beltane month, when as the book of Ezekiel reminds us, Baal feasted on the "slain men . . . under every green tree, and under every thick oak." Odin, of course, is Valfodr, the Father of the Slain, who ride with him at the end of the world.

"His voice had risen to a scream. 'Frank, Frank, a terrible and unspeakable deed was done in the beginning. Before time, the deed, and from the deed --' He had risen and was hysterically pacing the room. 'The deeds of the dead move through angles in the dim recesses of time. They are hungry and athirst!'"

-- Frank Belknap Long, "The Hounds of Tindalos"

So what is Herne? Is he another ragged Harlequin [scarecrow](#), in the forest of the unknown god, a messenger from Outside that warns the kings of England when death and war are afoot? Perhaps he is an Outsider himself, flashing across the sky with his Wild Hunt, "taking cattle" and mutilating them ("making the milch-kine yield blood") like his fellow Greys (the color of Odin, after all) do in the American Southwest. If so, perhaps he connects to the "serpent tailed" fireballs seen above Windsor Castle in 1783, the year Herne's Oak gave its last acorns -- messages home? Reinforcements? Spawn? Perhaps the oak is a shoot from Yggdrasil, the World-Tree, reaching across planes and dimensions. Philip Urswick, the cloaked rider, the "wizard" who cures, dooms, and creates Herne, is interesting in this context -- Urswick might mean "Urd's Field" or "the Field of Fate," and "Philip" is, of course, a "lover of horses." The Horseman in the Field of Fate -- sounds like the Wild Huntsman to me. Is Herne, like Odin, "myself made offering to myself"? Herne, the "angled one" is the living gateway from Outside to England, folded upon himself and self-begotten, a loop in time stalking in Moebius circles around the zero point. For now, his chain holds, but the Hounds of Herne are hungry and athirst, and the old Oak is dead.

Character Creation? It's in the Cards

I had something of an idea today for an alternate way of starting a campaign that I'm itching to try. But, given that I'm locked in a tower, forced only to write and dance for your amusement -- <Dance, Editor-Boy! DANCE!> -- I don't know if I'll ever have a chance. So I'm throwing it out there for you all; hopefully someone will be able to use it for their campaign. It's more of a protoidea, with a bunch of variations that might serve some games better than others.

In general I've noticed there are usually two camps of character "creation" I offer in my games. The first type is the anything-goes approach found in practically every system; whatever kind of system you want to make, so mote it be. The second is pregenerated characters, where I supply the characters to the players (perhaps tailoring them to their preferences, suggestions, or desire).

The former is very straightforward and makes a lot of sense; logically, gamers are most likely to get into their character if they are exactly the ones they want to play. Unfortunately, it has problems. It can be very difficult to design adventures and subplots for disparate characters; characters can step on each other's toes ("We're both playing one-of-a-kind renegade ninjas?!"); and the characters as created may not line up with the GM's desires -- a band of diplomats doesn't do much good in a campaign devoted to dungeon-crawling.

The latter, although admittedly rare in my campaigns, also makes a lot of sense. I'm able to hit the ground running, with interesting stories and plots for everyone; I can make sure the whole range of abilities I want the players to have (*and* what abilities I don't want them to have); it's more work for the GM; and players may not enjoy their characters.

What to do, then? ***What to do!?!?***

(That's rhetorical, by the by . . . but I'm sure you figured that out.)

Anyway, I realized the two views aren't necessarily incompatible. For example, players often figure out the whole "range of abilities" thing, and will work among themselves to make a balanced party. Many players making a Supers team make sure there's someone who can fly or teleport, someone who can do ranged attacks, someone who's sneaky, etc.; those in a Fantasy game make sure there's a healer, a magician, a cavalier, an acrobat, a unicorn . . . Hmm. I think I got distracted. Anyway, players often work toward balance themselves.

Unfortunately, players only have a small piece of the puzzle; although they may stumble across several aspects of the GM's advantages in creating characters, they don't know, for example, what abilities or plot elements are useful to the GM to make the best gaming environment possible.

The obvious fixes I've considered to this previously are not terribly useful. For example, if I ask a player to take, say, a child as a dependant for his character before the campaign starts, it won't have anywhere near the impact when <gasp!> that kid becomes entangled as part of the larger plot. And it doesn't solve the problem of players wanting PC abilities that I'm not comfortable with them having -- or with too many characters having -- because it can unbalance certain plots.

What to do, then? ***What to*** . . . oh, you know the drill.

Anyway, my idea is to incorporate more of a game aspect into the act of character creation itself. For example, let's take a basic example. Let's assume a game with four players, and four groups of broad abilities: Advantages, Disadvantages, Backgrounds, and Skills.

Let's say that the GM knows what kind of Advantages will make the game work best, Disadvantages that will feed the most interesting stories, Backgrounds necessary for the long-term campaign, and Skills required for survival. And he notes them all as he might normally when creating pregenerated characters. Only he doesn't assign them to characters; he writes each sub-ability on an index card. So the stack of Advantage index cards might be:

- Luck
- Danger Sense
- Combat Reflexes
- Immunity to Poison
- High Charisma
- ...

The Disadvantage stack might resemble:

- Secret Hunted (mildly powerful)
- Claustrophobia
- Dependant (spouse or significant other)
- Code Against Killing
- Combat Paralysis
- ...

and so on.

At the time of character creation, a player chooses one ability from the stack that looks interesting to him, then passes the stack on; the next player chooses an ability, and so on. (Ideally there are as many different ability stacks as there are players, so that each player gets first dibs on one type of abilities.) Then the player gets to build his character using the abilities he picked.

This system has a number of interesting properties. First, players have the challenge of creating a character with abilities they normally wouldn't pick, or wouldn't choose together, hopefully resulting in characters that are different and interesting. ("Hmm . . . how do I explain that I have demolitions, military contacts, Luck, a code against killing, *and* a young daughter?") Second, it ensures that any plot elements the GM needs to advance the campaign are pre-seeded, *without* the players being suspicious (or at least as suspicious); the GM would be wise to seed in mundane elements that he doesn't plan on using in the plot, just to keep the players from getting too suspicious about what will or won't be used. In short, it's an interesting compromise between the "anything goes" method and the GM-prepared model.

Now, there are any number of ways to tweak this basic method. First, the GM might seed some abilities more than once if he wants multiple characters to have them (such as Firearms). Second, the GM might create a list of possible "everyman abilities": those abilities that players can buy (or get points from) in addition to the ones they drew. These could be the common kind of abilities that the GM doesn't mind if players have (such as Dodge), or those that might flesh out characters additionally (such as Hobby skills).

More intangible elements can be added, as well, that don't have any game effect but may (or may not) be important to the campaign. For example, many tales revolve around characters who keep journals or historic records (such as Gabrielle in *Xena: Warrior Princess* or That One Guy in *13th Warrior*). If this is important to the campaign, then the GM might include "Keeps meticulous notes or a journal" as a pickable index-card ability. Or "environmentalist." Or "owns a house downtown." Or "always has a pet." (Of course, the GM should be clear as to what he expects if there's any ambiguity; is the player expected to keep notes, or is it something the character is assumed to do?)

For games that can support it, it might be possible for this to be the *entirety* of character creation. For example, in a **Fudge** campaign the players might pick from a communal pot of abilities: Luck (Good), Agility (Excellent), Hunted (Fair), Jetpack (Remarkable) and so on. Any ability that isn't chosen is assigned its default value (for example, Poor for Abilities in **Fudge**) The players get their abilities as they go, and each tries to assemble their stack into an interesting character. This might also be a good way to allow players new to roleplaying to create a character that's interesting, while not overwhelming them with the typical reams of possibilities the standard game offers. ("Hmm . . . would it be cooler to be able to arrest people with police powers, or to own a psychic cat? Hmm . . .")

Finally, it's possible to increase the gamery aspect of this idea by introducing a bidding system. For example, like many game systems, all **GURPS** abilities have a point value associated with them, and all characters are built on a

certain number of points. So what if all character abilities are put up for "auction" (perhaps drawn at random by the GM), with the base price being the ability's regular cost, and the players can then bid more character points for that ability? If both Ted and Alice *really* want the 30-point version of Luck available, then they might be willing to spend more character points for it; eventually, Alice may overbid Ted by offering 52 points for that ability. (Contrariwise there may be some abilities *none* of the players want, and the GM may need to expect to offer them for fewer points, or even put them aside and assign them randomly to players once the bidding/creation process is done.

Sometimes introducing something new and different to character creation can be just the kick an experienced troupe needs to create a truly memorable campaign, while providing options for character development *and* the elements necessary for the GM to craft memorable adventures.

And if you all try this advice and it doesn't work out . . . well, at least I know I'm locked safe in a tower, where I know you can't get me. And I've even got these protective leg irons!

--*Steven Marsh*

Dragon Planet: Part Two -- The Bloody Tower

A GURPS Space Adventure

by Stephen Dedman

Kamax

If the heroes decide to go to Bishop Rock in search of Malik Dragunov, they will first have to get to Mornharbor on Kamax, 260 miles from Mount Aramis, 340 miles from Port Luisa. A roundship with an experienced crew can travel these distances in two and three days, respectively.

Steerage passage on a roundship from Port Luisa will cost a florin (\$48) per passenger per day, with food \$6/day extra; a contest of Merchant skills may alter this by up to \$10 either way.

If the PCs are at Mount Aramis, they may be able to persuade Flint's surviving sailors to sail them back to Kamax: Intimidation is most likely to succeed if the party defeated Flint and his knights. If there are no surviving sailors, or too few to man the ship, they may have to try to sail it themselves -- using defaults if they don't have Seamanship skill, with a -9 modifier for a Tech Level 6 lower than their own.

Landing a spaceship on Kamax may be possible, but not easy: even with much of the land fallow, the rough terrain offers few good landing places. For a vehicle with a Size Modifier of +5 or less (e.g. an ultralight), a suitable landing place may be found within 1d-1 miles of the city. For a spaceship with a Size Mod of +6, the nearest landing area will be 1d+1 miles away; double this distance for every +1 increase to Size Modifier after this (e.g. a 200,000 cf ship would have to come down 8d+8 miles from the city). Crossing the remaining distance overland has its own hazards: most Kamaxians react as badly to ultra-tech as other Ahtoans, and Prince Odon's knights and veterans will suspect any strangers of being spies from other realms.

A spaceship with a LMass of less than 62.5 lbs per cf may come down on the water: GM's decision whether it floats the right way up.

Bishop Rock

Giselle can give the heroes the following information about Bishop Rock:

The rock is a pillar of stone shaped (mostly) by wind and waves, one of several which protrude from the reef near Kamax's west coast. Its name comes from its resemblance to a squat chess-piece, which is best seen from offshore. It stands about half a mile out to sea from Mornharbor, where the tides rise and fall up to 18'. The tower is about 100' tall at high tide, and nearly 60' across at its widest point. A cave near the top, facing out to sea, is the dragon's lair: fortunately, Giselle says, the dragon was eating when she crept out, and didn't notice her. She tried to climb down the face of the tower, but fell when a third of the way down. The only way she knows to get in, except by flying, is in the basket that the Dragonlord's aides lower down when a boat brings supplies.

From listening to people in the tavern, Giselle knows that a boat visits

the rock every second day, about an hour before sunset. It carries food for the dragon, and sometimes items for the Dragonlord. The dragon eats carrion: fish not sold at market, dead horses, even paupers and still-born babies picked up by the dead cart. A large horse will feed it for two or three days: it eats bones, hooves, hair, intestines . . . the whole animal.

This huge domed cave (Level Five), about 50' in diameter and 22' high, contains the dragon, its food, the crane that

lowers and raises the basket, some "strangely shaped rocks" (fragments of M-type asteroids to feed to the minifac), a generic ST 20 exoskeleton, and a dismantled arcuballista (p. CII37) with 100 bolts. Two artificial gills, a televiewer with infrared option, a fusion flight pack, a long-range communicator with neutrino receiver, a spinarete, a construction foam sprayer, an autograpnel and a rocket piton hang from a rack near the entrance: Giselle will not be able to describe any of these devices in a meaningful way, or remember them well enough to draw them.

The Dragonlord, his three lieutenants, and their captive women eat "strange dishes that come from a magic chest" (a gourmet food processor) in a smaller chamber underneath the top cave. This level (Level Four) also contains the women's cage (four connected modular cages, p. UT62, with a voiceprint scanlock), one large bed (surrounded by a hospital-style curtain, with a holocom and a privacy field in the headboard), a sonic shower, a chemical toilet, a large vapor canteen, an automedic, a table, four chairs, and three locked containers: one of these contains cosmetics and women's clothing; another holds a medscanner, a medical pouch, a neural inhibitor, and assorted drugs and medical supplies; and the third contains two Type I Neurolashes, four pairs of neuronic handcuffs, 2d chem grenades, 20 gyro cassette for the rocket carbines, and rechargeable power cells. The women in the cage have envirobags with heating units (p. S71), but no clothing.

The room on Level Four is roughly circular, about 40' in diameter with a 12' ceiling. It has four narrow windows, scarcely more than arrow-slits; these admit most of the light during the day, but during the nights, these are covered with blackout curtains, and cold lamps are used to light the rooms. There are also several "thin black boards" (E type solar panels, p. UT8, used to recharge the power cells), placed near the arrow-slits to catch the sunlight.

A staircase leads up into Level Five, and down to another room which Giselle has never seen. She has seen the Dragonlord and three companions, and the four women they hold captive, but no one else has entered the chambers she's seen in the time she's been there. She suspects (rightly) that the caves were carved out as a refuge for a former lord of Mornharbor Castle, but suited the Dragonlord perfectly. In exchange for this refuge, the Dragonlord has given Prince Odon better swords and armor for his army; Giselle has heard rumors that he's also promised him a larger kingdom.

This is all that Giselle knows, and more than any of Flint's crew can say, except for Flint himself. If the investigators successfully interrogate Flint and ask the right questions, they can get most of the following information (except for the contents of Dragunov's closet and the traps in Level One) as well.

The natural stone walls of Bishop Rock vary from six inches to six feet thick (DR 8, 90 hit points per 6"). The crane lowers a basket, 4' by 4' by 3', that can hold 800 lbs; the winches can raise this at five yards/turn. When the boat comes past in the evening, it's about 90 feet from the cave down to the deck (if they try to climb this without equipment, treat as a vertical stone wall).

The cave entrance is not the only way into the tower; there's a four-foot-high doorway on Level One, at the base of the eastern wall, but that's only accessible -- and barely visible -- for about an hour when the tide is at its lowest (around midnight). The low tide exposes a natural causeway (about 1,200 yards of very bad road) between Odon's castle and this doorway; a gate, locked and barred, blocks off a tunnel that leads into the castle. Flint has never used the causeway, which was meant as an emergency escape route from the castle, and doesn't know how well the castle end is guarded: nor does he know about any security measures Dragunov may have put in place at the tower end. He knows that a spiral staircase leads down from Dragunov's room in the tower, but he's never been down it to see what's there.

Level Three is home for the Dragonlord's lieutenants, the Dragon Knights - Flint, Ramos and Vermeer. It's elliptical, about 39' by 30'; the floors are smoothed over with construction foam and covered with fur rugs, and the walls are decorated with pornographic pictures. The room contains three bunks (each with an Omniblaster pistol under the pillow), four chairs, a table, a large closet, a holo projector, a sonic shower, a chemical toilet, and a large vapor canteen. The closet is divided into three compartments, each containing one Rocket Carbine with one clip of nerve gas CHEM rounds and one clip of HEX; 10 cassettes each of CHEM and HEX gyrocs; a skinsuit; a thermo suit; a military wet suit; an air mask with a CBR filter and mini-tank; a chameleon cloak; and a tube of ablative foam, as well as several suits of more conventional clothing. Stairs lead down to Level Four, and up to the barracks. There are four

arrow slits, looking approximately northeast, northwest, southeast, and southwest. An infrared motion detector with an effective skill of 16 sits at the end of the bed.

Dragunov's room occupies all of Level Two -- an elliptical room about 36' by 24'. It contains most of the usual furniture from a standard starship cabin: bed, desk, two chairs, closet, holo projector, and a sonic shower. All are modified for his 8' frame. The floors and some of the walls are smoothed over with construction foam, but the only attempt at decoration is a print of a naked woman and a red dragon. The room also contains a minifac (p. UT83) which produces the weapons and armor they've used to bribe Odon, as well as luxuries for their own use, and a teaching suit (p. UT61) with Broadsword program. The contents of Dragunov's closet are the same as his lieutenants'. Stairs lead down to Level Four, and up to the barracks. There are two arrow slits -- one looking east out to sea, the other west towards Mornharbor. An infrared motion detector with an effective skill of 16 sits at the end of the bed; a small computer with Accounting, Interpreter, Medical and Word Processing software, French and Latin dictionaries, maps of Ahto, a copy of the Great Book, and an extensive library of fantasy novels and medieval history texts sits on the desk.

Level One is a rough cylinder about 22' around and 24' high, with a staircase spiraling around the walls. At the top of the stairs is a one-inch-thick wooden trapdoor reinforced with bronze and bolted; DR 3, 16 Hit points. Forcing or breaking the door will transmit an alarm to Dragunov's communicator.

The doorway into Level One from the causeway is only 4' high by 3' wide; there is no door, but there is a four-strand monowire spiderweb (p. UT62) strung across the doorway. On the bottom step, disguised with a thin layer of sand, is a Tangler mine (p. S79). Roll Traps/TL10 to detect either of these measures. Level One is otherwise empty, and has no arrow slits; a sensor set into the underside of the trapdoor will sound an alarm if it detects a light source brighter than reflected moonlight inside Level One. If the heroes set off any alarms once inside the tower, it will lose them the advantage of surprise and give Dragunov and his henchmen time to arm and armor themselves.

If the party is trapped in Level One, or retreat back across the causeway, remember that the tide rises by about one foot an hour from midnight to midday. (The traditional method of execution in Mornharbor is to be chained to a pier at sunrise and let the tide drown the accused: the Great Book maintains that the water will spare an innocent man, but this has never happened.)

Avenues of Approach

There are three ways to Bishop Rock: by air, by land (the causeway), or by sea.

Air: Heroes may decide to fly into the cave using backpack parawings, fusion flight packs, etc.: the entrance to the cave is too small for anything over Size Mod +3 (Size Mod +2 if the dracomech is in the cave), and gives a -5 modifier to Piloting or Parachuting. Worse still, the dracomech is programmed to fire on any unidentified intruders; fortunately, it uses the stun cannon inside the cave rather than the flamethrower. It will also raise an alarm, bringing Dragunov or one of the Dragon Knights running.

Land: If the heroes try to use the causeway (during the one hour per night when it isn't underwater), they will first have to swim or wade for 150 yards through water four feet deep to reach it. The path, one hex wide, leads straight out from the cliff under the castle; climbing down the cliff from the castle is even more difficult and hazardous. There are no sentries watching the causeway from either the tower or the castle: Prince Odon would rather not draw attention to it, and Dragunov doesn't consider it a problem. However, if the PCs try using flashlights, they will be noticed by the castle's guard, who will alert the Dragonseer, who will use his communicator to alert Dragunov.

Heroes trying to move stealthily along the causeway should roll Stealth once (with modifiers on p. B67); if any of them fail, or aren't bothering to use Stealth, they will be detected, and the dracomech will come flying around the tower and into firing range just as the leader is 7 hexes from the doorway. Unable to either hover or to stand on the narrow causeway, the dracomech will fire its flamethrower once at a four-hex-long area (2d fire damage per hex) near the center of the group, then fly up to the top of the tower and perch there, giving the heroes two turns to run (or dive) for cover before it fires again.

Sea: Those who don't wish to use the causeway may swim out to Mount Bishop at any time, then attempt to climb the tower or swim underwater and enter through the doorway on Level One. The drawback to this method is that swimmers can not carry much in the way of weapons or armor.

An alternative to this is to take a boat. The most common boats in Mornharbor are the wooden rowboats favored by the fishing fleet (each roundship also carries one). These are PD 2, DR 3, Body HT 200, and can move at 14 mph with a full crew of 10 oarsmen. Empty mass is 2,230 lbs; cargo space is 28 cf and maximum load is 4500 lbs (2.25 tons) including crew; draft is only 2.5', which enables them to approach the tower safely at any time during the day. At night, when the tide is lower, even experienced pilots will be reluctant to negotiate the reef and will demand a florin as fee and two royals (\$1920) as security, before they do so. Heroes who take a rowboat and attempt to row from Mornharbor at night without sonar, Danger Sense, or similar precautions will have to make two rolls against Boating skill, with Vision modifiers for the darkness; failure on either will mean the boat has hit a rock, taking 1d-1 damage.

A rowboat probably won't attract much attention unless the PCs use a flashlight or some other obvious ultra-tech item, in which case the castle sentries will notify the Dragonseer, who will alert Dragunov, who will send the dracomech out to attack the boat.

Climbing the tower may be risky, but it will enable heroes to avoid the traps of Level One and fire into Levels Two, Three and Four through the 6" wide arrow-slits (grenades would be even better than most guns and beam weapons). These are too small for even a skinny human character to use as an entrance, but they may be suitable for a small alien or robot.

The party may also choose to reach the tower in the supply boat. The crew may be tricked or intimidated (treat as four Veterans with Boating-13), but not bribed. Playing dead and hoping to be thrown onto the dead cart, and then into the basket, is not recommended; the crew dismembers the bodies before leaving port, to make the pieces easier to handle.

Hauling the Loot

Dragunov will not surrender under any circumstances. If the heroes enter the tower via Level One and seem able to capture him, he will retreat to Level Five to attempt to escape to Odon's castle (using the Fusion Flight Pack, on the back of the Dracomech, or by whatever means seems most likely to succeed); if they attack from Level Five, he may grab an artificial gill and escape through Level One. He will not commit suicide, but he will take suicidal risks rather than be handed over to the SJG (treat as having the On the Edge disadvantage). If he reaches the castle, he will lead Odon's troops in an attempt to re-take Bishop Rock.

If the heroes manage to defeat Dragunov, his lieutenants, and the dracomech, and take control of Bishop Rock, they should be able to get one boat-load of loot (4500 lbs, minus the weight of the characters and their gear) out of the tower without too much difficulty. Large items from Levels Two, Three and Four, such as the minifac, food processor, modular cage, closets, beds, etc., will have to be dismantled before they can be removed from the rooms; this is an easy but time-consuming job for anyone with Mechanic/TL10 skill (though re-assembling some items may require Electronics/TL10). Singh is only interested in capturing Dragunov and releasing the slaves; his personal code of honor does not allow looting, and he will try to dissuade the PCs from doing any. They may decide to come back for seconds without him -- but this may not be as easy as it sounds.

If the "corpse" of the dracomech is visible from the castle, Prince Odon will begin blockading the tower soon after sunrise. He will commandeer the three roundships in the harbor, crew them with his own veterans and arm them with medium ballistas (p. CII38). The castle's own arcuballistas and catapults do not have the range to reach Bishop Rock, nor will they pose much threat to spaceships, but they may prevent anyone else from Mornharbor reaching the tower to loot it.

If the dracomech's corpse is not visible, the Dragonseer will wait until sunset before persuading the crew of the supply boat to take him and a couple of experienced burglars (Dai Blackthorn, p. B214, would be ideal) to the tower to investigate. If the Dragonseer's thieves find the tower unoccupied, they will begin to loot it of those items they

recognize as valuable. Prince Odon, who has spies of his own watching the Dragonseer, will learn of this before midnight and send two of his best knights (with BPC armor and monowire-edged swords) and eight veterans across the causeway to the tower at low tide, giving them orders to kill the Dragonseer, bring any treasure they find back to the castle, and ready the arcuballista on Level Five. Odon's navy will then blockade Bishop Rock soon after sunrise.

Odon's troops will hide all of Dragunov's gear that they can remove from Bishop Rock and can't find an immediate use for. If the heroes try to bargain with Odon for these items, the Prince will ask for military assistance: he expects the rulers of the other kingdoms to unite against him because he collaborated with the Dragonlord. What form this "assistance" takes will depend on how much he thinks the heroes value the gear: it may range from him asking them for weapons and/or training in their use, to demanding that they destroy the other kings' castles and/or fleets. If the heroes refuse, Odon will make it very dangerous for them to stay on Kamax . . .

If Singh learns that Odon is keeping two offworld women (Nata and Tomiko) in his harem against their will, he may try to rescue them. He is unlikely to succeed at this without the party's help (the harem is protected by TL10 security measures provided by Dragunov, and Tiffany and Kona are ordered not to let the others leave), and may need to be rescued himself . . .

Return of the Revenge

After 33 standard days (22 Ahtoan days) from when the heroes first land at Mount Aramis, a ship of Dragunov's pirate fleet, the *Revenge*, will enter the system to collect tribute and to deal with the survey ship it expects to arrive two days later. When the crew receive no replies to their communications from Dragunov, they will land at Mount Aramis to investigate.

If Singh and/or any of the PCs have reported the situation on Ahto to the Survey Service, the Patrol, the Navy and/or the Special Justice Group, there will be a small force of battlesuited space marines waiting at Mount Aramis, and at least two corvettes hiding on or behind Ahto's moon, ready to ambush the pirates. If they don't report, and can persuade Singh not to (assuming he's survived), they can attempt to capture the pirates themselves -- but the pirates may have them outnumbered and outgunned. (If you need to rescue them, have a small fleet of Navy and/or Patrol ships arrive in the nick of time, and tell the heroes that the SJG was tipped off).

Cast

Dragonlord (Malik Dragunov)

Malik Dragunov grew up poor on a collective farm on Anastasia, where the only breaks from the boredom were his school library's collection of fantasy novels and holoventures. Dragunov became obsessed with dragons, kings and swords, but he wasn't content to simply read about them; he studied swordplay, and practiced with vibro-machetes and baseball bats. At 17, with too long a criminal record for the local militia, he joined a troop of mercenaries, and soon became notorious for his ruthless treatment of enemies and civilians. He turned to piracy and gunrunning, and attracted a small band of followers and a much larger group of enemies. He was on the run when he heard about Ahto, and decided it was better to be king over a few thousand people (while running a small quota of slaves to Nangodai to buy offworld luxuries) than executed in front of a few billion.

52 years old, but looks about 40. Pale skin, dark blue eyes, bald; tattoo of dragon coiled around torso. 8', 380 lbs.
Native gravity .9 G.

ST 13 (15); **DX** 14; **IQ** 13; **HT** 13. Move 6.

Advantages: Ambidexterity; Attractive; Bionic Arm (ST 15, with concealed Hand Flamer); Charisma/2; Combat Reflexes; Cool; High Pain Threshold; Panimmunity; Voice; Wealth (Wealthy).

Disadvantages: Bad Temper; Bloodlust; Bully; Enemy (Special Justice Group, appears on 6 or less); Fanatic (self);

Gigantism; Language Talent/1; Longevity; Megalomaniac; Reputation, -4 to Law Enforcement professionals and Bounty Hunters, always recognized.

Skills: Acting-13; Bard-17; Beam Weapons/TL10 (Flamer)-17, (Blaster)-16; Brawling-14; Broadsword-16; Chess-13; Climbing-14; Fast-Draw (Sword)-15; Fast-Talk-13; First Aid/TL10-12; Guns/TL10 (Gyroc)-16; Heraldry (Ahtoan)-12; History-11; Interrogation-13; Intimidation-16; Judo-15; Knife-14; Languages (Standard)-14, (Arabic, French, Latin, Russian)-12; Leadership-14; Literature-11; Politics-14; Riding (Horse)-13; Piloting/TL10 (Starship)-14; Savoir-Faire-12; Scrounging-13; Sex-Appeal-15; Shortsword-14; Streetwise-15; Swimming-15; Tactics-14; Two-handed Sword-15.

Quirks: Proud; Collects more books than he has time to read; Fascinated by Catherine the Great; Pretends to be chivalrous, but would rather cheat than lose; Despises democracy and socialism.

Gear: Fine Thrusting Bastard Sword with Monowire edge; BPC Half Plate (PD 4, DR 29, 35 lbs) over Medium Arachnoweave suit (PD 2, DR 8; PD 1, DR 2 vs impaling, 2.5 lbs); Chameleon Cloak; Blackout gas grenade; Sleep gas grenade; Medium Communicator; Infrared contact lenses. If not expecting combat, wears Arachnoweave suit, leather gloves, and boots.

Dragon Knights

The Dragonlord's lieutenants, Gordon Ramos and Raul Vermeer, were genetically engineered to be soldiers, then trained as guerrillas, on Lugh during its long civil war. Though not blood relatives, they look and think alike enough to be brothers. (The most obvious difference is that behind their nightshades, Ramos's eyes are dark brown and Vermeer's blue.) When the war finally ended, both joined Dragunov's platoon, and are as fiercely loyal to him as they are to each other. Neither will attempt to escape unless they're sure the other is already dead.

41 years old; brown complexion, razor-cut dark brown hair, clean-shaven. 5'11", 170 lbs. Native gravity 1.08 G.

ST 13; DX 12; IQ 11; HT 12. Move 6.

Advantages: Alcohol Tolerance; Combat Reflexes; G-Experience; High Pain Threshold; Neural-interface implant; Panimmunity.

Disadvantages: Bully; Callous; Enemy (Special Justice Group, appears on 6 or less); Pirate's Code of Honor; Pyromania; Reputation (-3 to Law Enforcement professionals and Bounty Hunters, recognized on 7 or less).

Skills: Beam Weapons/TL10 (Blaster)-16, (Neural)-15; Brawling-13; Broadsword-14; Carousing-13; Demolitions/TL10-12; Detect Lies-10; Electronics Operation/TL10 (Sensors)-11; Fast-Draw (Pistol)-13, (Sword)-12; Fast-Talk-12; First Aid/TL10-10; Free-Fall-12; Gambling-11; Garrote-12; Guns/TL10 (Gyroc)-14; Gunner/TL10 (Flamethrower)-14, (Sonic)-13; Judo-12; Knife-13; Leadership-11; Riding (Horse)-11; Piloting/TL10 (Shuttle)-13, (Dracomech)-12; Savoir-Faire-11; Shortsword-12; Streetwise-13; Tactics-10; Vacc Suit/TL10-12.

Quirks: Intolerance (Pacifists); Preference for redheaded women.

Gear: Fine Thrusting Broadsword with Monowire edge; BPC Half Plate over Medium Arachnoweave suit; Medium Communicator; Nightshades. If not expecting combat, wear they wear Arachnoweave suit, leather gloves, and boots.

Prince Odon

Prince Odon is an unremarkable Ahtoan aristocrat: uncharismatic but shrewd, and saner than some. While not as popular as his late wife nor as thoroughly hated as his late father, he has the respect and loyalty of his soldiers, who are the best equipped (and best fed) on Ahto. Dragunov chose him as an ally because of this, and because he was more ambitious and less hidebound than the other rulers.

As well as arming and flattering him, Dragunov has pandered to his weaknesses by supplying him with offworld luxuries, including food and women. Odon's harem consists of Nata, a homesick Nangodaian lured from the Perfumed Garden (see Part One) with false promises; Tomiko, a 7'7"-tall Light-worlder abducted from a zero-g dance troupe; Tiffany, a Lemon Angel android bought on the black market on Galt; and Kona, an Eros-series bioroid.

44 years old (looks 50+); pale complexion; graying blond hair, beard and mustache; ice-blue eyes. 5'9", 195 lbs.

ST 11; DX 10; IQ 12; HT 9. Move 2.

Advantages: Alcohol Tolerance; Combat Reflexes; Status/6; Wealth (Wealthy).

Disadvantages: Bully; Code of Honor (Chivalric); Dependent (Son, 75-point character); Gluttony; Greed; Obsession (increasing his family's dominion); Overweight (45 lbs encumbrance); Primitive (TL3); Stubbornness; Unfit.

Quirks: Proud; Likes exotic women.

Skills: Administration-14; Area Knowledge (Kamax)-14, (Ahto)-13; Armory/TL3-10; Brawling-10; Broadsword-12; Carousing-11; Detect Lies-13; Diplomacy-14; Economics/TL3-10; Fast-Draw (sword)-11; Heraldry-13; History (Ahto)-10; Languages (French)-10, (Standard)-9, (Latin)-8; Law (Ahtoan)-11; Leadership-13; Politics-13; Riding (Horse)-11; Savoir-Faire-14; Strategy (Land)-13; Tactics-12.

Gear: Fine Thrusting Broadsword with Monowire edge; Heavy fur robes (DR 1) over BPC Breastplate (PD 4, DR 29, 9 lbs) and Medium Arachnoweave suit; Boots; Small crown (gilded steel set with pearls; PD 2, DR 4, 3 lbs).

Ahtoan Slaves

The three women the Dragonlord has abducted and kept as a harem for himself and his lieutenants are Status 0 -- unmarried teenage peasant girls from farms or fishing villages. All are traumatized by their treatment, particularly by the sadistic Flint; though not willing to trust any strangers, they will give whatever help they can to anyone they see attacking Dragunov and his lieutenants. Ada is a blue-eyed redhead; 5'7" and 130 lbs. Isabel is a brown-eyed brunette; 5'4" and 110 lbs. Zuri is blond and green-eyed; 5'6" and 125 lbs.

ST 10; DX 12; IQ 10; HT 12. Move 6.

Advantages: Beautiful or Very Beautiful.

Disadvantages: Illiteracy; On the Edge; Primitive (TL3).

Skills: Agronomy/TL3, Animal Handling or Fishing-10; Area Knowledge (Ahto)-10; Brawling-12; Cooking-10; Language (Standard)-10; Merchant-9; Running-12; Sex-Appeal-10; Swimming-10.

Dragon/Dracomech

This is the TL10 Dracomech from *GURPS Vehicles 1st Edition*, with the mind disruptor replaced by a Stun cannon. It resembles a classical wyvern: reptilian head, leathery wings, snake-like body and two clawed limbs. Powered by a carnivore bioconverter, it eats 700 lbs of meat -- half a horse or four large people -- per Ahtoan day, and can regenerate damage at 10% of HT every 24 hours. It has two cramped internal seats for a pilot and gunner (womb seats with neural interface sockets), but its complexity 5 minicomputer has autonomous operation, personality simulation (complexity 4), gunner (sonic), melee, and tactical vehicle operation software, giving it an effective IQ of 10 and combat skills at 14. (Giselle was able to escape because the dracomech had no orders to stop anyone leaving; instead, it called Dragunov to ask for instructions, its usual response to unexpected events.)

The dracomech has a 200 cf organic body (30' long, HT 375); its head is a limited traverse turret containing a TL8 Heavy Flamethrower and a Heavy Stun Beamer (HT 50). Its arms have ST 200, HT 125, and claws: they do 21d

impaling or 23d cutting damage. Its ornithopter wings have HT 188; its top speed is 135 mph, stall speed 38 mph (it can't hover), acceleration 9 mph/sec, deceleration 15 mph/sec. It can also run at 45 mph, acceleration 7 mph/sec, deceleration 20 mph/sec . . . but it can't swim.

The dracomech is well protected with ablative armor: PD6/DR250 on the front and underside, PD6/DR200 elsewhere except for the wings and head, which have PD6/DR100. It's more than a match for any TL3 weapon, even siege engines, or for a group of TL10 PCs with no heavy weapons (though missiles with shaped-charge warheads can hurt it) -- but once outside of its cave, it's an easy target for spaceship weapons capable of groundfire (see p. S138). In Space Combat terms, the dracomech has cDR2 (turret and wings are CDR1) and no effective attack (with a ceiling of 5400 yards, it can't even ram an orbiting spaceship).

Mass 5142.5 lbs; Size Modifier +3, Radar Signature -2, IR Signature +4, Acoustic Signature +1. Human-spectrum and passive IR sensors in turret. 47.4 cf cargo space; 2 man-days limited life support.

Heavy Flamethrower: Malf crit.; Damage/Type, 8d/sec fire; SS 15; Acc 7; 1/2D n/a; Max 100; RoF 1; Shots 20.

Heavy Stun Beamer: Malf ver.; Damage/Type, roll HT-5 to avoid stun; SS 15; Acc 13; 1/2D 1,000; Max 2,000; RoF 1. 100 shots.

Pyramid Review

Black Sails Over Freeport (for the d20 System)

Published by [Green Ronin Publishing](#)

Written by **Brian E. Kirby, Robert Lawson, William Simoni, & Robert J. Toth**

Illustrated by **Toren "Macbin" Atkinson, Mario Fiorito, David Griffith, Ramsey Hong, Ralph Horsley, Chris Keefe, Steve Lawton, Britt Martin, & Joseph Wigfield**

Cartography by **Todd Gamble, Hal Mangold, & Rob Lee**

256-page b&w softcover; \$18.95

Big adventures for *d20 System* are not all that unusual, but formatting them as anything other than trilogies definitely is. The latest exception is *Black Sails Over Freeport*, a mammoth campaign crowbarred into the confines of its 256-pages. This makes it by far the biggest release for Green Ronin's pirate-themed *d20 System* setting, [Freeport: City of Adventure](#). Indeed, a prospective GM for this campaign will get the most out of it by having both the *Freeport: City of Adventure* sourcebook, and its supplement, [Denizens of Freeport](#) at hand.

Black Sails Over Freeport is designed for a party of four characters, of roughly 6th level. From the book's artwork, it is obvious that the four default characters for the campaign should be those first given in [Death in Freeport](#). Of course, they should have gained some experience by playing though both the original . . . *in Freeport* trilogy and various adventures from [Tales of Freeport](#) in order to get to 6th level. That said, the book does not include anything in the way of default characters.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

At the heart of *Black Sails Over Freeport* lies the relationship between two gods, Harrimast, the city's great god of piracy, and his first mate, Yarash. Simply, the latter embodies all that is evil in piracy, while the latter embodies all that is "good." Worshippers of Harrimast are the kind of pirate with a sense of honor, a notion of romantic adventure, and at least an ounce of mercy; while Yarash's followers are anything but, being the scourge of the seas, their brutal acts turning the foam blood red. Appalled at his lieutenant's growing power and the actions of his followers, Harrimast punished Yarash. In return, he swore revenge, and took as loyal servants five cunning pirates who had been on the losing side in the act of betrayal that ensured the very survival of Freeport. Known as the "Full Fathom Five," their reign of terror upon the high seas again threatened the very safety of the city, which was exactly what Yarash wanted. With the aid of a repentant from amongst their number, the then current Sea Lord of Freeport lured the remaining four members of the Full Fathom Five into an area known as "Hell's Triangle," and then trapped them in this graveyard of ships. Their master, whom Harrimast had condemned for his treachery, joined them, and together their existence passed from fact to legend.

In the century or so since, both Yarash and the Full Fathom Five have been all but forgotten -- helped by authority's successful efforts to suppress all knowledge of these events. Occupying the minds of Freeport's citizens are events upon the mainland -- a brewing war between the barbarian and Elven nations, and at home, with the influx of Orc

labor, brought into to rebuild Milton's Folly, the building at the center of the . . . *in Freeport* trilogy. While the natives complain at the drop in wages this has caused, the Orcs grow increasing militant in their demand for Orc rights. In this, the portrayal of the city's Orc population is drawn from Green Ronin's first RPG, *Ork!* For the player characters, the adventure begins with a random Gnome pressing a scroll case into their hands and asking them to protect it until he can reclaim it. Eventually, they will learn that inside the case is a map showing the location of Yarashad, a mythic island within the Hell's Triangle that is rumored to be home to a large treasure hoard. All they need is a certain magical item that will get them safely into Hell's Triangle and a ship that will get them there. Of course, they will not be the only ones interested in either the map or the item, a certain band of cultists believing that both will be helpful in releasing their imprisoned master.

Black Sails Over Freeport is divided into three long acts. In the first part, the party is chased back and forth across the city as they assemble everything they need for a voyage into Hell's Triangle. There is opportunity for combat, investigation, and roleplaying as they learn more about their destination and its history, foil the efforts of the cultists, encounter the most anonymous man in Freeport, and free an Orc from a prison hulk. In this they will have the aid of an academic who dabbles in a little treasure hunting on the side, though his lack of adventuring experience will prove as much a liability as his scholastic skills are useful.

As the second act opens, the party will have made their to the center of Hell's Triangle, and discovered the existence of four islands, each now home to the remaining members of Full Fathom Five. Each member also possesses an artifact that when together will unlock the legendary treasure hoard. The longest and most involved of the three acts; this middle section is where the campaign comes into its own. Both the islands and their masters are very different, each member of the Full Fathom Five now being an undead creature with over a century's worth of brooding behind them. Their islands are personal fiefdoms each with a different flavor, all four consisting of the same format: an island full of abused and used natives, beneath which lies a dungeon lair. The characters have the freedom to investigate the islands in whatever order they choose, and the other undead pirates will often intervene with raids of their own.

There are some very tough encounters to be found on and under the islands, many of which are in the Effective Level range of 12 to 15. This may prove to be a problem considering that the player characters start at sixth level. The design for each island is also where the campaign is at its silliest. Over the course of the four islands, *Black Sails Over Freeport* references *Star Wars: Attack of the Clones*, *Zardoz*, *Planet of the Apes*, *Soylent Green*, *The Terminator* trilogy, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, and *She*, among many others. In places, what starts as mere homage in drawing upon these sources verges on the ham-fisted and threatens to undermine the tone of the campaign. This is in addition to some possibly equally silly encounters -- a bored vampire who is more interested in conversation than sucking blood, a pair of Ghast chefs that believe the player characters to be the next on the menu, an attic full of monsters masquerading as giant toys, and even a lump of stone that has fallen from the sky and is a dead ringer for *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay's* Chaos-mutation-inducing "Warpstone."

With all four artifacts in hand, the island of Yarashad is finally revealed to the party. Getting onto the island is tough enough, but at the center lie some incredibly powerful challenges that will test the characters to their utmost. Hopefully they will have gained enough experience and levels to deal with an Effective Level 20 encounter. The payoff is worth it, as the party will literally sail away with enough loot to set them up for life; roughly 25,000 GP in coins and gems, plus items worth another 55,000 GP came from one player's rolls.

This though, is not the end of the campaign, as events have continued apace in Freeport while the party has been away. The third act finds the city threatened by both the barbarians and the Elves for not coming to the aid of their particular side, the Orcs actively pushing for their rights, and the cultists preparing a new plan to bring Yarash back from his confinement. This is a much shorter section and should be run at a frenetic pace as events escalate around the heroes. These begin with the Orcs going on the rampage and the barbarian fleet assaulting the city, before the good folk of Freeport strike back at the remaining barbarian ships. At this point, the cultists strike and Yarash arises. Stop this from happening and the characters gain an incredible prize: a one-time boon from Harrimast.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Physically, *Black Sails Over Freeport* is very well done, neatly laid out and organized for ease of use. Its three acts

are comfortably broken up into a series of scenes that are accompanied with suggestions for experience awards for roleplaying -- both good *and* bad. Although it is profusely illustrated, not all of the artwork is worth having been included, and these pieces really do detract from the book's busy gray layout. Fortunately, many of the other illustrations are excellent and really do help the DM visualize a particular scene. The cartography is excellent throughout, as befits a Green Ronin publication, although in places it is a little cramped. Considering the size of the campaign, it is no surprise that the last 50 pages of the book is taken up purely by the statistics for the NPCs. In addition, another five pages are given over to player handouts. One major omission from the book, especially given its length and scope, is the presence of an index.

Black Sails Over Freeport is not without its share of problems, but these are not insurmountable. In particular, there is no indication as to the experience point gain from one act to the next, or from one scene to the next. This is necessary because of the difficulty of some of the encounters, especially in the second act.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

Also, the plot lacks clarity -- it seems all too convenient that Yarash is able to break free after the characters have effectively foiled the efforts of the cultists in the first act. Plus the serpent men, a prominent though hidden facet of Freeport throughout previous adventures, suddenly make a grab for power out of nowhere in the third act. There is almost the feeling that the whole point of act two is to get the characters away from the city just to set up the finale.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

The three acts *are* very different, with the first being the most similar to other ***Freeport*** adventures, the second the strangest *and* the one most like any other ***d20 System*** adventure, and the third being a perhaps too busy conclusion. Finally, there is the feeling that while the campaign has the scope and grandeur of a ***Call of Cthulhu*** campaign, it is a pity that ***Black Sails Over Freeport*** is not as Mythos influenced as were those early Freeport adventures.

Despite these problems, ***Black Sails Over Freeport*** offers a lot within its pages. There is an investigation to conduct, plenty of roleplaying opportunities, a swathe of interesting foes to smite, several mini-wilderness and mini-dungeons to explore in the form of the four islands, and an über-big bad to take down in the climax of the story. And since these are all arranged in a series of decently sized scenes that can be played in just a few sessions, there never seems to be a moment when the campaign has the chance to lose momentum. ***Black Sails Over Freeport*** should keep any Freeport campaign going for months to come and while it may not be perfect, certainly sets the standard for the big ***d20 System*** campaigns to beat.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Wreckage

Published by [Fantasy Flight Publishing, Inc.](#)

Designed by Barry Stockinger

Developed by Kevin Wilson & Darrell Hardy

Edited by Christian T. Petersen & Robert Vaughn

Art, graphics by Scott Nicely, Jesper Ejsing, & William McAusland

Four cars with speedometer and needle sets, initiative counters, and four decks of seven steering cards each, 38 damage cards, 18 equipment cards, 32 hit counters, three mine counters, eight gas can counters, 14 obstacle tiles, spinout tile, combat and movement ruler, full-color components, b&w rules in six languages; \$19.95

It seems the gaming world owes a debt to Steve Jackson Games that won't easily be repaid. The whole Mad Max-esque cars and guns fighting genre seems to borrow, probably by necessity, from *Car Wars*. And Fantasy Flight? Their tabletop arena game *Wreckage* is the second product under their banner (the first being the Horizon line's *Redline RPG* world) to milk the setting's ideas.

The object of the game is to be the first player to pick up three fuel cans, or to be the last car still running.

The game is for two to four players, and each chooses one of the four colored cars. Each car is rated for Acceleration, Handling, and Structure. The cars are all double-sided, with a different vehicle on each side, so players have to choose which arrangement of stats they'll go with for that game. The player takes the deck of movement cards that match their vehicle's color, and then everyone takes turns selecting items from the equipment deck.

These devices give you some sort of advantage during the game. Weapons are the most direct means to do damage to your opponents, but you can also get armor, movement boosters, or enhancements like turrets. Once decked out, the cars are set up in a standard format -- with everyone pointed at the obstacles and fuel cans at the center of the playing surface -- and initiatives are determined.

Turns are split in two, so you will move and attack once each in initiative order, then repeat the order. Speed determines who acts first. On your turn, you move and perform any attacks available to you. If you move over a fuel canister, you pick that tile up and put it with your vehicle's display. You play steering cards to decide what maneuvers are available to you in each of the two rounds, and both must be placed face-down at the start of the turn. If your card choices later put you on a collision course, you could be in trouble.

Most of the steering cards are standardized -- each deck has a "turn left" card, a "turn right" card, a "repeat" card (which means you want to perform the maneuver from the first card a second time), etc. Each car also has two special movement cards, unique to that deck. The purple car has the ability to jump, for example, while the green vehicle can pull a bootleg. Everyone gets a slight advantage, movement becomes a little less predictable, and players who miscalculated their moves may have a way out. A "ruler" provided with the game shows movement segments, so players can set the stick beside their car and slide the counter the proper number of car lengths forward. It also has a

crook in one end that rotates the car for a left- or right-hand turn.

To attack someone, you must be able to get line of sight to the target and they must be in range. The other side of the movement ruler has segments marked off to determine how far apart opponents are; if the stick crosses an obstacle, Line of Sight is blocked. When a weapon is fired, draw a number of cards equal to its damage value from the damage deck. These cards show zero to three little "bang" symbols, and these are compared to your structure and any armor you've equipped your car with; exceed your structure and the vehicle is eliminated. Some cards list critical hits, randomly removing a movement card from your movement deck and limiting the maneuvers available to you. Others may spin you out, changing your vehicle's facing.

You may choose to repair a point of damage or regain the movement card of your choice by making emergency repairs. Instead of executing your steering card, you trade two cards out of your hand for whichever form of damage you decide to repair. A pricey exchange, but you may prefer forever circling the arena with left turns to not being able to slow down as you head for a wall. Anyone who suffers a fatal blow places any fuel cans collected beside his last known position for others to scavenge.

The system in *Wreckage* is blunt but workable. The game eschews fine detail for fast, practical mechanics. Even without the fine print of *Car Wars*, the addition of just a few rules like the special steering cards, emergency repairs, and hairpin turns gives a tactical depth to the game that increases the replay value. And, in the Fantasy Flight tradition, the colorful components are easy on the eyes.

The rules make good sense (though the order of their presentation could be a little more precise). What isn't immediately obvious is the question of arena size -- there's a specific layout to the basic game, but if this sits at the center of the average living room table, there will be too much space to maneuver outside the cluster of obstacles in the middle. In other words, you'll have to play the game a couple of times before you can come up with some house rules for arena layouts (there's just the one in the book) that won't result in a game that takes ages to complete.

Some of the inclusions seem a bit gaudy given their purpose. The damage cards are a pretty extravagant and heavy-handed way of determining damage, and there ought to be a less elaborate way to keep track of things than hit counters and a speedometer with a cardboard needle. There isn't a substantial savings in playing time when compared to *Car Wars* -- a game still takes about an hour -- but getting the game started is much faster with the streamlined vehicle creation system. Foregoing the profusion of choices and options of that game, *Wreckage* still offers an involving and demanding tabletop experience.

--Andy Vetromile

Primary Sources

The Zombie Survival Guide

Published by [Three Rivers Press](#)

Written by Max Brooks

Illustrated by Max Werner

272-page b&w softcover; \$12.95

The *Zombie Survival Guide* is not a roleplaying game sourcebook, but it reads like one. It describes a detailed setting complete with enough plot hooks to hang a campaign on. The setting is Max Brooks' interpretation of the zombie horror story. His premise? The world has been infested with a virus that turns the living into the living dead. The governments and population of this setting are mostly unaware of the danger. Ancient stories of corpses reviving, attacking, and consuming the flesh of their victims are regarded as folklore. Modern reports of outbreaks in remote areas are dismissed as the product of overactive imaginations. The threat of civilization being overwhelmed by the living dead is growing and only the prepared will survive.

The book is presented as a parody of military survival manuals. The layout and illustrations are done in the same, simple style. It covers the subject of surviving zombie attacks using a dry and technical tone. This tone is important to the mood of the work and is maintained throughout it. This is the *Zombie Survival Guide's* strength and weakness. Max Brooks uses a particular blend of dark humor and horror. There are no laugh-out-loud comments or tongue-in-cheek passages. He treats the subject with such an earnest and serious tone that the book becomes believable at times. This tone also gives the book a farcical quality. Unfortunately, the length of the book may mean that the underlying joke gets stale for some readers.

Adapting Max Brooks' setting as a roleplaying campaign is relatively straightforward. The source material provides a great deal of depth in the form of historical accounts and pseudo-science. Player character types could range from ordinary people simply trying to stay alive to those who have dedicated their lives to studying and fighting the zombie threat. The *Zombie Survival Guide* describes varying levels of zombie attacks, from an isolated incident to a worldwide infestation leading to the fall of civilization. The players could find the campaign slowly escalating from destroying a few zombies in a lonely spot to fleeing the cities as they are overrun to a struggle to survive in a full-blown post-apocalyptic game.

The book itself could be dropped into an existing horror campaign. The PCs have a few encounters with walking, flesh-eating corpses. The zombies prove to be resistant to most attacks, but the PCs eventually destroy them. A couple of sessions later and a PC receives a copy of the *Zombie Survival Guide* as a gag gift. The details given in the book are an exact match with the creatures they ran into. But the book is clearly marked "humor" and was written by Mel Brooks' son. How reliable is the information within its pages? If the tactics in the book are real, they offer a good chance of victory. On the other hand, that helpful-sounding advice could seal the party's fate if the book is nothing more than a work of fiction. And if the information in the book is real, how did Max Brooks acquire it? How much do his parents know? A trip to New York might be needed to find the answers. This could kick off a new and slightly quirky chapter in a horror campaign.

Alternately, a GM could just throw these zombies at a team of trained undead hunters and watch their well-practiced plans fall apart. The living dead of the *Zombie Survival Guide* are created by a virus, not magic. Max Brooks even provides the pseudo-scientific explanations to prove it. This makes them immune to attempts to dispel them or drive them off using magic. Even worse, they are proficient at tracking prey by smell and hearing. The players will have to

scramble to find ways of dealing with packs of tireless hunters that want to consume their flesh. Like all good B-movie monsters, however, these zombies do have weaknesses. First, they are mindless rotting corpses with poor coordination. Outrunning them is not a problem on open, level ground. Second, destroy a zombie's brain and that zombie gets put down for good. The *Zombie Survival Guide* helpfully recommends a number of weapons for this application.

The final chapter of the book is of particular interest to GMs running a historical or time travel campaign. It chronicles all of the known zombie attacks throughout history. Encountering zombies as a soldier of the Roman Empire or the French Foreign Legion adds a new twist to a zombie horror story. Zombie infections are offered as the reason why ancient Egyptians removed a subject's brains during mummification. The book also provides a few details on an organization of zombie hunters in feudal Japan and of a Cold War zombie research project in Siberia. This provides even more depth to the setting and offers up a number of adventure seeds for GMs. The *Zombie Survival Guide* is also useful outside of the horror genre. Much of the advice given on escape, defense, and creating a citadel against zombie attacks is handy for modern day campaigns. The book suggests that the best way to prepare against an all-out zombie attack is to travel from a secure home (with a 10-foot tall concrete fence, a well-stocked armory, and plenty of emergency supplies) to an isolated location (with more fortifications, weapons, and supplies) in a suitable vehicle (with good gas mileage, off-road capability, and plenty of cargo/passenger space). In other words, to live like certain kinds of player characters.

Overall, the *Zombie Survival Guide* provides that "I want to run this" sentiment that a good setting should. The fact that it is not, in fact, a roleplaying supplement and that GMs will have to create their own stats should not distract from this point. It is also a darkly humorous piece of horror fiction in its own right. However, the relentless way that Max Brooks refuses to break character may wear on some readers.

--*Raymond Ford*

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Irregular Webcomic



by Chad Underkoffler

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Murphy's Rules



by Steven Marsh

Murphy's Rules



Confessions of a Non-Gamer

When the idea of switching regular features among the regular contributors came up, I thought it was a nifty idea, but it made me a little nervous too. It was suggested that I write Steven Marsh's Random Thought Table column. It made me nervous because, although I've now done a heap of work here at SJ Games, I feel like a gaming outsider. What could I possibly write about? The brilliant Mr. Marsh suggested that I write about just that . . . being a gaming outsider.

A great idea, but I have to make a confession. I'm not really a gaming outsider. I'm more of an ex-gamer.

All through high school I played games. Things like *Star Frontiers* (I was too much of an iconoclast to play *Dungeons & Dragons*), *Paranoia*, and something called *Car Wars*. I ended up working part-time in a comic and games store, and we played things like *Star Fleet Battles*, *BattleTech* (or was it *MechWarrior*? I can't tell the difference) and *Call of Chthulhu*. In college a friend of mine and I discovered *Warhammer 40,000* and *Blood Bowl*, and pretty much, for about four years, every Saturday, we gamed (actually, both of us being in school for art, we spent way more time painting miniatures and making scenery than actually getting around to playing!). Then my friend moved to England, and I never played games again.

And somehow, I lost my ability to understand games. I remember a friend of mine trying to teach my how to play *Magic* when it first came out. I couldn't understand a word he said as he explained the game. We gave up. Around the same time I dug out *Blood Bowl* to play again, having fond memories of trolls throwing goblins to the end zone, and I couldn't even understand the simplest of movement rules. I think video games spoiled me.

Fast forward 13 years, and I've been dragged back in to the world of gaming by my good friend Mr. John Kovalic. He suggested that I take over on *Munchkin Fu* and Mr. Jackson liked my art enough that *bam!* I'm a gaming "professional" now.

Oddly enough, years ago I tried to get into gaming illustration. In high school I sent my portfolio to West End Games in hopes of working on *Paranoia*. Didn't hear back from them. In retrospect, no big surprise. Then, at some point after college, I was at a gaming convention, I showed my portfolio to some game companies (a much better portfolio from having worked professionally in animation and comics) and I was told that there is no interest in the kind of art I did in gaming. No cartoony humor in gaming! Go away!

Working on *Munchkin Fu* was interesting for me. As I worked on the game, I didn't have a clue of how it would work or be played. When friends came by, and I showed them the art, they'd ask how the game worked and I have to say I didn't have the faintest idea. I didn't find this to be a problem . . . I thought it was kind of funny! Same thing happened on *Ninja Burger*, and currently, the same thing is happening with *Burn In Hell*.

So as the release of *Munchkin Fu* approached last spring, John Kovalic suggested that I join him at Origins. My first game would be out for the show, and I'd get a chance to meet my "co-collaborator," Steve Jackson.

I arrived in Columbus for the show, and after a struggle of just getting my name badge, I found my way in. Just as I got there, two big boxes full of brand new *Munchkin Fu* sets arrived. There was much excitement, and previously unknown to me, I found out just how popular the *Munchkin* line was. I've worked in comics for more than a decade, and sometimes it's like pulling teeth trying to sell a two-dollar comic book, but here's a \$25 game flying off out of the box! Exciting!

I sat down and before me was the fist person in line, clutching his brand new copy of *Munchkin Fu*. I asked him if he wanted me to sign the box, or some cards. He looked at me like I was an idiot.

"No! I want John Kovalic to sign it."

"Oh," I said, "well, John won't be here for about 20 minutes, and he didn't work on that game. I did."

The poor boy was in shock. He leaned in to look at my name tag. Then he looked at the name on the box. Then looked back at my name tag. Oh no, it seemed I was right. He sighed, and in the most disappointed tone of voice, said "fine . . ." and tossed the box to me.

"Fantastic. I've only been here 15 minutes," I thought to myself, "and I'm ready to leave." And the day really didn't get much better.

John eventually arrived at the table, and I think he signed more copies of *Munchkin Fu* than I did. I was met with nothing but disappointment from the *Munchkin* fans; I had people tell me how much they did not like my art, and I thought, "Wow. I drove six hours for *this*."

At the end of the day I announced that I was ready to make the six-hour drive home that very night. John convinced me to stay and give it one more day at least. Things would get better.

He was right. The next day people came by and told me that they had played the game the previous night and they really liked it, and they really liked the art. People had favorite cards that they wanted me to sign. Things were better. John still signed a lot of copies of *Munchkin Fu*, but at least they wanted me to sign it, too!

So that was my first convention as a "gaming professional."

Less than a year later and I get invited to WarpCon in Ireland. They want to fly me there and they'll pay for all my expenses. I was in shock. I worked in the comics industry for 13 years, and I never get flown anywhere . . . I'm in gaming less than a year, and next thing I know I'm in Europe! And I figure, they're paying to bring me there . . . so they're surely not going to treat me like garbage!

WarpCon was great. The people were so nice, and they knew who I was! I played lots of games and had so much fun that by the end my traveling partner, Mr. John Kovalic, was pointing and laughing at me "Ha ha! You're a gamer now!"

A couple weeks later, after I got home, I found out a local gaming store was planning their yearly convention. I went in and asked if they would want me to go to the show and help them sell copies of *Munchkin Fu* and *Ninja Burger*. I was met with nothing but skepticism over the fact that somebody that lives in their city could possibly work for Steve Jackson Games. It was more or less suggested that I'd have to bring in the original artwork for them to see to prove I worked on these games. And besides, they have a guy who wrote a *Star Trek* novel coming, so they wouldn't really need me there.

"Wow," I thought, "a couple weeks ago a show that required me taking a plane wants me . . . now the show I could ride my bike to doesn't want me."

I mentioned all this to a friend of mine the other day and he said, "Isn't that the way . . . you have to go to Europe to be appreciated!"

One last convention story. I do a lot of illustration work for LEGO. Last summer I was a guest at a LEGO convention (of all things!). The very first person that came up to my table said, "Oh rats; I forgot to bring my copy of *Munchkin Fu* to get you to sign!"

So maybe I have to go to Europe or non-game conventions to be appreciated. Still, I'm not discouraged. While I may not be at the local show, I'm sure I'll see some of you at some show this year, and in years to come. While John may not be 100% right with his declaration that I'm a gamer now, I don't really feel like a non-gamer anymore either!

--Greg Hyland

Designer's Notes: *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition*

By Sean Punch

First, a confession: In 2002, if you had asked me as a *gamer* whether I thought that a Fourth Edition of *GURPS* would ever happen, I would have said, "No." Third Edition was (and remains!) an excellent game, and with all those supplements printed over the years . . . well, I truly believed that there was too much inertia to overcome.

But as the *line developer*, I knew that all those supplements had made *GURPS* into a patchwork -- a game built up by accretion. I had made an effort to avoid this since taking up the mantle in 1995, but *GURPS* was bigger than me or anyone else. So when Steve gave Fourth Edition a green light in the spring of 2002, I had already been thinking about what I would do were I to create a new edition.

What *I* wanted was only half the picture, though. Before I could write a single word, I had to consult my oracle: *GURPS* players. I pored over Steve's 13-year-thick file of comments on Third Edition, as well as similar correspondence I had received in my seven years as line editor. That represented the bulk of customer input to *GURPS'* designer and caretaker over the course of its lifetime.

Armed with that knowledge, my next move was to design a Web poll that would ferret out what *current GURPS* players felt was important. I based the questions in equal parts on the correspondence, SJ Games staff input, and of course my own ideas as a *gamer and a developer*. Then the poll went live . . . and garnered over 4,000 responses!

In mid-2002, David Pulver and I sat down and reduced the correspondence, the poll results, and our personal visions of the project to a list of desired changes to the Third Edition. From that, we created an outline. We divided this up and got to work.

The task was daunting, to be honest. We had to take apart the *Basic Set, Third Edition, Compendium I*, and *Compendium II* (over 400,000 words of text!) and revise and reassemble it all -- in the context of 16 years of *GURPS* canon -- in about a year. And the result had to be playable and *fun*.

This wasn't easy, especially since David and I were working from opposite ends of Canada! It involved a lot of long-distance time . . . not to mention caffeine. To stay focused, we kept our list of changes and our outline nearby. And whenever we felt we *had* to deviate from the plan, we bounced the idea off the other guy for a reality check. Throughout, we held three guiding principles in mind:

1. Make *GURPS* more scalable. Scalable to power level, technology level, the physical size of the heroes . . . everything.
2. Cut out excess *required* detail to make *GURPS* more accessible to those who prefer to ignore the rules and get right to the game.
3. Add more *optional* detail to give tweekers more knobs to fiddle with to get things "just right."

By mid-2003, we had a first draft that fit the bill.

To stay on schedule, we had to forgo a public playtest (sorry!) and ask a group of staff, former staff, freelance writers, and senior MIBs to review our draft. Review it they did. For months, David and I had *bursting* inboxes! We made a lot of adjustments and plugged a lot of holes. It was nearly as much work as the text revision, but it was important to both of us that the assembled experts genuinely liked the end product.

After that, I gave the manuscript a final pass and handed it to Andrew Hackard for a good edit. Then the finished book went to Steve. As the original designer, Steve didn't have to ask for final approval -- we actively bothered him for it, in order to benefit from his experience and wisdom. And sure enough, Steve found a lot of little errors (and a few big

ones!) and asked us to clean up some unclear turns of phrase. Then the text was *really* done.

More than two years after we started, we were finished. Finished, that is, except for the page design, layout, art, cover . . . all those major details that writers like me tend to take for granted. That's a lot of hard work, and it's still work in progress, but the results look good! I think **GURPS** fans are going to love it.



[Next -->](#)

Situation Conspiracy

by David Morgan-Mar

Genre: S.C. (Secret Conspiracy/Situation Comedy)

Style: Televisual (Small Screen Cinematic)

Fidelity: Amazingly low. No, lower. Keep going. That's it.

Themes: Aliens, Cabal, Comedy, Conspiracy, Cosmic Horror, Faerie, Science Fiction, Undead

Campaign Setting and Background Information

Maple Street is a normal-looking cul-de-sac in an attractive middle class suburban neighborhood, containing just eight homes. The neighbors all get along well, and there never seem to be any disturbances of note. But visitors to Maple Street get an odd feeling about the place. Something there is just not quite right. Strange things can be seen out of the corner of the eye. Time sometimes unaccountably seems to go missing. Acquaintances of the residents drop in for a visit, and leave unable to remember anything that has happened.

What Everybody Knows

It's the 1970s. The world is just like ours was back then. The residents of Maple Street are all average citizens. There's nothing to see here, no indeed.

What Everybody Doesn't Know

Middle America is about to become the front in a battle between advance forces representing several different supernatural, otherworldly, and ultraterrestrial factions. Strangely, coincidentally, almost *comically*, they have all chosen Maple Street as a safe, inconspicuous location for their bases.

The Residents

1 Maple St. -- Darren and Samantha Stubbins: Darren is an advertising executive. Samantha is a witch, one of a powerful cabal of magic-wielding individuals who seek to use their control over mystical forces to subjugate humanity and rule the world.

2 Maple St. -- Mrs Black and her boarders, Tim O'Hare and his Uncle Morton: Unknown to Mrs Black, Morton is a Martian scout gathering intelligence for an impending invasion by forces from the Red Planet. Tim, having been promised amnesty in return, is his willing assistant in fitting in with Earthling customs and helping him out of situations in which Morton's origin might be discovered.

3 Maple St. -- Mrs Carolyn Myer: Carolyn is a widow, who lives with her two children, Jonathon and Candy. They have a dog, Scruffy, and a housekeeper, Martha. Also living at 3 Maple St. is the ghost of Captain Daniel Grigg. Grigg manifests only to the family, and is in the process of seducing Mrs Myer so he can have a mortal willing to do his bidding. His ultimate goal is to release hordes of spectral undead upon the Earth.

4 Maple St. -- The Adamcescu Family: Recent immigrants from Romania, the Adamcescus consist of parents Gomaz and Marticia, children Tuesday and Dugsley, Uncle Festar, Marticia's mother "Grandmama" Eudorae, and the butler Lurtch. The Adamcescus are all vampires, while Lurtch is a reanimated construct made by sewing together parts of separate bodies. Their aims are to maintain a veneer of normality over the larger neighborhood so as to ensure a

constant food supply, and to slowly spread their affliction throughout America.

5 Maple St. -- Wilbur and Carol Potts: Wilbur is an architect and Carol is a former dancer. Their house has a small barn out back, which houses Wilbur's horse, Mister Ted. Mister Ted is an Unseelie talking horse, with the ability to confuse and dazzle humans with his speech. He plots to open gates between the mortal plane and the Faerie Realm, allowing Unseelie to spread into and take over this reality.

6 Maple St. -- Major Tony Nielson: Maj. Nielson is an astronaut employed by NASA. Everyone on Maple Street thinks he lives alone. His friend Maj. Roger Haley frequently visits, giving rise to neighborhood speculation that the pair is gay. In reality, both majors have been enslaved by a powerful djinni who manifests in female form. This malevolent spirit, known as "Janie," lives in a bottle in Nielson's living room. She aims to use the men to release fellow djinn who were bound to servitude millennia ago and unleash their wrath upon humanity.

7 Maple St. -- Mindy McDonald and her boyfriend Murk: Mindy works in her father's record store. Murk is a shape-shifting alien from the planet Urk, on Earth to collect information about humans as a potential slave and food species for the bloodthirsty, slaving Urkans.

8 Maple St. -- The Brody Family: Mike and Carol Brody formed a blended family when they married, both bringing three children from a previous marriage. Together with Alice, their housekeeper, they form a household of nine, numerologically representing completeness and the whole universe. Mike is an architect, who designed the Brody house with sacred geometry to tap into the mystical power of other planes of existence and form a gateway through which creatures of non-Euclidean dimensions may travel. The Brodies aim to use this netherworldly influence to reduce humanity to pawns in their quest for ultimate cosmic power.

Currently, none of the residents of Maple Street suspect that the other seven houses contain anything other than a normal, average, Middle American household. In fact, the leaders of each group are completely unaware that the other factions even exist, and would dismiss talk of such a thing as patent nonsense. Uncle Morton knows there's no such thing as magic, for example, and Mike Brody knows the idea of aliens on Earth is ridiculous.

However, things *have* been getting a little weird around Maple Street lately. All the families receive visitors from time to time, and they sometimes go away confused, scared, missing chunks of their memory, possessed, or not at all. It's just starting to get strange enough that a few people are beginning to get suspicious that all is not what it seems in Maple Street.

PC Opportunities

Perhaps the most obvious role for a group of heroes is opposing *all* the factions in Maple Street. This is a tough task, and will require resourceful and clever individuals, preferably backed by some sort of exotic abilities or a powerful organization.

Investigators will begin in the dark and try to uncover clues revealing what is happening in Maple Street. Suitably powerful investigators might then turn into:

Defenders of humanity will be called in once some sort of authority realizes what is going on -- or part of it anyway -- and decides that action is necessary to stop the threat. These could be ultra-competent individuals, members of a vast organization devoted to defending humanity, or normals thrown in way above their depth, depending on the campaign style.

On the other side of the coin, there are a lot of factions at work, and it is possible for PCs to become involved in supporting any one of them. Anyone working for one faction will be more or less opposed to most of the others. There are a few possible alliances amidst the chaos, and cementing an alliance may be the key to overcoming seemingly impossible odds and emerging victorious.

PCs could become involved with a faction either by wilfull recruitment, threats, blackmail, or work for hire. Each of the factions has the resources and powers to make either of these an option, if applied creatively enough.

Recruits will be at least minimally aware of the faction they are working for, but they should begin ignorant of the existence of the others.

Coercees will be unwilling participants in a plot to destroy (or at least seriously damage) human civilization. They may begin unaware of any unnatural forces, or could be coerced after having witnessed them. The second revelation would be learning what those forces are planning. At this point, heroic characters might try to rebel and fight against their oppressors, while less moral ones may spy opportunities for later power grabs.

Employees may begin thinking they are on to a good thing, as the wages will be generous. The jobs might seem a little unusual, but for the pay, who's complaining? Over time the jobs will get weirder, until one involves something obviously illegal, immoral, or downright illogical. This may lead to some discreet investigation, and what will the staff do when they discover they are working for unnatural forces of evil?

NPC Backgrounds

The characters below have their most important *strengths* (generally positive qualities, abilities, skills, or effects) and *weaknesses* (generally negative qualities, abilities, skills, or effects) detailed. In descending order, the ranks are Master, Expert, Good, Average, and Poor. Depending on character conception, any quality can be a strength or a weakness. For example, suppose a character has "Spoiled Brat" as a quality. If it's ranked Average or above, it's a strength: the character always gets his own way, can wield undue influence by threatening to sic Mommy or Daddy on others, possesses lots of cash or gadgets, and people generally fawn over him, making life easy. But if the character has "Spoiled Brat (Poor)," this is a weakness: the character has led a pampered and sheltered life, rubs people the wrong way, and expects everyone to bend over backward to fulfill his most minor needs.

Samantha Stubbins: Samantha is the nominal leader of a secretive cabal of witches and warlocks numbering perhaps a hundred members. She has Magical Powers (Master), but spells require long, intensive, and carefully prepared rituals to cast. Magic is subtle and the effects manifest mostly as events that might have happened anyway, or could be written off as coincidence or luck. For example, Samantha could manipulate a lottery or make someone be hit by a car, but could not throw balls of fire from her hands. She doesn't want to rule the world overtly, but merely wishes to place controlled puppets into positions of power. Since magic is tiring, she also uses her Beauty (Expert) and Coercion (Good) on husband Darren to get him to produce subversive advertising campaigns designed to further her goals.

Darren Stubbins: Darren is Smitten (Poor) with his wife and Clueless (Poor) about what she is doing. He knows she is a witch, but believes she would only use her powers for good. He is Expert at Advertising and Fast Talking, and will do his best to get other people to understand that Samantha is a normal housewife. He is incapable of believing Samantha is up to no good.

Uncle Morton: Uncle Morton appears completely human, but is a native of Mars. He is an advance intelligence scout for the Martian Interplanetary Invasion Force. He observes Earthlings so that he can form reports that will be the basis for Martian military operations when the invasion fleet arrives. He currently does not have a need-to-know on the timing of the invasion, but suspects it will be sooner rather than later. Morton has several otherworldly powers such as Invisibility (Good), Levitation (Expert), Telepathy (Expert), and Telekinesis (Good). He has access to several superscience gizmos that operate with Average reliability, and can radio messages back to Mars. His scout saucer, however, was damaged on landing and he is attempting to repair it.

Tim O'Hare: Tim is a newspaper reporter (Expert Journalism skills). Morton has convinced Tim with displays of high-tech and weird powers that Earth doesn't stand a chance against the Martians. Tim cut a deal to help Morton in exchange for being allowed to live after the invasion. Morton has no intention of keeping the bargain, but uses Tim to help gather intelligence. Tim's job is helpful in researching Earthling military strength and preparedness. Not one to be a hero, Tim's major problem is Spinelessness (Poor).

Captain Daniel Grigg: A wilful undead human spirit, Captain Grigg has been embittered by the years he has spent wandering the mortal coil seeking eternal rest. Now that Carolyn Myer has rented his house, he has a means of seeking vengeance on the world. In order to call forth legions of other ghosts, he needs Carolyn to track down and abduct a skilled medium. Finding one is the problem. Grigg is Insubstantial (Master) and Invisible (Master). He can Materialize (Master) at will, but has trouble Affecting Material Objects (Average). When materialized he is Handsome (Expert). He is Bound (Poor) to the grounds of number 3 Maple St and has a Short Temper (Poor).

Carolyn Myer: Carolyn is a struggling freelance magazine Writer (Good). Unfortunately, she is Naive (Poor) and Romantic (Poor). She thinks Captain Grigg is dreamy and is ready to do his bidding.

Gomaz Adamcescu: The head of the Adamcescu vampire clan, Gomaz is Charismatic (Expert) and has built up considerable Savoir-Faire (Master) over his thousand years of unlife. Gomaz led his family to the New World to seek fresh hunting grounds -- Romania, and most of Eastern Europe, is already overrun with vampires. The Adamcescus are now preying on the occasional visitor to Maple Street, and prowling further afield at night. As vampires, Gomaz and his family are all capable of Shapeshifting Into Bat Form (Good) and Wolf Form (Good) and are Invulnerable (Master) to everything except Standard Vampire Weaknesses (Poor) (sunlight, holy symbols, garlic, running water, wooden stakes, etc.). Gomaz plans to use his Infectious Bite (Expert) to spread vampirism and Domination (Expert) over infected victims to build a power base in America.

Mister Ted: Mister Ted is a faerie horse, placed on Earth by members of the Unseelie court as part of their plot to prepare the mortal realm for faerie invasion. He resembles a mortal horse, but speaks English with a Glib Tongue (Master), can create Glamours (Expert) at will, affect mortals with Good Luck or Bad Luck (Expert), and Communicate With Animals (Expert). His weaknesses are a Vulnerability To Iron (Poor) (he doesn't wear horseshoes) and being an inveterate Trickster (Poor).

Wilbur Potts: Wilbur is an Architect (Expert). He is currently under the mesmeric influence of Mister Ted's Glib Tongue, and will follow the horse's orders to the death. He will vehemently deny that his horse can talk, or is anything other than a normal palomino, and will actively work to cover up any such accusations or evidence.

Carol Potts: Carol is ignorant of Mister Ted's abilities. She thinks her husband is a bit eccentric, but is very Tolerant (Master) of this. She could be persuaded that something really odd is afoot if presented with enough evidence, but it will take a lot to convince her Skepticism (Poor).

Janie: Janie is a djinni who normally resembles a Beautiful (Expert) woman dressed in a pink harem costume. Appearance is deceiving, however, as she is Proud (Poor) and has a Bad Temper (Poor). Added to her powers of Smoke Form (Master), Shapeshifting (Good), and Mind Control (Good), this makes her extremely dangerous. Janie's main weaknesses are Overconfidence (Poor) and Vulnerability To Solomon's Seal (Poor). She has enslaved Maj. Nielson and Haley to help her in her quest to find and release other djinn, and to ultimately break the power of Solomon's Seal and release *all* bound djinn back into the world.

Major Tony Nielson: Maj. Nielson is an Astronaut (Master). Unfortunately, after a mission splashdown he found an antique bottle on a desert island. Removing the strangely sealed stopper, he found himself under the influence of the newly released Janie. Nielson is now Mind Controlled (Poor) and has no self will of his own. He acts normally, except for prowling antique stores and garage sales looking for weird artifacts.

Major Roger Haley: Maj. Haley is an Astronaut (Expert) and also Mind Controlled (Poor) by Janie. He frequently visits Tony's home to receive new orders from Janie.

Murk from Urk: In his native form, Murk is a 9' tall hairy alien with dagger-like fangs and a constant drool. In this shape he Causes Fear (Expert). He is able to Shapeshift Into Human Form (Good), but if he gets angry or hungry he switches back. He eats humans and once a week becomes Ravenous (Poor) until he feeds. Murk keeps Mindy alive so that he has a long-term study subject to learn human habits and to gather information for him and explain human affairs. By himself, Murk constantly Misunderstands Human Actions (Poor). Murk's eating tactic so far has been to befriend someone, invite him over to the house, eat him surreptitiously, shapeshift into his form, and leave the house, so as to allay any suspicion by Mindy.

Mindy McDonald: Mindy is a Sales Assistant (Average). Unfortunately, she is Good-Hearted (Poor) to a fault. She knows Murk is an alien but is, so far, completely unaware that he is not a friendly human-shaped alien. She believes helping him to understand human society and nature will make him a better alien and will lead to friendly relations between Earth and Urk. If confronted with the truth, she will freak out, as she is Unable To Cope With Horror (Poor).

Mike Brody: Mike is the undisputed head of the Brody household. He is an Architect (Master) and also skilled at Sacred Architecture (Master). He also has Master level knowledge of the Cosmic Realms and Ultraterrestrial Gods And Entities. All his family and their housekeeper Alice are willing assistants in Mike's hermetic activities. Together they perform rituals to summon and bind extradimensional entities to do their bidding. The goal is nothing short of world domination. Mike's only weakness is that he is prone to Boring Moralizing (Poor) when attempting to interact with people outside the family and convince them that nothing odd is going on.

Carol Brody: Carol is outwardly devoted to Mike, but hides a Secret Desire To Usurp Him (Poor). She has Expert knowledge of Cosmic Realms and Ultraterrestrial Gods And Entities.

The Brody Children: These are, from eldest to youngest: Greg, Marcia, Peter, Jan, Bobby, and Cindy. They all have Good knowledge of Cosmic Realms and Ultraterrestrial Gods And Entities.

NPC Interactions

The default condition is that all the eight factions are mutually opposed. However, the value of an alliance is indisputable and some households lean more naturally together:

- *Samantha Stubbins and Mike Brody.* The power of magic joins these two. They could potentially teach each other a lot, and their styles and goals are similar, but ultimately each wants sole dominion over humanity. If they joined forces, each would seek an opportunity to stab the other in the back at first convenience.
- *Uncle Morton and Murk.* Being based on technology, these two form a natural team. The Martians want Earth for its mineral wealth and sunny outlook; the Urkans want the humans for fodder. A match made in heaven.
- *Captain Grigg and the Adamcescus.* Both being undead, they can probably relate fairly well. Their goals are not really incompatible either.
- *Mister Ted and Janie.* These are both seeking to unleash malevolent spirit entities on to Earth. They could conceivably cooperate, and neither's goal really threatens the other.

Other alliances are possible. The GM should simply keep in mind the factions' goals and judge any potential interactions on a case-by-case basis.

Items & Locations

1 Maple St.: The Stubbins house is kept spotlessly tidy inside and out. There is nothing unusual to be seen, unless a visitor enters the study. This room is painted black, and has several obviously mystical decorations: charms, candles, brazier, wax dolls, a large stone altar topped with a wavy-bladed knife and a gold chalice, etc. Samantha uses the study to prepare and cast spells. She has told Darren she uses it as a sewing room, so he avoids it and has no idea what is in there.

2 Maple St.: Mrs Black lives upstairs in this two-story house, her residence accessed by an external wooden staircase on the side. The lower floor is inhabited by Tim O'Hare and Uncle Morton and is an obvious bachelor home with tacky gray-green Formica kitchen fittings. Of most interest is the garage, which contains the parts of Morton's non-working flying saucer. Only the radio works, and has a direct link to Martian military command. If anyone should operate this they will be greeted by a gurgling voice speaking Martian (with no appreciable time delay). Responding in any language other than Martian will result in the connection being cut off at the other end. Cinematically skilled mechanics or gadgeteers may be able to repair some of the saucer's flight systems. Also littered around the garage are several differently shaped ray-guns. These have various strange effects if used, but are generally not fatal.

3 Maple St.: Captain Grigg's former and present home is a stone country cottage that looks a little out of place amongst its more modern neighbors. Ivy covers the walls, which have fittings of naval brass, and the whole is decorated in a nautical style. The nautical theme continues inside, especially in the upstairs parlor, in which an oil painting of Captain Grigg in a sea jacket and cap watches over a brass telescope mounted on a stand. A barometer on the wall indicates not air pressure, but Grigg's mood, reading "Stormy Weather" when he is angry and "Fine" when he is calm. Anyone sensitive to psychic impressions gets a strong sense of foreboding in this room. The telescope has a field of view including the back yards of numbers 2 and 4.

4 Maple St.: The Adamcescu house might be the oldest and is certainly the most run-down on the street. Its steeply pitched rooves look as if they are about to collapse. There is a belfry, which seems to be infested with bats. Buried in the basement are several exsanguinated corpses -- the remains of door-to-door salesmen and similar callers. The basement floor is loosely packed earth. (Investigators with suitable resources could identify it as *Romanian* earth.) The bedrooms upstairs all contain coffins instead of beds. During daylight, the Adamcescus are always home, usually resting in their coffins, but they will rouse if someone knocks on the door or enters the house. The windows are shuttered and no direct sunlight reaches any part of the interior. At night, Lurtch remains home while the vampires roam the neighborhood to feed.

5 Maple St.: The Potts home has a somewhat rural feel to it, with a broad porch and rustic motifs decorating the immaculate sky blue walls with white trim. The yard is larger than any of the other properties, containing Mister Ted's barn behind the house. Mister Ted has bamboozled Wilbur Potts into assisting him to build a stone circle in the back yard, which will form a gate to the Faerie Realm and allow the Unseelie to enter the mortal world en masse. So far, three huge granite monoliths have been delivered and planted in the turf, with five more required. Wilbur has told the neighbors that he is landscaping the back yard to allay suspicions over the cranes required to hoist the rocks over the house.

6 Maple St.: Maj. Nielson's house is a drab-looking bachelor pad, in need of a bit of upkeep. Previously a diligent home-owner, Maj. Nielson has neglected such things as mowing the lawn and cleaning the gutters ever since he fell under Janie's control. Inside, the house shows an unexpected feminine touch to the decorating, which may simply confirm any belief that Nielson is gay. Sitting inconspicuously on the mantelpiece is an antique bottle and, next to it, a fitted stopper. The stopper displays an intricate device (the Seal of Solomon) and can be used to seal Janie in her bottle. In her arrogance, she has not bothered to get rid of it.

7 Maple St.: Mindy's home is a narrow, two-story, gabled affair with an old fashioned coal cellar door in the side. The interior of the house is unremarkable, except for the attic room in which Murk sleeps. This is littered with bits of unidentifiable orange (alien) fur and dried pools of drool. It also contains Murk's egg-shaped spacecraft, in working order. Getting it to power up or beep is easy, but operating it properly would take either a lot of study or luck. In the cellar are large mounds of alien excrement, containing ground human bones, gold teeth, wristwatches, etc. It is not obviously excrement -- it has almost no smell and is fairly clean, considering. Mindy did have a ginger tom cat, but he disappeared a few weeks ago and she would like to find him, although showing her his bones in the cellar might not be a good idea.

8 Maple St.: The Brody house has an indefinable air of oddness about it. It looks like a quirky modern architecture design, but some of the angles just seem somehow *wrong*. Nothing you could put a definite finger on though. Mike Brody has designed the house to focus sacred architectural energies and act as a conduit for extradimensional power. The walls and fixtures around the living room form a pentagram and it provides large bonuses to summoning and binding cosmic entities within it. Someone with mystical knowledge examining the floorplan in detail might spot the pentagram. Unusually for a house this size, the children are forced to share only two bedrooms -- one for the boys, one for the girls. The sacred architecture dictates a vast living area with little left over for bedrooms.

Events & Possible Story Arcs

The broad story arc available will involve some or all the following:

- Someone starts to get suspicious of events in Maple Street.
- Someone investigates and uncovers evidence of one or more of the terrible secrets of the houses.
- The households become aware that their neighbors are potentially dangerous rivals.
- All hell breaks loose.
- The heroes resolve things somehow. Maybe. If not:
- Malevolent spirits and cosmic entities are released on Earth, two alien invasion fleets arrive, and other unpleasantness.

At some point within this sequence, the following may occur:

- Authorities of some sort arrive to "clean up" the problem.

The "someone" who investigates could be an agent outside Maple Street or a person working for one of the factions. An outside agency discovering one or a few of the truths hidden in Maple Street will catalyze discoveries between the households as well, either before or after the authorities arrive to sort things out, depending on the nature of the findings and the covertness or otherwise of the investigations. If, on the other hand, the factions begin finding out about each before any external authorities do, things will start to get messy quickly and the first external response will be isolation and damage control rather than investigation.

Some different options are outlined below:

Investigators

External authorities are interested in finding out what is going on in Maple Street. Local police are likely to be the first ones involved, perhaps on the trail of a missing door-to-door salesman, following up a complaint about untidy house maintenance, or seeking what someone in the next street claims was a wolf. This could quickly escalate to FBI involvement, if evidence of serial killings, kidnappings, or anything *weird* comes to light.

PCs could be either local police, involved with initial doorknocking and then caught up in the whirl of an FBI case, or the feds called in when the police chief decides his boys need help.

Damage Controllers

This is a job for ultra-competent individuals with some serious backing. There may be a super-secret arm of the federal government with immense reserves of black funding, equipment the likes of which won't be seen on the streets of Tokyo for another 50 years, and arcane or secret knowledge of the existence of supernatural forces, aliens, and alternate dimensions. This agency lies in wait for just such an outbreak as this, as it has since Roswell. Or the Jersey Devil sightings. Or the Salem witch trials...

They just never expected it to all hit the fan in one street at the same time. These guys are going to have their work cut out for them. Rather than going in all guns blazing, this will require some surveillance and possibly infiltration. If the heroes can sow discord and get some of the factions to wipe each other out, the mess will be that much easier to clean up. Assuming the world is still in one piece.

Or it could be the Army or Marines, special ops or SWAT teams, or just regular FBI agents in way over their heads. These sorts of teams will recruit as much paranormal and scientific knowledge as they can -- also potentially good PCs.

Faction Members

For whatever reason, the PCs are aligned with one of the factions, at least initially. Play the campaign straight for a while and have them assume the neighbors are indeed normal. Then they can either be the initial investigators into something odd, or have their suspicions raised when police and the feds start poking around the house next door. This

should lead naturally into uncovering the truth and setting off a major turf war between the groups. At some point, the PCs may switch sides, if their faction leader will let them.

Advice, Opportunities, & Pitfalls

Situation Conspiracy can be played in widely varying styles:

Sitcom

The set-up as written is based on well-known situation comedies, with a twist. The twist can serve to make the setting even more humorous, with slapstick outcomes as the various factions pit their mystical and technological jujitsu against one another. In this style of play, emphasize the outlandish silliness inherent in the premise. Play up the sitcom stereotypes and tropes:

Mundanes don't know what's going on: Introduce other characters from the relevant series to throw spanners into the works: Darren Stubbins' boss, the Brody's butcher. These people will stumble onto weird things and those in the know will need to somehow convince them that everything is normal. This is a good job for anyone working with the factions. Or the PCs could be outsiders like Maj. Nielson's staff psychiatrist or the nosy woman across the cross-street from the Stubbins house. They might slowly piece together what is happening, only to have the local police utterly disbelieve that a witch is living at number one and plotting to control the world.

Embarrass people: Mister Ted likes to order risqué magazines on Wilbur's credit card -- naturally the neighbors see them being delivered. People can be turned into animals by magic or ray-guns, and when they turn back they will be up trees, or sniffing someone's posterior. Men can dress as women for all sorts of reasons. And never miss an excuse to have someone locked out of the house in nothing but underwear.

Incompetence: Whatever can go wrong will -- and it's usually someone's fault. General klutziness is fine, but what about flubbed spellcasting, Martian gadgets that backfire, ghosts who forget to dematerialize as they walk through walls, vampires who fly into walls as bats? Don't be afraid to have someone fall off a roof or drop a monolith on the neighbor's place.

A final word on the sitcom style: It may help to change the NPC names back to what you're familiar with. It'll make them easier to remember and the comedy will flow faster.

Dark Humor

Played a little straighter, Maple Street can be humorous on the surface as the PCs discover just who is living in each house, and take a sinister turn when they realize all is not what it should be. The approach here is that the sitcoms are giving us the cover story and each of these families hides a dark secret. These secrets are something to be fought, but with confidence.

Let the PCs be capable of reacting: Without extraordinary powers or resources, mundane investigators really don't stand a chance against Maple Street. Heroes of the campaign should be out of the ordinary: parapsychologists who have some understanding of magic, spirits, and undead; gadgeteers with weird science technology; or members of an organization capable of securing such support. They can be hidden from or looked down upon by society -- until they are needed to save it.

Play the factions off: Squabbles between different brands of evil are perfect for highlighting the fact that Evil Never Pays and Good Will Triumph. Ideally, the PCs can instigate rivalries between the factions. There should be some collateral damage that needs attending to, but this is a good way to help even the odds.

Don't overwhelm: With so much nastiness in the area, it can be tempting to throw everything at the heroes at once. But hold back. Let them break in and investigate the saucer in Morton's garage in the middle of the night without having a

half-dozen Adamcescu vampires show up and attack. Unless you think they can handle it, of course. But revealing the surprises hidden in the houses one by one is more dramatic and tense than throwing it all open at once.

Serious

Finally, Maple Street can be the core of a gritty, deadly serious campaign aimed at saving (or dominating) the world. Push the comedic elements far to the background and emphasize the fact that the world is a more mysterious and dangerous place than most people know. Elements of horror and dark conspiracy should come to the fore here. Murk from Urk will be a hideous slathering beast rather than a "man in a suit" type alien, and the Adamcescus will be extremely competent and dangerous vampires. And the cosmic horror of the Brody house will be enough to push some investigators over the edge.

Disguise the NPCs: As things stand, anyone who grew up with syndicated television from the 1970s will recognise most, if not all, of the NPCs by name. For a serious approach, change the character names to ones that won't trigger instant recall of the TV series. A phone book or book of baby names will help if imagination fails. Things can be made more strange and unfamiliar by portraying the NPCs differently to their TV counterparts. They almost need to be anyway, given their motives and abilities here. If this is done right, nobody should suspect where these households come from until the battle is over and the players are a gibbering mess thanking their lucky stars to have survived such a gruesome and tough campaign.

Ditch some of the families: Eight competing factions is more than enough for anyone but the best-equipped and most powerful saviors of mankind. To make things easier, revert some of the families to mundane households with no secrets. This can make the investigation phase trickier, as the agents need to find out who to oppose and who to rescue, rather than carpet-bombing the street. The mundanes will need to be sheltered from the truth too, and could be used as pawns or shields by the remaining factions.

Form a cabal: Competing factions in the one street? Maybe it makes more sense for these guys to all be working together. Splitting up the spoils is something they can argue about later, but in the meantime they will form a dangerous alliance against any external threat.

Other Resources

- [Bewitched](#)
- [The Ghost and Mrs Muir](#)
- [Mr. Ed](#)
- [My Favorite Martian](#)
- [I Dream of Jeannie](#)
- [The Brady Bunch](#)
- [Mork and Mindy](#)
- [The Addams Family](#)
- [Ghostbusters](#)
- [Men in Black](#)
- [The X-Files](#)
- **GURPS Arabian Nights**
- **GURPS Black Ops**
- **GURPS Cabal**
- **GURPS Faerie**
- **GURPS Mars**
- **GURPS Spirits**
- **GURPS Undead**

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Thanks to Chad for agreeing to the swap and providing the character ability explanation, and to Steven for suggesting this crazy swap in the first place. And to the folks on the PyraMOO who wondered why I was asking odd questions about sitcoms and Hitean weirdness with barely a breath in between, yet still contributed to my research.

The Jester

An Article About Kidding Around for *d20 System*

by Owen K.C. Stephens

A jester for April Fool's. Okay, okay, it's hardly an original idea. A lot of magazines have done jesters for April issues. I own those old issues too. But so far, I haven't seen a jester for the *d20 System*. There's probably one out there. (Let's face it, with the number of *d20 System* books out there's probably one of everything *somewhere*. Need a prestige class for one-handed dwarves with dwarfism? If a real publishing company hasn't done it, some fan netbook has.) But since I haven't seen it, I can blithely pretend it's an original idea and write up the way *I'd* like to see a jester done.

The first thing I can rule out is a prestige class. I mean, what's so prestigious about being a jester? Sure mimes are kinda scary, but what character strives to *become* a mine? ("Hmmm . . . I could learn *fireball*, or Man in a Cage . . ."). Okay, so mimes are a really bad idea. Let's ignore them for the rest of the article.

Most classic RPG jester tricks could be simulated with feats, but that leads to players cherry-picking useful abilities for their characters ("My fighter is taking pie-throwing, so I have a cheap ranged weapon.") without picking up the "role" of court fool. That just leaves writing up a new core class -- 20 levels of silliness allowing characters in a campaign of any level to play the fool.

The following class is designed to be balanced and usable, but not serious. I suspect most GMs know whether they're going to allow a jester PC into their game, or have any use for a jester NPC, without ever looking at the write-up. A serious game with the right players can survive adding a jester, but for the most part jesters are for casual or even beer-and-pretzels level games (I certainly needed pretzels to write the thing up).

Jester

Jesters are people who depend on comedy to survive. They may be court fools, village idiots, stand-up comedians, class clowns, or just cut-ups. They can't be mimes. Mimes don't get their own character class. Jestors are often surprisingly well-trained, brought up as apprentice jesters for years before being given their own floppy feet and stupid hat. There are entire academies dedicated to the art of jesterism, with hundreds of years of experience honing the skills of comedy. Kings and emperors petition such academies for jesters worthy of royal court, and such patronage can be the cause of political backstabbing and epic conflict.

Other jesters buy a joke book from the back of a comic.

A jester fills the same roles as bards and monks -- that is, they're a class no one will have taken yet so you can make a character that doesn't do the same things as everyone else's. An npc jester is likely to annoy players just short of enough for them to kill him, but is a great way to kill time while the GM looks for his real adventure notes. A jester is likely to kill a serious game, and thus is often seen as a harbinger of doom.

Monsters, especially monstrous humanoids and giants also have jesters, who are often used as shock troops to pacify and terrify enemy kingdoms. Most famous of these are the half-ogre Harlequin Brigade, who were so fond of puns that they were eventually struck down by the gods themselves. This was the intent of the Harlequins, who thought the idea of gods being so annoyed they'd kill jesters was, itself, ironically funny at a legendary level. Few monstrous jesters ever hope to reach this level of infamy, but even so the sight of a green dragon in an orange wig and ill-fitting suit or a hill giant with polka dot furs and a pinstripe club are enough to strike terror into the hardest of heroes.

Table 1-1 Jester Level Progression

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort. Save	Ref. Save	Will Save	Special
1	+0	+0	+2	+2	Only when it's funny, play the fool
2	+1	+0	+3	+3	Cavort
3	+2	+1	+3	+3	Gag
4	+3	+1	+4	+4	Parody
5	+3	+1	+4	+4	Faking it
6	+4	+2	+5	+5	The Art
7	+5	+2	+5	+5	Master Fool
8	+6	+2	+6	+6	
9	+6	+3	+6	+6	The Art
10	+7	+3	+7	+7	
11	+8	+3	+7	+7	One-liner
12	+9	+4	+8	+8	
13	+9	+4	+8	+8	Master Fool
14	+10	+4	+9	+9	
15	+11	+5	+9	+9	The Art
16	+12	+5	+10	+10	
17	+12	+5	+10	+10	Grand Master Fool
18	+13	+6	+11	+11	
19	+14	+6	+11	+11	
20	+15	+6	+12	+12	The Killing Joke

Class Rules

The game rules for playing a jester are listed below:

Health: In games using hit points, jesters receive 1d8 hit points plus their Con modifier at each level. In games using some other form of health points a jester should receive fewer than a dedicated soldier, but more than scholars, rogues or technicians.

Skills: A jester's class skills [and the key ability for each skill] are Balance (Dex), Bluff (Cha), Climb (Str), Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Wis), Disguise (Cha), Escape Artist (Dex), Forgery (Int), Gather Information (Cha), Handle Animal (Cha), Hide (Dex), Jump (Str), Knowledge (local), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Open Lock (Dex), Perform (Cha), Profession (Wis), Ride (Dex), Sense Motive (Wis), Sleight of Hand (Dex), Speak Language (None), Spot (Wis), Swim (Str), Tumble (Dex), and Use Rope (Dex). In games using new or unusual skills, a GM should add any skill with a key ability of Dex to the jester's class skills.

A jester receives a number of skill points equal to (10 + Int modifier) at each level. Skills are a jester's greatest strength, and he needs a lot of them.

Proficiencies: A jester gains proficiency with all simple weapons and all martial light weapons. The jester may select any one non-exotic weapon to start proficiency with as well. A jester is proficient with light armor, but no shields.

Laugh Points: Many of a jester's most useful talents require the expenditure of a Laugh Point. Being really, mystically funny is exhausting, and even jesters can't do it all the time. The jester's pool of Laugh Points represent how much unused, really funny material he has at his disposal. When a Laugh Point is used, it's gone. The jester can earn new Laugh Points, but those spent are permanently lost. This both limits how often the jester can use powerful abilities, thus maintaining game balance (as if anyone allowing a jester into their game care about game balance), and prevents the jester's player from using these powers so often it's annoying (which is realistically far more important).

Whenever a character gains a new jester level, he automatically gains a number of Laugh Points equal to his new level. Additionally, if a jester's player says something that makes the GM laugh (unless the jester is an NPC, in which case making the GM laugh is creepy and earns nothing) or makes 75% of the players laugh, he earns a Laugh Point. A jester may never have more than twice his level in Laugh Points at one time.

This system means funny players have an easier time playing jesters, which may not be balanced but should prevent jesters played by power-gaming stick-in-the-muds. And, more importantly, is funny.

Only When It's Funny: Jesters are inspired to great accomplishments when they're trying to do difficult things for a

laugh. A jester trying to do something funny, even if it's also effective, may burn a Laugh Point to add +2d6 to a skill check, ability check, or saving throw. The jester may only do this a number of times per day equal to his Cha modifier.

Of course if the jester's player is right, and the action really is funny he's likely to get the Laugh Point back. If it's not *really* funny, the player is down a Laugh Point, which is punishment enough.

Play the Fool: A jester is very adept at acting like an idiot, and has little difficulty convincing others it's true. Whenever a jester makes a Bluff check specifically to convince people he's stupid, clumsy, foolish, confused, lost, not paying attention or misunderstanding something, he gains a bonus equal to his jester level.

Faking It: Anything a jester can't do, he can pretend to do. A jester can make a special Bluff check to *appear* to be succeeding at any Craft, Knowledge, or Profession check, or even a Bardic Lore check. No material is produced, no money is made, and no actual information is gained, but observers must beat the Bluff check with either a Sense Motive check or a check on the actual appropriate skill the jester is faking in order to realize no real work or information is accomplished.

Cavort: A jester in light armor or no armor may take a standard action to make a Perform (Dance) check. The result of the check becomes the jester's AC until his next round.

Parody: A jester is a master of making fun to both shame and amuse. A jester may spend a Laugh Point to do a particularly striking parody. The parody can have any one of the following affects:

- **Laugh It Off:** The jester can grant any one creature who can hear and understand him a second saving throw against any effect that causes him to suffer a morale penalty or a fear effect.
- **Political Commentary:** A jester may force any one creature who can hear and understand him to make a Will save (DC 10 + $\frac{1}{2}$ jester's level + jester's Cha modifier) or have its Leadership score be reduced by 1. A jester may only target the same creature once per level (the jester must gain a new level before targeting the same creature).

Creatures without the Leadership feat should note the penalty, since they'll suffer it if they ever take the feat.

Because humor often doesn't translate well, creatures of another type (though not those of other sub-types) than the jester gain a +2 bonus to their Will saves.

- **Shame:** The jester can force any one creature who can hear and understand to make a Will save (DC 10 + jester's level + jester's Cha modifier) or be shaken for 1d4 rounds.

Because humor often doesn't translate well, creatures of another type (though not those of other sub-types) than the jester gain a +2 bonus to their Will saves.

The Art: Jesters are not all the same. Each learns one or more difficult tricks to help amuse people and survive the harsh, cruel world that is they typical *d20 System* campaign. At 6th level, and again at 9th and 15th, the jester may choose one of these tricks, known as The Art. Once chosen, a trick of The Art may not be changed.

Comedic Capacity: A jester with this power can burn a Laugh Point to cause any sack or bag to act like a *Hew's handy haversack* for 1 week. He can burn 2 Laugh Points to double the capacity of any vehicle (wagon, ship, even a horse) for one leg of a trip (GM's discretion).

Patronage: The jester manages to suck up to one person of importance well enough for that person to become the jester's patron. The patron is within 3 levels of the jester (determined randomly), and socially important. The jester gains x4 the monetary benefit when making a Perform or Profession check for the patron or at an event the patron arranged for, gains a +4 bonus to all Cha checks made with groups that seek the patron's favor, and gains minor legal and social protection from those who do not wish to anger the patron.

In a modern-era game, the patron likely gets the jester his own TV show, which has a 75% chance of being cancelled

each season.

Pie Throwing: The jester can throw anything roughly the size, shape and consistency as a pie with a 10-foot range increment. Such objects never do more than 1 point of damage, though they can be poisoned (poison pie is normally only used by dark Clowns, such as the lich Bozo-Dur).

A jester may burn a Laugh Point to force the target of a pie to make a Ref save (DC 10 + $\frac{1}{2}$; jester's level + jester's Str modifier) or be blinded for 1d6 rounds.

Rage: The jester may burn a Laugh Point to force any one creature who can hear and understand or see him to make a Will save (DC 10 + $\frac{1}{2}$; jester's level + jester's Cha modifier) or be so enraged it can take no action other than those designed to cause the jester harm for 1d4 rounds. (The target is not forced to harm the jester, it simply isn't allowed to take any other kind of action).

It's worth noting that a jester who uses the rage Art on a target that can only see him likely makes a gesture not acceptable in polite society.

Because insults often doesn't translate well, creatures of another type (though not those of other sub-types) than the jester gain a +2 bonus to their Will saves.

Something Funny: This Art allows a jester to cast prestidigitate a number of times per day equal to 3+ his Cha bonus.

Surprise: A jester with this Art can, by burning a Laugh Point, do something so startling and unexpected (pull a rabbit out of a hat, have birds explode out of a pie, shout like a monkey with no warning, etc.), that one selected target that can see and hear him must make a Will save (DC 10 + $\frac{1}{2}$; jester's level + jester's Cha modifier) or be flat-footed until its next move.

Master Fool: At 7th level the jester gains a bonus Skill Focus feat with any jester class skill. He gains this bonus again at 13th level.

Gag: A gag is anything funny. A jester may define a gag as a joke, a silly face, a pratfall, or even an unfortunate biological noise.

You may not use mime for a gag.

By expending a Laugh Point, a jester may use a gag to force one target to make a Will save (DC 10 + $\frac{1}{2}$; jester's level + jester's Cha modifier). If the target fails, it's LOL for 1-4 minutes (see New Conditions, below). Because humor often doesn't translate well, creatures of another type (though not those of other sub-types) than the jester gain a +2 bonus to their Will saves.

One-liner: A one-liner is a sudden, unexpected vocal comedy similar to a gag. While a gag can be anything funny, a one-liner must be spoken. Thus it is language-dependent, and the target must be able to hear the jester.

By expending a Laugh Point, a jester may use a one-liner to force one target to make a Will save (DC 10 + $\frac{1}{2}$; jester's level + jester's Cha modifier). If the target fails, it's LMAO for 1 minute (see New Conditions, below). Because humor often doesn't translate well, creatures of another type (though not those of other sub-types) than the jester gain a +2 bonus to their Will saves.

A jester may take a standard action to make a Sense Motive check opposed by the target's Bluff check or Will save. If the jester wins he gets a "read" on the kind of humor the target likes, granting a +2 to the one-liner's DC.

Grand Master Fool: At 17th level the jester is so funny his powers no longer grant a +2 bonus to creatures of other types, nor is any creature required to understand him for any ability other than The Killing Joke (see below).

The Killing Joke: The killing joke is legend among jesters. It's a joke so funny that those who hear it are killed. In

truth the killing joke isn't quite so powerful. Only the most powerful of archjesters ever manage the killing joke, and they realize that each killing joke must be tailored to a specific target.

A killing joke has all the limitations of a one-liner (see above). The jester must spend two Laugh Points for the killing joke, and may only use it once per day. The target must make a Will save or be dead (for specific limitations on being dead, see New Conditions, below).

New Conditions

This article defines a few new conditions, to make humor more standardized within the *d20 System* framework. A GM may choose to make spells or feats that refer to these conditions, or write up magic items using them (clown nose of humoring, for example, or the cursed silly hat).

LOL (Laughing Out Loud): A character laughing out loud is so amused he -must- make noise. The character laughs, snickers, claps or slaps his knee. It's impossible to Move Silently while LOL, and in fact the character grants a +10 bonus to the Listen checks of creatures trying to hear him. (Since Listen checks suffer penalties from distance, this is actually game-mechanically relevant.)

Unless specified otherwise, a character is LOL for 1 minute.

LMAO (Laughing Mightily At Others): A character LMAO is laughing so hard he takes penalties to all actions. In addition to the drawbacks of LOL, the character takes a -2 penalty to all skill and ability checks, attack and damage rolls and saving throws.

LMAO is a greater version of LOL. A character already LOL who suffers an affect that makes him LOL is instead LMAO.

Unless specified otherwise, a character is LMAO for 1 minute. The character then must make a Will save (DC 15) or be LOL for an additional minute.

ROFL (Rolling On Floor Laughing): A character rolling on the floor laughing cannot take any actions other than one 5-foot adjustment each round. The character is not considered helpless, but does lose any Dex bonus to AC.

ROFL is a greater version of LMAO. A character already LMAO who suffers an affect that makes him LMAO is instead ROFL.

Unless specified otherwise, a character is ROFL for 1 round. The character then must make a Will save (DC 20) or be LMAO for an additional minute.

Dead: The core rules of the *d20 System* do define the condition of being dead. However, interestingly, the only mention about limitations the character suffers is that his soul leaves his body. The condition doesn't specify the character is unable to take actions.

For purposes of this article, a dead character is considered an inanimate object, unable to take any action, give information, have its mind read, or do anything a lump of steak the same size and shape couldn't do.

Designer's . . . uh, Managing Editor's Notes: *GURPS All-Star Jam 2004*

By Andrew Hackard

The question I get asked second-most often about this book is "Will there be a *GURPS All-Star Jam 2005*," to which I can only answer "We'll see, but I sure hope so."

The question I get asked *most* often is "What were you thinking?" This article hopes to answer that question.

* * *

When we were looking at the 2004 schedule, we realized we needed another *GURPS* book early in the year. After discussing all the various ideas that were kicking around from our top authors, I had a brainstorm -- ask nine of them to write 10,000 words on whatever topic they wanted. (I *did* veto a couple, I will admit, mostly for a decent mix of chapters in the book.) No one said no -- and Beth McCoy roped Walter Milliken into helping her out, probably by using a Song of No Dinner For You -- and several of them pulled out ideas they'd had which were too big for *Pyramid*, too small for even a small *GURPS* book, blew the dust off, and said "I've been waiting for this chance my whole life, Mr. Trump."

Er, wait, that was tonight's "The Apprentice." Perhaps I should wait to write this until I'm done watching TV . . .

As the chapters came in, I assigned them to whichever editor looked the most bored, or wandered by my office first, cackling madly as I imagined their attempts to reduce each and every chapter by 25%. Because, you see, overcome with excitement, *every single author* asked for permission to exceed wordcount, and (when that permission was denied) did it anyway. Those scamps!

(I should note that I'm writing this on April 1. Some of the previous paragraph, therefore, is not *entirely* accurate. April Fools!)

We pulled out the +5 Machetes of Word-Whacking and got to work, knocking each chapter back under the 10-kiloword threshold while not losing too much content in the process. Many thousands of syllables died at our hands, but in the end, all the surgeries were successful, and we had nine leaner, meaner chapters for our trouble.

Layout proceeded apace; we tested a new page design with *All-Star Jam* (you may have noticed) as stealthy prep work for the [GURPS Fourth Edition](#) layout, and made sure to put the new font (New Aster, at 90% width, as if any of you cared) through its paces. And then, we had to get art.

It's at this point that I sent a very odd request to our authors: would they supply a photograph for our cover artist to use as reference? They complied, more or less willingly, and when they saw Greg Hyland's cover sketch, most were amused. But they didn't know the half of it . . . we didn't tell them that we were having Greg do the interiors as well. I had a ball writing the art specs (be sure to hunt for hidden or not-so-hidden pyramids!) and working the authors in as much as I possibly could. I think this book is something special, and I wanted to be sure that its illustrations were equally, um, special. From some of the comments I've been hearing, we succeeded.

(And it's worth noting that no author has actually *complained* about their portraits -- at least, not to me. That's not an invitation, guys.)

* * *

Back to that first question, about next year's book . . . there are certainly some very fine *GURPS* authors who weren't included in this volume. Sean Punch is probably the most glaring omission, but now you all know why he didn't have

time to contribute this year. With luck, he can squeeze us in for 2005. I'd love to see what Bob Schroeck, Michael Suileabhain-Wilson, or Chad Underkoffler would do with 10,000 words and near-total freedom, too. So I think the chances of an *All-Star Jam 2005* are pretty good, especially if fan reaction continues to be as positive as the early returns have indicated. And I can't wait to get started on it. Thanks to everyone who embraced my wacky idea, to all the authors who contributed, to Greg for turning my dumb ideas into brilliant drawings, and to all of you for making it possible.

The Man

for *GURPS Voodoo*

by David Moore

"Fairfax will tell you the same thing I have. We're not authorized to do things like this."

"Who is? Who makes the decisions?"

"Well, a committee would make a decision in a case like this."

"One man. You go high enough, you always come to one man. Who?"

-- Mr. Carter and Porter, *Payback*

Since Al Capone and Don Corleone, the criminal superboss has been a compelling force in the popular imagination. *Daredevil*, both as a lawyer and as a vigilante, struggles against the powerful and shadowy Kingpin while *The Crow's* Eric Draven discovers that his killers' orders ultimately originated with the cruel and incestuous Top Dollar; Keyser Soze slips out from under the police's noses in *The Usual Suspects* and the Mariachi hunts the drug lord Buco in *Desperado*.

There isn't a hustle, a racket or a hit that takes place where he doesn't see a piece. If you work the city -- drugs, girls, fraud, network -- odds are you answer to somebody, and that guy answers to somebody too. But it all ends with *him*. Everyone knows it, but no one says anything about it; not if they value their skins. He's a stressed pronoun and a raised eyebrow. The police can't touch him, not that it'd do any good: he's got the DA and the judges in his pockets too. Sure, the feds went in once or twice, but all they ever got were his lieutenants. *He* always got away, only to resurface somewhere else. He's the top dog, the boss of bosses. The Man.

Of course, there's no such thing. Organized crime is an oxymoron; sure, there are gangs and outfits, but the idea of one guy being able to control every criminal in a city is ridiculous. It's a myth, an urban legend. An idea.

But then, ideas have power . . .

Il Capo tutta di Capo

"What happened to you and your girlfriend back there . . . I ordered that building cleared. Hell, nothing happens in this city without my say-so."

-- Top Dollar, *The Crow*

Like a Voodoo loa or Hermetic god, the Man is an idea, the belief in which is so deep and widespread that it has become real. Encountered individually it has the traits of a spirit, but this is a *manifestation*, an expression of the archetype given form. It appears in a city where the urban legend of a criminal mastermind or overlord has taken root. Building on that legend, the manifestation finds and assumes an influence over every criminal operation or gang it can, promoting the groups it has gained access to and squashing those that stay outside its influence, until it makes truth of the legend.

Although the idea is general, the manifestation is specific; he (or she!) will have a name, and a biography, although the details may be hazy and fantastic, and not consistent between tellings. The story may co-opt the name and details from the career of a real criminal or boss from the city's history, but this is a separate being, not a ghost. A few features are common to all such biographies: the Man is a foreigner or outsider who has either arisen only recently or been operating for an outlandishly (but not supernaturally) long time; he will defy physical description, with the possible exception of a single trademark feature such as a scar or tattoo; he will be a recluse that no one can recall meeting, although everyone has anecdotes about unfortunates who have done so; and he is known for a singular cunning, cruelty and determination -- everyone will know at least one story of a terrible punishment he has meted out, or a

vengeance he has extracted.

For all that, the Man is sometimes, especially if he has been established a long time, a servant of the community. His patronage may extend to churches or schools, or charity groups. He may even enforce a kind of ethical code among his agents; for instance, declaring children, married women, or priests "off-limits." This, of course, is simply a more subtle form of control, making locals side with his organization over the police or invading gangs, but can still result in good; manifestations of the Man have been known to drive Corruptors and In-Betweeners out of a city, and to stamp out the more wantonly destructive crimes.

Lieutenants

"Gather your soldiers. You're on for tomorrow night. No sweat."

"Is the Man in?"

"He's taking a meeting."

-- Grange and T-Bird, *The Crow*

One distinctive feature about the Man's organization is that he himself is never seen or heard from. His orders are given by his trusted lieutenant or mouthpiece, and his reach is felt in the contacts he has, the people he uses. These lieutenants, of course, are Initiates or Mediums who commune with the manifestation and channel it; the orders they pass on come to them by spiritual contact or are given directly through them, the spirit possessing his servant to speak to individual soldiers.

The strangest thing about these Initiates is that they *don't realize it*. Communications from the spirit are remembered as phone calls or passed messages, rather than dreams or visions. Rituals appear to both their performers and ignorant observers as phone calls (usually to other, lesser spirits, who execute the ritual's effects), bribes and deals; and they work as well as the rituals of Vodoun and Gnosticism because this, as far as the ritualist is concerned, is *how things get done*. Sacrifices to the Man and to the other spirits he uses are in the form of cash, drugs and the occasional spilling of blood; the tools of ritual magic are guns, phones, cash, dark glasses and suits, although superstitious symbols like crucifixes or luck charms may make their way into the lieutenant-Initiate's repertoire.

There may be a network of such lieutenants in the city, running separate crime rings and never meeting face-to-face; only the manifestation, taking reports from each lieutenant and giving orders in turn, knows everything that's going on. Or there may be just one lieutenant, running "his employer's" affairs. He becomes in truth what the Man is believed to be, albeit always thinking himself only a messenger and valued second-in-command.

The Man in the Shadow War

*"King Willie says, 'Not only do I have to kill you, but I have to take your soul.' Voodoo magic, man. f***ing voodoo magic!"*

-- Gold Tooth, *Predator 2*

As far as possible, the Man avoids the Shadow War. Arising from the belief systems of neither the Voodoo Societies nor the Lodges, he has no interest in either faction. An individual manifestation might have no objections to making temporary deals with either side, but generally speaking the Man finds that getting involved with their struggle is more trouble than it's worth. Nor is he a Corruptor, although he *uses* corruption to forward his goals. He was created out of a belief in a controlling force, and control implies ownership. The Man cherishes and jealously guards what's his, and what would be the point in controlling a decaying city? Most frustrating, the Man's agents and Initiates are often completely unaware of his nature, or even of their own powers, which seems to put them "beneath the radar" of more consciously-involved Initiates (see *Ignorant Initiate*, below).

None of this prevents him from becoming part of the War from time to time. Any of the major factions may seek to gain influence in a given criminal community. Warily eyeing the other groups as they do so, they may be completely unprepared to find this independent spirit power already entrenched and with no intentions to budge. Also, while the

Man is not an active Corruptor, his actions -- violent crime, prostitution and drug-trading, among other things -- often further their goals nonetheless. A Corruptor spirit may move into a city where a manifestation of the Man is in place and operate for years without ever being noticed. Gradually, the manifestation may be subverted until he becomes a Corruptor himself, serving the enemies of humanity. Alternatively, the manifestation may find himself sharing his city with a Devourer In-Between (p.VO102), which is far more likely to result in a war to extinction; Devourers are highly territorial.

The Man in the Campaign

The obvious use for the Man is to make his syndicate a focus for an adventure or campaign. The players are police or private investigators, led by a case or bust onto the trail of the city's rumoured superboss; the ensuing investigation draws them into a citywide network of allegiances and pay-offs, but the Man himself remains elusive, always just beyond their reach. Meanwhile, threats, attacks, attempted bribes, or interference from corrupt cops or DA officials dog their steps. Federal agents from the DEA, Treasury, or the FBI's Organized Crime Task Force may claim jurisdiction over the case, causing friction with the PCs who are trying to get to the heart of the case before being pulled off it. Or the players could be feds themselves, clashing with local corruption and maverick cops while struggling with their unfamiliarity with the city.

Alternatively, the players could be criminals, knowingly or unknowingly the crime lord's employees or rivals. A plot to squash a rival group, cement control of a neighborhood or remove a troublesome official will hint at the extent of the Man's organization; as they discover more about who (and what) the crime boss is, they have to decide what they're going to do with the information. An interesting variant on this is to have one of the PCs as the boss's lieutenant-Initiate; the growing realization that his employer isn't strictly real, and that the orders he passes on are taken by spirits rather than living soldiers, can be a major source of horror in the story (think Tyler Durden in *Fight Club*). In any case, police or criminal games with the Man should avoid overt signs of the supernatural, at least to begin with. The superboss's information and influence should beggar the imagination, but not initially defy explanation.

Adventure Seed: A turf war between a Mafia family and a Chinese Triad is discovered to have been engineered by the two groups' seconds-in-command, hinting at them being agents of a common interest. They are found to be working for a mysterious crime lord, who hopes the war will weaken both families and pave the way for staging a take-over of the neighbourhood. He has promised the two seconds-in-command leading roles in the new order.

In an "aware" *GURPS Voodoo* campaign, with Initiates and In-Betweeners as PCs, the Man can work as one of several forces at work in a city. Vodoun Initiates from the Protectors or Loa Lords (pp.VO21-22), or Hermetics from the Schismatics (p.VO32), are frequently involved in the underworld and crime scenes, rooting out rival Initiates, Corruptors and In-Betweeners who exploit and feed off the people. Seek and ye shall find, of course; an Initiate looking for rival supernatural forces in a city may mistake traces of the Man for something else. Hunting him will be a frustrating search, though; his Initiates tend not to show up, and his organizations are excellent at evading that kind of attention. Much of the drama of the game will arise from misdirection. As in the "cops n' robbers" game suggested above, the PCs shouldn't initially realise what it is they're dealing with; while they will be quicker to suspect the supernatural, proof of this, and of the exact nature of the enemy, will be hard to pin down.

Whatever the structure of the campaign, the PCs' goal will generally be to oust the manifestation and his crime ring. This will be a difficult proposition; even if they have the resources to combat spirits, the Man is more than one spirit -- he is an idea, an archetype. Unless the legend itself can be squashed, another manifestation will form around the core of the story. The ideal would be to persuade the people of the city that the crime lord has been killed or arrested; but with escape being as simple as dematerializing, and no corpse to show, either of these would be a challenge. After destroying the manifestation itself, defeating the Man may involve the unsavory business of framing someone else and offering him up for the authorities or the morgue.

Adventure Seed: A PC *vodounista* is asked by residents from the projects to investigate an apparent haunting. Speaking to the ghost, the players discover that he'd been agitating to expose corruption in the local council when he'd been killed, apparently in a mugging, by local youths. Helping the ghost find rest will involve uncovering the conspiracy he believes led to his death; and their investigation suggests a shadowy figure, possibly with spiritual

assistance, behind it all. Perhaps the Lodges are up to their old tricks?

Manifestations

"Did he say Keyser Soze? He saw Keyser Soze."

"He says he knows his face. He sees it when he closes his eyes."

"Ask him what this Devil looks like."

-- Metzheiser and Bodi, *The Usual Suspects*

Minor Manifestation

ST 12; DX 11; IQ 14; HT 12.

Move/Dodge: 6/6; Will: 18; Alertness: 16; Fatigue: 25

Moderate Manifestation

ST 18; DX 12; IQ 16; HT 14.

Move/Dodge: 7/7; Will: 21; Alertness: 18; Fatigue: 50

Major Manifestation

ST 25; DX 13; IQ 18; HT 15.

Move/Dodge: 8/8; Will: 25; Alertness: 19; Fatigue: 70

When the Man materializes or appears in dreams, he always appears as a normal human, never overtly supernatural. Specifics like age, nationality, coloring, and sex vary between manifestations, although commonly they have a single highly distinctive feature -- like a scar or tattoo, a missing eye, or being obscenely overweight -- that is constant to a given manifestation. When he has to appear to a minor member of his organization or to the public, the Man may appear as a silhouette or shrouded figure, seen across a room or on a rooftop; this both saves on fatigue and helps to preserve his secrecy.

Special Powers: The Man is always uncannily aware of the power structures and hierarchies that surround him. By spending 2 fatigue and succeeding at a Quick Contest (the Man's Alertness versus the target's Will), he will know to whom someone answers or where his orders originated, even if the agent himself doesn't.

Effects of Possession: The Man possesses his servants only rarely, preferring to work indirectly through orders and messages; when he does need to take direct action, however, he prefers to possess an expendable agent as long as needed, and then abandon him to the authorities or rivals once he's finished. The Man *never* grants Spirit Warrior status; possession is always absolute, and the host never remembers the time he was controlled.

Initiates

"We're associates of your business partner Marsellus Wallace. You remember your business partner, don't ya?"

-- Jules Winnfield, *Pulp Fiction*

Much of the regular work of the Man's syndicate is handled by living men and women. At the top of this network are the boss's prized seconds and lieutenants. Materialising to issue every order and receive every briefing, and providing all the spiritual support in person is tiring, so the crime lord coaxes his closest servants into Initiation, teaching them a form of ritual magic and giving them powers and advice. The lieutenants perform curses to remove rivals and blessings to promote their agents, or summon spirit "thugs" and "spies" to rough people up or gain information.

In spite of this, the lieutenant-Initiates never fully realize what they are. The Man's system of ritual magic, called

Ritual Magic (Street Dealing) (M/VH), has Streetwise-12 as a prerequisite; its ritual tools are phone calls, coded phrases, cash and drug bribes and threats. The ritualist creates and maintains the illusion that all he is doing is mundane (see below), that his orders are being carried out by human agents and soldiers rather than spirits or his own ritual power. The Paths most often used are those of Luck, Protection or Spirit, although there is no technical limit on which Paths or Rituals may be learned and used.

Limitation: Ignorant Initiate -20%

This limitation, taken on the Initiation advantage (pp.VO58-63) and on any advantages taken with Initiation as a prerequisite, indicates that the Initiate doesn't know he has any power. He will usually not believe in spirits himself, and is fully capable of summoning and manipulating them while preserving this belief. Essentially, the character suffers from a severe Delusion (p.B32), without getting any extra points from it. The Initiate can buy and use any Ritual or Power, but must be able to rationalize it as a mundane act, most often through a human agent, although minor effects can be put down to strokes of luck. This limits what can be achieved and, more importantly, how quickly; achieving someone's death in a car-crash could be believed over a two-day period (contacting an agent to sabotage the car), but even a wildly successful ritual couldn't kill someone on the spot. It is effectively impossible for an ignorant Initiate to acquire Fourth Level or higher Initiation.

On the plus side, the Initiate's ignorance acts as a kind of defence against detection. Any of an Initiate's normal powers to detect a fellow Initiate, or to deduce an Initiate's involvement in an apparently coincidental event, is at 2 to detect an ignorant Initiate. In a city with several supernatural interests at work, this makes it likely that attention will be deflected to another group or faction.

An ignorant Initiate may eventually be persuaded of his powers; this should be roleplayed out, but the Initiate should be strongly resistant to acknowledging the truth. In this case, the limitation may be bought off with earned points, and both Powers and Rituals used normally. It is possible to continue using Ritual Magic (*Street Dealing*) after paying off the limitation.

The Man in other Settings and Systems

The idea of a crime lord being a spirit, totem, or archetype can, with a certain amount of adjustment, work in any modern or near-future setting with gothic or fantastic elements.

Shadowrun: While the magic of *Shadowrun* is flashier and more overt than the subtle powers of *GURPS Voodoo*, the urban setting of the game is very similar. In this game, the Man is not an individual spirit entity at all, but a totem. His lieutenants are shamanic conjurers, who invoke city spirits that manifest as gang members and informants. Alternatively, the Man is himself a Free City Spirit, with a network of lieutenant-shamans serving him.

The Man could begin play as the PCs' regular employer, a powerful and mysterious "Mr. Johnson" whose actions gradually reveal his plan to secure Seattle's underworld (or that of the game's local city) under his control.

Vampire, Werewolf, Mage: Another gothic horror game set in a largely urban setting, the *World of Darkness* games fit the concept well. The Man is an Umbrood spirit, granting his servants Fomori powers and Sorcerer paths as he binds them tighter into his service. Alternatively, the "lieutenant" who is really in charge of it all is a Marauder mage and the Man is his avatar; his ignorance of his own powers constitutes his Quiet.

Vampire PCs might see him as a rival, or a threat to the Masquerade. Mages might see him as a potential enemy or danger to the people, or Technocrats might want to remove dangerous elements or rivals. Werewolves would likely see him as a Wyrms spirit or corruptor. In the *World of Darkness*, they might be right . . .

GURPS Psionics/Black Ops: The Man doesn't have to have a separate existence at all! The "lieutenant" is a powerful unconscious psychic with a Split Personality and a Compartmentalized Mind. The Man is his alternate personality, projecting itself out of him as a telepathic or psychokinetic illusion, manipulating events and spying on rivals, and appearing to him in dreams or as a voice over the phone.

The Company wants to find out who is manipulating the criminal community in the local city. Is it a Grey plot, or the work of the Lodge, or MIND? What, in the end, does the mysterious manipulator want? When they find out who it is, do they try and bring the "innocent" lieutenant in for counselling and training, or terminate him?

Pyramid Review

Raising Up (for Call of Cthulhu)

Published by [Chaosium, Inc.](#)

Written and illustrated by Dr. Michael C. LaBossiere

54-page b&w tape-bound softcover; \$13.95

Raising Up is the third book to be released as part of Chaosium's Miskatonic University Library Association Monograph series. The series was begun in late 2003 with the physically flawed, though still interesting *Parapsychologist's Handbook*, with the intention of countering the lack of releases for *Call of Cthulhu*. 2004 has already seen the release of another Monograph, *End Time*, also by Michael C. LaBossiere, making *Raising Up* his second contribution to the series. Where *End Time* detailed mankind's near future after we have left the Earth to explore the worlds and moons of our Solar System, particularly the colonies on the Moon and Mars, *Raising Up* is a much simpler and more traditional release for *Call of Cthulhu*.

What LaBossiere, best known for his contributions to GDW's *Challenge* magazine, presents in *Raising Up*, is the Miskatonic University Library Association's first collection of scenarios in the form of a five-part mini-campaign. Upon initial reading, it appears to be set in the game's classic period of the 1920s, but by the second part and its mention of an MP3 player, it is clear that *Raising Up* is set firmly in the here and now. At its core lies not some planet threatening foe or cult, but a single individual, one Reginald Preston, a reclusive academic, who despite being confined to a wheelchair, has set his mind to becoming both a dedicated student and foe of the Mythos. Little able to actively confront its manifestations due to his infirmities, Preston can at least conduct research and direct the more physically able.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

This is where the player characters come in, their having come to Preston's attention after he has learned of their exploits in facing the Mythos. *Raising Up* opens with "Part One: The Bookstore," in which he asks them to visit a bookshop where he was to collect a new tome from the owner, Don Wedenberg. Unfortunately, he found Wedenberg dead on the floor and was forced to flee at the sight of a strange creature, the like of which he has never seen before. This is an effective little mini-encounter, serving to introduce Preston, who will prove to play a major role in the rest of the mini-campaign. Its new Mythos being is also a nice addition, being a minor creature similar to that of those seen in the film *From Beyond*. The one thing it does leave hanging, is what should be done with the body of the late Mr. Wedenberg.

Slightly less successful is "Part Two: Player of Hell," wherein one of his students is terrorized by what Preston suggests to be a vampire. Not the traditional Balkan vampire, but a vampire nevertheless. This factor may be off putting for those Keepers that prefer to have their *Call of Cthulhu* games unadulterated by non-Mythos creatures. Better still is "Part Three: The Bone Dealers," that has Preston direct the investigators to take the fight straight to the Mythos, though in the form of a somewhat backwards and backwoods enemy. They have the feel of the protagonists from *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, though without the forestry implements.

Where Parts One, Two, and Three were confined to the United States, "Part Four: Tomb of Ash," takes the investigators to Egypt, where they must confront a far more ancient danger, though one that is currently confined within the walls of a tomb. This is a threat that they do not want let loose, and while getting inside the tomb is a dangerous and mortifying task, they have the aid of two Egyptian scholars, one of whom has contacts that can provide an occult solution.

For "Part Five: Putting Down," the party return home to deal with more threats unearthed by Preston's research. This is the final part of *Raising Up*, and unlike the previous four parts is not so much a mini-encounter, but rather more a fully fledged scenario. That said, it is described as consisting of a of encounters. After the events in Egypt, Preston has decided to become a little more active in his search for Mythos-related activities and learns that across New England, there has been an increase in the number of grave robberies. Worse still, he tells the player characters that the graves are those of reputed witches and wizards! This leads to a number of encounters across the region before a final showdown on a small island off the coast.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Given the number of scenarios that the author has written, it is no surprise that *Raising Up* feels very sound. It neatly counters a problem inherent to many scenarios for *Call of Cthulhu*, that of the never before heard of relative or contact turning on the investigators' doorstep to get them involved in something dark, only for them to either die in the process, or end up as being the villain behind nefarious deeds of the scenario. By having Reginald Preston appear on such a regular basis, the players -- invariably a suspicious lot -- can grow to trust him and perhaps look upon him as both contact and friend. Should the Keeper so decide, Preston could very serve as a patron to less experienced group.

Despite the soundness of the campaign, it does feel as if the meat is a little taut upon its bones. In places it could benefit from a little more development, not to say fleshing out. Particularly in the last part, where the writing does suffer from a sense of haste and would have been better had the various missions been more fully detailed. Also it could have been made more explicit that the campaign is for the modern ear at the very least, if not the inclusion of suggestions to adapt it back for use for a twenties set campaign. While the inclusion of a vampire in Part Two may not be in keeping with the Mythos, it does mean that *Raising Up* might be more suited to less stringent settings, such as the forthcoming *Pulp Cthulhu* or *Cthulhu d20*. It is also suited to even more monster-busting RPGs, such as [Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game](#) or the [Angel Roleplaying Game](#).

One definite advantage with *Raising Up* is its loose structure, which means that each of the five parts can be pried apart to be run as single one-off scenarios, or extended with the insertion of other "assignments" given out by Preston. The anthologies *Last Rites*, *Secrets*, or *The Stars Are Right* would all be useful in this regard, as would a number of scenarios found on the Chaosium website, also written by Michael LaBossiere. With some effort, it could be adapted for use with *Delta Green*.

Part of the conceit for the Miskatonic University Library Association series of Monographs is that the layout and editorial duties have been left up to the author. Where that proved to be a handicap for *The Parapsychologist's Handbook*, it is not so for *Raising Up*, where the layout is clean and tidy, and the typographical problems turn out to be merely bothersome. The few illustrations it contains are decent enough, but more so with the depictions of the campaign's two new Mythos beings. The maps it does include are perfunctory, but at least they provide a basic idea of the areas they cover.

Another problem with *Raising Up* is that of its cost. It is a slim book, which, when combined with the fact that it is only available direct from Chaosium's website, makes it expensive to have shipped outside of the USA.

Raising Up is probably best run by a more experienced Keeper, for a group comprised of less experienced players and investigators. Despite it needing more fleshing out, *Raising Up* represents a sound addition to the Monograph library.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

d20 Mecha (for d20 System)

Published by [Guardians of Order, Inc.](#)

Written by David L. Pulver

Edited by Mark MacKinnon, Jeff Mackintosh, Adam Jury, & Rich Spainhour

Art, graphics by Jeff Mackintosh, Niko Geyer, Angie Lai, Christopher Poon, & Stephan Martiniere

80-page b & w softcover; \$16.95

Pyramid Review

BESM d20/d20 Mecha Character Folio

Designed by Jeff Mackintosh

Art by Jason Chan & Niko Geyer

16-page b&w softcover; \$4.95

Given how coarse the *d20 System* can be, something as intrusive and potentially complex as giant robots seems like it would be tough to interweave with the rather blunt mechanics. Showing his usual penchant for elegant system design, Dave Pulver and his crew match the two almost flawlessly.

There's a dearth of setting material here, so readers are going to have to come up with their own (though there are a few worlds already published that make liberal use of mecha). Alternately, the sizable bibliography lists a mess of TV shows, manga, and movies to get the creative juices flowing. What the book does have is a few tips on what typical *d20 System* fantasy characters might be doing with mecha or one of their cinematic offshoots. From there, they expand the character classes (the mecha pilot or commander) and add feats and skills that put you behind the wheel (or keyboard, or joystick) of the big machines, or leave you in charge of the batteries of firepower with which they're equipped. Chief among the class feats is Mecha, each level you get gives you more Mecha Points, for use with the mecha design system.

The design system will be fairly familiar to readers of Guardians of Order products, though with less concentration on levels. Depending on the size of the mecha, you have a base speed, a base number of hit points, and other statistics, all of which may be bought up in standard increments. Give it the power of flight, let it burrow under the ground, or let it

ply the space lanes. Exotic abilities from the genre haven't been forgotten, like turning invisible and combining with other robots. To reduce those prices and point totals, defects can be added. Maybe you catch fire easily, or the machine doesn't have the robotic equivalent of hands.

Weapons are constructed separately and comprise a series of choices on what form the weapon will take and with what qualities and restrictions it will be imbued. Is it a slug thrower? Does it toss canisters of gas, and are the fumes meant to obscure or damage? Does it fire in a straight line, or does it have a cone effect? Maybe the penetration is reduced, or the weapon is an oversized axe that, once thrown, must be retrieved.

The system isn't limited to big robots, though. Any vehicle can be duplicated, including mundane things like motorcycles, sailing ships, and the family car. Further, stable headquarters floating in space or sitting atop a mountain can be created and they'll still have access to equipment, defenses, and weapons.

Once the mecha is built, there are plenty of ways to merge it into the campaign. You can decide everyone works for the military and is assigned their vehicle, but the relative value of the machine you build can be made a part of the story. Maybe you want everyone to be able to buy one outright, or perhaps they have to pay it off, or they steal it, or use the *d20 Modern* buying system. All these methods are simple, but they all come with their own set of advantages, disadvantages, and connections. *d20 Mecha* actually helps the GM characterize his setting and makes just-plain-rules into useful tools.

The combat transition is remarkably smooth. Traits like Move actions, flat-footedness, and even the interaction of the crew with the outside world while hidden inside their metal skin carry over simply, workably, and with little fuss. There are a number of special cases -- to be expected when your device may have three or four movement types and can step on a gas station -- but rather than include pages of involved calculations, they offer a few simple steps and three levels of action. Splitting the activity up like this helps when adjudicating a running human and a running two-story mech . . . or it may be more accurate to say it helps GMs *avoid* having to combine different scales in awkward ways during combat.

The Character Folio, released concomitantly, isn't just for *d20 Mecha* but for *Big Eyes, Small Mouth d20* as well. Only a couple of pages are needed for the character sheet per se, but there's space for recording the statistics for your mechs and vehicles as well, including their weapons. If you're not playing a mech game those two pages may be lost to you, but you still have space to write up your Items of Power on another page. There's also room for your goals, allies, history, adventure records, advancement, name, date of birth, social security number, ice cream preferences . . . well, maybe not, but the FBI doesn't keep records this thorough. The folio does provide almost as much inspiration for character development as it does space to list it in.

With the usual refreshing brevity that characterizes many of their releases, Guardians of Order has expanded everyone's *d20 System* library manifold with *d20 Mecha*, a simple and utile set of guidelines.

--Andy Vetromile

The Temper of Names

for *d20 System*

by **Brian Rogers**

Aaaah, coming to see if anything you've scrounged has value, eh boy? What's that? Plundered from lacedons under the docks? Well, the Azure Sea holds many secrets. Let's see what you have here, starting with the sword . . .

Arthur Pendragon has Excalibur. Severian carries *Terminus Est*. Corwin owns Greyswandir. Thorin Oakenshield bears Orcrist. Elric is cursed with Stormbringer. Rand Al'Thor draws Callandor. Latro wields Falcata. Your *d20 System* hero has . . . Sword +2? For a warrior seeking glory, an unnamed blade is a *Brand of Mediocrity*. His weapon is as important as his honor, as much a part of him as his hand, and as crucial to his legend as his victories.

So how do you get a named weapon? You could comb through old scrolls and listen to bards for hints to their locations, or do what any true hero would do: Go forge one in the fires of your own legend! Name Weapon is an Item Creation feat allowing combat classes (Barbarians, Fighters et. al.) create their own magical weapons.

Name Weapon [Item Creation]

You can name one or more weapons, investing them with part of your personal legend.

Prerequisite: 3+ levels in classes receiving d10 or higher hit dice.

Benefit: You can create any magic weapon whose prerequisites you meet. Enhancing a weapon requires using the weapon in a suitably heroic act, then officially naming the weapon in a naming ceremony. This ceremony lasts one day per each 1000 GP in the price of the weapon's magical features. To enhance a weapon you must spend 1/25 of its feature's total price in XP -- preferably earned in the aforementioned heroic act. The naming ceremony requires raw materials whose cost equals half the feature's total price. The weapon to be enhanced must be a masterwork item. This is a Spell-like ability.

As with Craft Magic Arms and Armor, the character's level must be at least three times the enhancement bonus of the weapon, and the weapon must have at least a +1 enhancement bonus before it can gain any other special abilities. While this feat is similar to Craft Magic Arms and Armor, you can't use Name Weapon to create magic shields or armor, repair broken weapons or to enhance weapons that you have not carried in battle. You can't own more than one weapon you have personally named at one time -- the feat needs a strong sense of legend to operate, and multiple namings dilute that legend. Finally, Name Weapon has different prerequisites than Craft Magic Arms and Armor, since fighter types invest their legend through acts rather than spells.

Prerequisites

The Masterwork Weapon

See the tang mark? Forged by the dwarven smith Rurik Gorunn before the Dwarvish Diaspora. Legends say that his blades need sharpening only once every 11 years.

Why must it be a masterwork weapon? Only the finest weapons can sustain the power of legend. Named Weapons need to be distinctive: their name etched on them in ancient runes, sinuous carvings on their haft or jewels of great price on their pommel. Legends will not form around less august weapons, so take some time to describe your weapon's appearance -- be it one of gilt and flash or purely functional beauty.

The Heroic Act

This is the blade that Richard Ironmantle used in his duel with the Ogre barbarian Grunek the Mighty, clearing the caravan routes south of Molvar before he was yet 18 summers old.

In order to name your weapon, you have to use it in a suitably heroic act, usually besting a powerful opponent in fair combat. Specifically you must single-handedly defeat a creature whose challenge rating is equal or greater than the level required for the weapon's enhancement (three times the weapons enhancement bonus).

This can be quite difficult, since a monster's challenge rating indicates its threat against a party of adventurers, but it is this act of valor that powers the Name Weapon feat. You can get indirect help from allies before the battle (such as receiving a *Bull's Strength* spell from a wizard companion), but they can neither attack your opponent nor cast spells on you once the battle is joined. The DM is the ultimate arbiter of what actions qualify as interference. This fight need not be to the death, but your victory must be sufficient to earn full experience for the encounter.

In a mechanical sense, the PC is paying for spell costs of weapon enchantment with Experience Points. As such, the PC doesn't get experience for the heroic act -- or more precisely he does, but it is immediately spent on the weapon.

The Naming Ceremony

After that battle Ironmantle named the blade Dittany, indicating his passion for Elana, a local nobleman's daughter with estates of that name. The festival of naming lasted days, during which the soldiers drank much wine, bards immortalized the battle, and Richard played courtier to his beloved.

The naming ceremony ties the weapon, its name, and the character's legend into one unbreakable knot. The specifics vary depending on the nature of the character and her legend, but one thing is certain: it is pricey. Costing half the value of the magical weapon in gold pieces, naming ceremonies have a bare minimum cost of 1000 GP. While a spellcaster's cost indicates equipment and obscure magical resources, a warrior's funds emphasize his legend.

You and your DM should determine what expenses your character's specific naming ceremony requires: a barbarian may spring for a drunken party through several bars in the foreign quarter; a fighter could employ bards to craft tales of his and his weapons prowess; a paladin might donate the money to his temple, spending the time in fasting and prayer. All heighten the character's -- and the weapon's -- unique legend.

Reaffirming the Name

Richard achieved permission to wed his beloved after he used Dittany in single combat to slay the White Dragon of Watchtower Hill. During the course of their wedding he commissioned songs be sung reaffirming the blade's legend, and the celebrations lasted 16 days.

You can reaffirm the name of a weapon you have already named, thereby increasing the strength of its legend and its magical power. You have to repeat the steps of the Named Weapon feat, including a new suitably heroic act for the new enhancement. The cost of reaffirming the name is reduced by the amount you spent last time you named the weapon, in both gold pieces and experience points. Thus Richard Ironmantle raised his weapon's bonus from a +1 (from defeating a CR 4 Ogre at 4th level) to +3 (from defeating a CR 9 adult White Dragon at 9th level), but only had to pay gold and experience based on a cost of 16,000 GP (18,000 for a +3 weapon, less the 2,000 he spent at 4th level to give the weapon a +1). This is to give PCs a reason to hang on to a named weapon rather than discarding it and naming a new one for a greater enhancement.

Special Abilities

Ironmantle later appears in the records of the church. After a battle with the Ghost-Priest of Zief he financed the construction of a temple and spent two full weeks in prayer for the god's divine favor, so that his sword might touch his

new foe . . .

You can also use Name Weapon to grant special abilities. This has the same level requirements, time cost and experience cost for a warrior as for a spell-caster, as listed in the DMG. Rather than a spell prerequisite, the PC must confront and defeat an opponent whose nature the GM deems suitable for the special ability (such as a Ghost for Ghost Touch, or a Fire type creature for Flaming)

New Wielders

Ironmantle passed Dittany to his son, Armis. He died somewhere in the High Forest, and Dittany vanished for 70-odd years. It appeared in the hands of the ranger Robin Westlake, taken from a Daemon Chieftain. After she drove the Fiend H'len'e from the High Forest, the woods Sylvan inhabitants joined her in a month of celebration and regrowth, reaffirming Dittany's legend.

New wielders can use all of a named weapon's abilities, just as if it were any other magic weapon. If the new wielder has the Name Weapon feat, she can reaffirm the name of the weapon as if she were the original wielder. This means she must meet the prerequisites for any new weapon abilities, but gains the benefits of the previous investments of experience and gold. Heroes have every reason to seek out named blades, as they not only give magical powers but can be improved at a lower cost. As the weapon passes from wielder to wielder, its legend grows.

Notes for the DM

Using the Name Weapon feat in your game increases the amount of work required for some magical weapons, but it acts as a great device for involving the PCs in your world's history. As PCs learn a weapon's legend -- its previous wielders and their enemies, the quests they undertook and the monsters they slew -- the game world becomes fleshed out and alive. PCs also have another way of leaving an enduring legacy: during the next campaign your players may well find knights questing for the weapons they made famous in your last one.

Better still, each previous naming acts as an adventure seed. Is the original owner's family looking for their heirloom? Is the last owner still searching for his blade? Has the weapon been tied to the defense of a particular township, who now expect its wielder to defend them?

Robin of Westlake? Unfortunately she was lost when her ship burned to cinders on the Azure Sea. It's rumored the Daemon Chieftains were responsible for that raid, and the Ghost-Priest has agents seeking Dittany. Nice blade you have there, son. Lock the door on the way out, and please don't tell anyone you came here.

Magog and Glory

"And the pub roars again and the man at the piano begins thumping out the Internationale and the words come into the large man's mind, unasked . . . and the sweat of herded humans has the stench of hard labour, and Gog feels the horror like acid in his mouth and he opens his teeth and howls."

-- Andrew Sinclair, *Gog*

Called to the spires of Cambridge last summer, I was asked to transmit some secret, some shadow under the town to invoke the genius loci and invite its attentions to our gathering. I took Sherlock Holmes' advice, and pored over large-scale maps of the territory, where I discovered the giants in the Earth. Madmen (and magic?) revealed them to me, I revealed them to the convention, and now I reveal them to you. Let us obey the injunction of the prophet, then, and turn our face towards Gog.

"I could never learn how these hills came to be called the Gogmagog Hills, unless it were from a high and mighty portraiture of a giant wch the schollars of Cambridge cut upon the turf or superficies of earth within the said trench, and not unlikely might call it Gogmagog, which I have seen but is now of late discontinued."

-- John Layer of Cambridge (c. 1640)

Specifically south -- of Cambridge, for the nonce -- to the Gogmagog Hills, now seemingly incongruously topped by a golf course. The name dates back to 1576 at least, from which point we have a wealth of directions to follow. The more prosaic will follow the spiral earthworks of the Wandlebury Camp atop the hills to the word "hodmandod," apparently once a local coinage for "snail," which strikes even my skeptical eye as ridiculously unromantic. Far more likely is some combination of the Biblical names Gog and Magog, and the giant Goëmagot. The latter worthy was slain, according to the impeccable testimony of Geoffrey of Monmouth, by the Trojan hero Corineus, albeit in Plymouth harbor rather than in the low hills of Cambridgeshire.

From whatever Celtic sump or Monmouth misprint "Goëmagot" springs (for instance, the very interesting-sounding "Tomb of Gourmailhon" in Brittany, guarded by a mysterious goatlike beast), it rapidly became conflated with the Biblical names. The combatants Corineus and Goëmagot became "Gog and Magog" (or Gogmagog) in Plymouth and elsewhere, especially in London, where Brutus was supposed to have made the suddenly twinned giants his doorkeepers. Two giant statues greeted King Henry V on his return to London from Agincourt, and a "Gog and Magog" (replacing those burnt in the Blitz) stand today in the Guildhall in unbroken succession.

Returning to the Hills, we find mention of a giant (or giants) buried there in oral history going back at least a century. A chronicle of 1604 compares a different giant to the one "carved on the turf" of the "Hogmagog Hills," whose teeth were dug out of a well in Cambridge. Unfortunately, the chalk giant vanished when Wandlebury was enclosed in the park of Lord Godolphin around 1730. The Cambridge antiquarian T.C. Lethbridge attempted to "reconstruct" the giant outline in 1954 by hammering a sounding bar into the hillside and tracing the soft, chalky spots -- about as good an idea as it sounds like. Notwithstanding, Lethbridge (if not conventional archaeology) found the outline of a warrior (Gog?) and a female figure with three horses, who he identified as "Magog," the female version of the fearsome giant and original of all moon or horse goddesses everywhere from the Celtic Matrona to the Hindu Maha-devi.

"There is but little ground for debate; but that the prophecy of Ezekiel, relating to Israel's last enemy, points conclusively to Russia . . . It is very probable this name has been given to the state because the population descends in a great measure from Magog, and Gog seems to be an abbreviation of the name Magog, and is applicable to the chiefs of this empire. The names of the three states that compose this empire are mentioned in Scripture word for word -- 'Son of man, turn thy face towards Gog, of the country of Magog, the prince of Rosch, Meshech and Tubal;' Rosh is Russia -- Meshech Muscovy -- and Tubal Tobolsky . . . It is thus almost established by evidence, that Russia is the country of Magog, and that Nicholas, or one of his successors, is the Gog announced by the prophet, and that there is reason to believe that the latter days are not far off . . ."

-- Dr. John Thomas, *Eureka* (1861)

But if you ask a different stripe of crazy person, you get an entirely different answer. Magog is quite self-evidently

Russia, you see, stemming from the prophecy in Ezekiel 38-39. For those not up on your minor prophets, Ezekiel warns Israel of an invasion from "the north quarters," from the "land of Magog" led by our old pal Gog. Gog will assemble the armies of Magog, which stretches over a number of countries last heard of in Genesis 10 but roughly identified with the territory north of Syria in the Caucasus Mountain chains. (If you're worried, the Lord will clean Gog's clock for him, so that comes out all right.) As early as Josephus, Magog was identified with "Scythia" (the modern Ukraine and southern Russia); a Bishop Lowth in 1710 and the Hebrew scholar Wilhelm Gesenius in 1835 both identify Magog as Russia. After the Soviet revolution, of course, identifying the Gog-led enemies of Israel (and, hence, of God) as the godless Commies was a piece of cake, and various fundamentalists leaped to do so. Although Hal Lindsey has backed off his predicted apocalypse since 1989, Tim LaHaye and others are still right in there swinging with the Menace From Magog.

"How many earth mounds have been found filled with bones of our ancestors? Whenever I read of these, I think of Baba Yaga and her oven. She bakes us and feeds upon us, she puts us back into the womb and disposes of our material form . . . [T]his is why we hear of these horror stories about Baba Yaga. We're afraid she will come and take us away. She'll grind us in her mortar and pestle and make us into food."

-- Eliza Fegley, "Thoughts on Baba Yaga"

And when we think of fearsome female giants, and Russia, what name comes to mind but Baba Yaga, the child-devouring ogress of the waste places? She has breasts of stone and teeth of iron, flies about in a giant cauldron (or mortar), and lives in a bizarrely inaccessible hut (on fowls' legs) in the black depths of the forest. Only those who approach neither on another's errand nor on their own can enter, and she gives to them fire within a skull. She's usually etymologized from the proto-Slavic word *jega* ("fright" or "disease"), or from the Lithuanian verb *engti* ("to strangle"). Some folk, looking abroad, find her name cognate with the Old High German *hagazissa* (from whence we derive "hag" in English), or coming from the Persian lunar demoness *Jaki* (or *Jeh* or *Jahi*). Let us, in the spirit of the place, propose another possibility -- perhaps "Yaga" comes from "Gog" (of likewise murky roots), making the "ma Gog" the "mother Yaga," or "Baba Yaga." Like our Magog carved in Cambridge, she has three horses (morning, noon, and night); just as Magog has three allies (Persia, Libya, and Ethiopia) in Ezekiel. (These triple allies also match the "white, red, black" colors of Baba Yaga's horses.) Sure, it's a stretch. But isn't it interesting that such a stretch in either direction leads back to the devouring Mother Russia -- and perhaps through "white" czarism, "red" communism, and the modern "black" neo-fascism of the Russian right?

"[H]e was eager, earnest, and, it seemed at the time, as indeed throughout his life, decent and virtuous. But as he explained to his Soviet secret masters, the Black Country changed all of that." -- Anthony Cave Brown, *Treason in the Blood*

And another Cambridge fixture also found his way to Mother Russia -- perhaps with the help of Magog under the hills? In a crucial letter to his father (the peculiarly mystical-minded St.-John Philby, whose idiosyncrasies Tim Powers points up in the brilliant novel *Declare*), Kim Philby mentions a mysterious "Hungarian" with whom he roamed the "Black Country" before throwing in his lot with the Soviet Union. Orthodox biographers identify the Hungarian as the artist (and possible Soviet agent) *Szigetti Szucs*, and the "Black Country" as the depressed industrial Midlands -- but the letter itself has disappeared from the archives. Could Philby have used "Hungarian" as a code for "Magyar" -- for "Magog"? Could the "Black Country" be the initiatory waste land beneath the giantess' mound, the kurgan guarded by bones and only accessible (says Baba Yaga's story) by one who neither approaches on his own, nor is sent by another? In short, by someone with a double agenda -- a spy?

One last word from Ezekiel 39:6: "And I will send a fire on Magog, and among them that dwell carelessly in the isles." Kim Philby and his Cambridge circle certainly did "dwell carelessly in the isles." There were four "Apostles" (of what deity?) who turned traitor at Cambridge -- and there are four Mag's (or Meg's) hills ("breasts of stone") within four miles of the Gogmagog Hills. Queen Elizabeth forbade Cambridge scholars to gather in the Gogmagog Hills -- did she know what other queen lurked beneath them? Perhaps [Christopher Marlowe](#) (also a spy, also a Cambridge student, also of liminal sexuality) visited those hills 350 years earlier, to find the same offer of "fire within a skull" made to him by Magog. Was his Tamburlaine simply an Elizabethan Gog, an offering made to placate the goddess beneath the hills? Kim Philby, of course, kept the cannibal crone fed more efficiently -- with the blood of British agents. Perhaps that's why he died at the ripe old age of 76 -- at 2 a.m. on Bendidea, the holy day of the "northern horse goddess"

Bendis, celebrated in ancient times by a midnight horse race through the black country of the night.

Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Tipping the Scales (Or at Least Remembering Them)

Having gone out of town for a week, I had the "pleasure" of dealing with the airline system again. (I find dealing with airlines to be one of the most stressful and frustrating affairs in the universe. I think the "high point" of this latest excursion was when I learned that, if I wanted to fly from Atlanta to Pennsylvania, it would be cheaper to drive to Tallahassee first, and then fly *back* to Atlanta, instead of traveling directly from the Atlanta airport. This is "efficiency." I can tell how much it bothers me because I use a lot of "pointless" quotation marks, even though I normally find them "annoying.")

But I "digress."

Anyway, as part of that journey, I found myself for the first time in the Chicago O'Hare International Airport. And, having a 45-minute layover, I expected this to be plenty of time. After all, since I'm a fairly in shape fellow with a lot of energy, how bad of a walk could there *possibly* be?

I'm sure my fellow Pyramidians who are better traveled than I know the folly of this idea.

So as I walked from my arrival gate to my transfer gate, I realized I had been walking at a brisk pace - often along moving sidewalks - for 25 minutes straight, and not only had I not reached my sidewalk, but I was still in the *same building*.¹

By far the cruelest moment of this trek was when I thought I'd reached my destination, having seen the sign indicating my gate . . . only to learn that it was, in fact, at the bottom of an escalator about another 50 yards away.

Anyway, to tie it all together back to gaming, I note that this is a perfect example of the concept of "scale." I was first introduced to this idea with West End Games' *Star Wars RPG*. In one of its GM advice chapters (I think) there was a section where the GM was encouraged to keep players aware of the scope of the *Star Wars* universe. In it, there was a sample transcript where the players encounter a Star Destroyer while in an X-Wing Fighter, and the players decide to attack it; the GM, in an effort to show the relative threat levels of what they're up against, takes a piece of paper and draws a triangle as large as the piece of paper. Then he puts a tiny dot off to one side; the triangle is the Star Destroyer, and the dot was the PC's vessel. The heroes wisely decided to fly away.

RPGs have an incredible advantage over other forms of entertainment, in that they exist almost entirely in the minds of the players. However, RPGs also have an incredible *disadvantage* . . . they exist almost entirely in the minds of the players. And if everyone doesn't have the same rough idea of the game world, it's easy to lose sight of fairly significant elements. For example, as a younger lad, I remember being disappointed when I learned that the *Enterprise-D* was "only" 641 meters long; if someone had pointed out that this makes it longer than five football stadiums, I probably would have been very impressed. (And if my country had been properly indoctrinated into the wonders of the metric system when I was a child, I might have a more intuitive grasp on what a "meter" is as well. But I'm off-topic again.)

Most of the time scale isn't a big deal, especially when everyone's dealing with concepts they're already familiar with. A modern jumbo jet itself is so large that really thinking about its size can take one aback; however, since most gamers have at least seen one and probably even been on one, the GM can use one as a backdrop and not be afraid that its size and scope will be lost.

But for other ideas and measures, having *something* the gaming group can latch onto will go a long way toward making sure a scene has a desired impact. For example, the jumpgates lurking at the edges of solar systems of the *Fading Suns* setting are the size of moons; an early plot idea I concocted involved an accident where two ships collided as they jumped through the gate. While not impossible (I suppose), I had nevertheless been unaware of the exact size of the gates until well afterwards . . . and I probably would have avoided a complication that required two small vessels to be in the same spot near a moon-sized object. (Then again, I suppose it's no more implausible than combing over Canada to [search for clues](#).)

For those looking to reinforce or reintroduce a sense of scale, then, I toss out the following ideas:

Always work in terms of familiar items. There's a reason the football stadium has become the unit of measure for many large numbers; since most Americans have been in one (or at least been near one or seen one on television), it's easy to conjure that as a means of giving context. Likewise drawing the giant triangle and the tiny dot immediately evokes a sense of scale, as does the classic *Ghostbusters* line, "Well, let's say this Twinkie represents the normal amount of psychokinetic energy in the New York area. Based on this morning's reading, it would be a Twinkie 35 feet long, weighing approximately 600 pounds." Any kind of actual real-world item can help bring the description down to terms the heroes can understand.

Also consider other familiar scales to draw emotional pull. For better or worse, the 58,000 American deaths from the Vietnam War are often used as a measuring stick for other kinds of fatalities. Given that such real-world statistics can be seen in poor taste, it might be good to try to work them in via in-game references. For example, if there was a particularly bloody war in the campaign world, that might be a good yardstick to refer to other events in the game; if nothing else, it would help give the players an idea of how the rest of campaign's citizens are reacting to an event.

And don't forget game terms. Since gamers often dwell in the world of numbers and rulebooks already, bringing those numbers back to the players can serve up large concepts in discrete units they already know. For example, in *GURPS* terms, my O'Hare jaunt was approximately 1,600 combat rounds.

Avoid simile or metaphor. While similes and metaphors seem to imply a concept of scale, usually they feel and sound more like hyperbole instead of fact (and fact is what's required to make scale work). For example, saying, "This sword's sharpness makes other weapons seem like pudding" is easy to ignore or dismiss. On the other hand, saying, "This sword could hack through an arm made entirely of steel more easily than a regular sword could cut through flesh" puts a real-world measure on the sword's effectiveness. In addition, this example places emphasis on the subject, not the rest of the world; the rest of the gaming group will probably have an easier time envisioning a metal-cutting weapon than pudding swords.

Don't forget that scale applies to just about anything. As the sword example above shows, scale doesn't just apply to size. Anything significantly outside the norm of human perception might benefit from having it brought back down to earth. You can apply scale to morality ("His soul is so dark that he could save a burning school full of children every day for a year, and still the scales would not be balanced"), information ("If all of human knowledge could be condensed into a haiku, the Oracle of All could be a book two inches thick of nothing but haikus"), or life spans ("For every day you have lived, Immortalus has existed for a year" might give the heroes pause. And then there's the classic Tom Lehrer line, "It is a sobering thought . . . that when Mozart was my age he had been dead for two years."). Just about anything that's *almost* beyond the scope of human comprehension can be boiled down to some scale element that the players can hopefully understand.

RPGs are often, at their core, epic. Unfortunately, the epic nature of those games can make it difficult for players to relate to the Big Things that make such games really interesting. Fortunately, with just a bit of thought, it's usually possible to anchor the game.

And if nothing else, it will give you something else to think about on the half-hour sprint to your next flight.

* * *

For those of you who are curious, I was out of town because I was attending [MEPACON](#), a small convention in Scranton, Pennsylvania. It seemed well-attended for a small regional con, and everyone was pleasant and helpful, while the event itself seemed well-organized. (Although, yet again, I did *not* have enough players to run "[The Kensington Codex](#)." I do believe the next convention I attend will require . . . drastic measures.) They also had a huge auction, where I lost out on both lots I had particular interest in, and acquired several books that made me question my assertion of, "Any RPG is worth a dollar." I got to try a demo of *Age of Mythology*, which was surprisingly fun, and I may try to snag a copy when I have free time and spare money (both of which seem almost as mythical as the game's subject matter).

So thanks to the good folks at MEPACON for their hospitality, and I recommend folks in the northeastern United States may want to check out their site periodically and see when their next event is.

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

¹ Technically, Chicago O'Hare seems composed of several sub-buildings, one of which is connected to the others with a tunnel. Whether this adjunct building counts as part of the "same building" I'll leave to pedantics. Regardless, this tunnel had a beautiful [neon light show](#) on the ceiling that made me glad I've never taken LSD.

Librarian's Love-Child in World Domination Horror

Conspiracies and Paranoid Delusions in *GURPS Discworld*

by Phil Masters

Note: This article first appeared, in very slightly different form, in issue 23 of Valkyrie magazine.

It's pretty much a cliché to say that anything that is *believed* to happen on our world probably happens somewhere on the Discworld. One way to explain this is to say that the Discworld stories are parodies and satires of things and ideas in the real world, and so their targets have to be fitted into the Disc somewhere. Another is to say that the Disc is literally shaped by perceptions and beliefs, and its inhabitants tend to think like human beings anywhere else, so what people we know believe, they can be painfully sure is real.

Well, up to a point, anyway. Not only do many Discworlders believe things that are diametrically opposite to what other Discworlders believe, but most of them, being human, believe several things that directly contradict each other. The Disc and its obligingly flexible region of local reality do their best to make all of these things true at onceⁱ, but there are limits. Sometimes, Discworlders manage to believe things which are in fact complete rubbish (and which remain complete rubbish for quite a long time).

Anyway, Discworlders are as credulous and paranoid as human beings in any other universe, so of course they believe in conspiracies. The more ambitious among them even try to start their own conspiracies, or at least to track down the better existing ones and sign up. As someone once observed in our world, the real point about conspiracy theories isn't that the theorists want to expose and destroy the conspiracy; it's that they want to join them.

"Sensible" Conspiracies

In fact, just like anywhere else, there really are some quite straightforward conspiracies on the Disc. That's in the sense that, when a bunch of people with a certain amount of power get together, they are often shrewd enough to realise that, if they pool that power, it makes even more power, and gives them a better chance of stopping anybody else from taking it away from them. Of course, the snag with people like this is that they can't always resist double-crossing and back-stabbing and trying to keep something just for themselves, but the shrewder of them can keep things going for a good few years.

Several examples of this can be found in the novels, although many of them hit the snag that there are people around who are better at this politics stuff than them, and the really dedicated passwords-and- secret-doors conspiracies are mostly run by people who are too hung up on the style to get the substance right. *Guards! Guards!* covers this ground in some detail, and you can't find a much more hopeless bunch of conspirators anywhere than the Elucidated Brethren of the Ebon Night (though, as the book shows, even hopeless conspirators have their uses, up to a point). More viable Ankh-Morporkian conspiracies appear in *Feet of Clay* and *The Truth*, and the often- conspiratorial court politics of the Agatean Empire are depicted in *Interesting Times*.

Away from the complexities of the big city, conspiracies have less need to remain under cover, and might be described more as "movements"; the vampires of *Carpe Jugulum* and the werewolves of *The Fifth Elephant* are, functionally speaking, conspiracies, and they have their secrets, but (aside from what the werewolves get up to in relation to some of their neighbours) they don't have the full conspiratorial tendency to lurk in dark shadows plotting against the powers-that-be.

One other sort of "realistic" conspiracy is organised crime, which certainly happens on the Disc -- at least in good-sized cities like Ankh-Morpork. However, thanks to the Patrician, Ankh-Morpork's Thieves' Guild is now too public, *too* organised, and much too complacent to conspire properly about anything, while the Assassins' Guild is far too busy earning lots of money and preserving the proprieties to plot very much. The situation in other cities is unclear, but most have a tendency to follow Ankh-Morpork's lead whenever possible. There are hints that the nearest thing to a properly sinister *underworld* conspiracy is the Brecciaⁱⁱ, but trolls, while pretty good at keeping secrets, are less talented when it comes to complicated plotting.

Curiously enough, there is a little, much-denied evidence that one of the most effective truly international conspiracies -- or at least, sneaky secret organisations -- on the Disc is the infamous but seemingly innocuous Fool's Guild. Admittedly, this mostly consists of a bunch of depressive clowns who spend their time memorising tired old comic routines, but there are suspicions that those members who get jobs as court jesters may act as spies in their employers' courts, reporting back to the guild-house in Ankh-Morpork. What the Guild does with this information would be another question.

Big-Time Conspiracies

Full-strength, world-spanning conspiracies, able to twist the fates of nations, keep entire populations in the dark for centuries, and employ really cool agents with snappy dress sense and the ability to wear dark glasses indoors without falling over the furniture, are rather harder. To begin with, the Disc is, broadly speaking, a low-tech society. While the best conspiracies on our world are sometimes supposed to go back thousands of years, the fact is that a conspiracy without radio, fast transport, and clever monitoring devices is a bit restricted. It has to limit its operations to a small region, or build a network of highly capable and *trustworthy* sympathisers -- and in the latter case, it still has the problem of communicating with them. When your messages are limited to the speed of a good horse or a fast sailing-ship, coordination is a real problemⁱⁱⁱ. And watching anyone who might threaten your conspiratorial plans, so you can give them an accident before they start making trouble, is also a challenge without modern technology.

Of course, there are a few groups on the Disc who can get round these sorts of problems. The first are the wizards, who have all sorts of scrying and telepathy spells, amongst other advantages. A properly-organised wizardly conspiracy could be a real menace. However, anyone reading that last sentence should grasp the problem with this idea; "wizards" doesn't really belong with "properly organised." Well, not much of the time, anyway. There are some hints that, on occasion, wizards *have* worked together to make life difficult for other people, but the odds are that, mostly, just when they were getting somewhere, the back-stabbing started. Anyway, these days, Unseen University exists as a sort of anti-conspiracy; an organisation which makes sure that any wizardly inclination to get organised is channelled into harmless academic politics.

Similar comments apply to the idea of witches running a conspiracy, but with less serious back-stabbing and more obsession with local concerns. Witches just aren't the conspiratorial type, at all^{iv}. A solitary *bad* witch might try organising a small conspiracy with herself at the top, but that's about as far as it goes.

Or, lastly, there are the gods. They, too, have supernatural communications, and some of them also have omniscience^v, which makes tracking people who are against you that much easier. However, in general, the divine game-plan doesn't really work in terms of secret conspiracy; what gods need isn't a network of hidden followers, it's lots of serious, full-time *worship*. A really smart high priest might come up with the idea of a conspiracy to serve the religion's purposes, but getting the logic through the head of the irascible dim-bulb up on Dunmanifestin is probably going to be too much like hard work. Also, a religious conspiracy would probably have to be run by a single deity; gods are at least as bad as wizards when it comes to proper long-term cooperation. For that matter, if and when any rival deities twigged what was going on, they'd probably be all too quick to blow the secret wide open to their own worshippers. There may be a few conspiracies *within* some larger religions, and perhaps some secret organisations whose job is to carry particular religions into hostile territory, but that's as far as it's likely to go.

So Discworld conspiracies will have to make do with limited resources, in a world that doesn't necessarily feel right

for their sort of operations.

Mysteries and Monsters

It would be tempting to bring the full paranoid paraphernalia of UFOs, numbered Warehouses and Areas, and all the other *X-Files* furniture into a Discworld game, but there are a few snags here, too. At least with the UFOs, anyway. The Disc is, when all's said and done, a fantasy setting, and dragging in SF/modern-day stuff like spacecraft tends to spoil the effect.

And no, people being abducted by flying carpets wouldn't be the same. Abductions by Krullians on board discs produced by *Fresnel's Wonderful Concentrator* (see *The Colour of Magic*, or p.DII144) might come closer -- the Krullians are just about weird enough to go in for something like that, if they have a reason. Still, it's all a bit too *obvious*. The best idea might be to go back to the genuine pre-modern version of alien abduction, and have Discworld characters being abducted by elves. *That* should worry your players quite significantly, if they've read *Lords and Ladies* and they've got any sense.

Other stuff is more feasible, but for the same reason, it may lack the necessary edge of weirdness. For example, yes, you can have cryptozoology -- weird creatures living on out-of-the-way bits of the Disc. But the trouble is, that's not going to surprise anyone. We *know* that the Disc has yeti, giant sea monsters, bat-winged demons, and miniature people living underground. They can be interesting to meet, but it's quite likely that the PCs have been there and done that. The same goes for signs from the gods -- though Discworld gods rarely bother with ambiguous calligraphy in root vegetables. When they really want to communicate with their worshippers, they come round and shout at them^{vi}.

Which leaves the really silly and surreal stuff; rains of frogs, perhaps. Well, C.M.O.T. Dibbler could probably find a use for them^{vii}, but you'll need a plot for them to connect to. The snag with a lot of Forteana is that it doesn't *go* anywhere.

It might also be interesting to bring in a few True Believers or Mystery Investigators. Many Discworlders are gullible enough to believe anything, and it's been proved countless times that any strange or dramatic events in inhabited areas of the Disc rapidly bring in hordes of rubberneckerers and trigger a mass of rumours, many of them with as much as 5% truth content. This sort of lunacy can provide a nicely comic element for a Discworld scenario, and sorting out which rumours are near enough to true to be worth following up, or saving idiotic bystanders from being abducted, trodden on, incinerated, hypnotised, turned into zombies, or terminally immersed in frogs, could keep PCs happy for hours.

Most full-time believers are likely to be rather nerdish and clueless, making them a minor nuisance at best and a menace to themselves and others if they ever get close to anything really important. There might be some fun in bringing on one who's got more clues than most, a degree of social and physical competence, and even decent looks and dress sense; in short, a Discworld Fox Mulder. Again, taking this concept too close to the original would probably be too much of an anachronism to work, but bold GMs might give it a go. Working out how to get the scenery right would be a lot of the problem; do Discworld lanterns produce a bright, focussed enough beam to cut through the mandatory darkness in the crucial search scenes? And could he find enough people who *didn't* believe in his theories, so that he could feel nice and persecuted?

Tabloids

One thing that the Disc has acquired recently is newspapers; see *The Truth* and "[Freedom of the Press: Journalism in GURPS Discworld](#)." Among them are some full-strength loopy tabloids. Of course, the universal fact about these sorts of tabloids is that the things they talk about are deranged and unlikely -- which means that, on the Disc, their stories have to be very, very eccentric indeed. The novel shows something of the history of the first such tabloid, which had its own peculiarities, but GMs might want to assume that the idea is just too interesting not to be repeated or to spread.

After all, a tabloid doesn't *have* to employ reporters who actually get out of the office; it just has to find someone who's good at making stuff up. That, however, isn't as easy as it sounds, especially if the paper wants to last for more than a

couple of weeks; even tabloid readers may notice and get a bit bored if the paper starts repeating itself too obviously. In fact, in the end, it may be *easier* to send people out looking for real stories, and maybe polishing them up a little bit -- especially on the Disc.

This raises two possibilities from the game point of view; PCs can use the tabloids as information sources, or they can work for them. The former is a gag that's been used before (including in the movie *Men in Black*), but it's still basically sound. PCs who go to this source *first* when they have a mystery to solve would probably be over-optimistic, and would certainly have to wade through a lot of rubbish to find the useful nuggets, but tabloid reports or the reporters might provide some handy indirect clues, and GMs wanting to drop some huge and convenient plot short-circuit^{viii} can always say that the PC with the lowest Status has just picked up his favourite newspaper, and there on the front page is the answer to the current mystery^{ix}.

PCs working as field reporters for a Discworld tabloid could have a distinctly *interesting* time of it. Remember, they don't have to find out the *truth*, or show any sense of responsibility to the public interest -- but they do have to keep their readers and editor happy. If some of them have some kind of latent conscience, they may sometimes see about solving problems and preventing the things they investigate from destroying the world; also, any particularly literal-minded trolls or dwarfs in the group may take their editor's instructions literally, which could cause trouble. They could also pursue certain venerable journalistic traditions^x with as much enthusiasm as any (more) respectable reporter. This could certainly make a change from more traditional modes of fantasy adventure. Or, if the headline turns out to be **Dragon Found in 10' by 10' Room**, maybe not.

It should also be said, especially if tabloid reporter PCs resort to making things up, that the Discworld is an informal sort of place, without much in the way of libel laws. This is fine so long as no-one makes the mistake of picking on someone their own size, or bigger -- but if you annoy somebody who is capable of getting their own back, it is expected and normal for them to do so. Hint: running the headline **I'm the Love-Child of the Unseen University Librarian**, while good for a couple of thousand extra sales, would certainly be bad for your health. Even if he is the nearest thing you can find to bigfoot without straining your expenses budget.

Ankh-Morpork and Lancre

The major venues of the many Discworld novels *can* serve as locations for conspiratorial plots, but GMs will have to deal with the legacy left by numerous novel plots.

Ankh-Morpork is, in fact, a boiling cauldron of conspiracies, but not many of them are very impressive. There are a whole mass of cults and secret societies, many of them aiming to bring down the Patrician and take over the city (and perhaps the world). The snag is, most of them are made up of the sort of embittered inadequates who indulge in fantasies like that, and quite a few are monitored more or less directly by the Patrician at any given time. He tolerates them as a harmless channel for some people's dangerous ideas. In any case, he's far too smart to try persecuting them; that would just mean that the members would have their paranoia confirmed, and it would teach the slightly smarter ones to hide and scheme rather better.

Occasionally, a conspiracy gets lucky -- or very unlucky -- and acquires something that enables it to threaten the *status quo*; see *Guards! Guards!* for an example. At other times, one arises which has the brains, resources, and luck to represent a serious threat to the Patrician; *Jingo* shows the city's leading figures operating as an informal conspiracy to this end, while *Feet of Clay* and *The Truth* have small, secretive groups which come up with fairly smart plans. The only snag is, even if such conspiracies can neutralise the Patrician, they have to deal with the increasingly competent City Watch and various other groups who the Patrician has ensured don't want too much change -- at least, not on someone else's terms.

PCs who get mixed up in conspiratorial plots in the city should probably either seek to work against the conspirators, or hope that the Patrician classes them as an amusing diversion or a useful tool. Still, it's just possible that some groups in the city are working at right angles to the Patrician's concerns, perhaps manipulating events elsewhere on the Disc, or focussing on magic or religion -- areas in which Lord Vetinari does not seek to intervene much. For that matter,

Vetinari himself may use a few semi-competent conspiracies to handle non-urgent matters that don't affect the city too directly. In *Illuminati* terms, he could be on good terms with the Disc's equivalent of the Gnomes of Zurich; it's the local counterparts of the Servants of Cthulhu who'll be in trouble if he notices them.

Lancre, the other recurrent setting for the novels, is really too small a place for proper conspiracies, and anyway, Granny Weatherwax wouldn't approve. Still, it might be fun to run a few threads of conspiracy theory through that part of the world. Who knows what the dwarfs on Copperhead Mountain get up to on the quiet? After all, they've been making money (and not spending it much) for centuries. King Verence seems rather unwisely determined not to ignore the subject of international politics, which may mean a few secret negotiations and treaties, some day. (Perhaps he could lend use of the castle to someone trying to conduct secret negotiations "in a good cause.") And with all the Ogg and Weatherwax family members who've gone off from this place to make their fortunes over the years, *anything* might have come back here and ended up in a cupboard somewhere. (Perhaps one of the crumbling towers of the oversized Lancre Castle is actually the Disc's nearest approximation to Warehouse 23?)

Also, if anyone *is* interested in Discworld cryptozoology, Lancre would be as good a place as most to start looking. The high forests and valleys have their share of rare species, some of which slipped over the Ramtops after things got a little rough in Uberwald recently^{xi}, and almost anything could slip in through the caves beneath the castle, or through the Dancers (the local standing-stone circle) if people are *really* unlucky. There don't *seem* to have been reports of giant hairy humanoids, long-necked lake monsters, or more than the occasional two-headed calf, but perhaps it's just that no-one has asked^{xii}.

GURPS Discworld Also Locations

Part of the objective with chapter 5 of [GURPS Discworld Also](#) was to provide a set of locations on the Disc that could be used for some plausibly Discworld-style stories, but without the baggage of the novels' usual settings. Some of them have some potential for conspiratorial or general-weirdness plots.

In fact, *Wadi El-Rukl* is actually run (secretly) by a conspiracy, and its geopolitical situation makes it a natural location for plots of intrigue, espionage, and triple-crossing -- all with that old *Arabian Nights* flavour, of course. The problem for PCs here might be to survive long enough to get the hang of what's going on, especially as the local version of cryptozoology would mostly relate to genies, which, while not *usually* malicious, have unhealthy amounts of power. Still, players can at least be assured that the conspirators trying to kill them will be immensely polite and subtle about it.

By contrast, *The Brown Islands* have plenty of scope for weird cryptozoology -- every island can have something different in the way of unexpected wildlife, from were-sharks to giant apes with a taste for blondes -- but rather less for proper conspiracies. The urban communities are all quite new, and are highly disorganized and prone to excessive amounts of quaffing and swashbuckling. Still, there could be scope for building *new* conspiracies here, working from the ground up; there are fewer established power-groups likely to interfere.

New Smarlhanger is most likely to import its conspiracies, however unknowingly. It's another new community -- or rather, a large community newly built on the basis of something older and smaller -- but it's a natural focus of attention for groups such as Uberwaldian vampires or werewolves, Sto Plains merchants, and the Semaphore Company. All would want agents in place there, watching the growing economy, keeping an eye on the semaphore system, and listening for rumours from any and all directions. PCs could be employed as such agents (but not necessarily told all the details, or indeed who they are working for), or could get caught up in the intrigues and secret wars of the different groups as they begin to collide.

Lastly, there's the "Cart Wars" community of Fourecks. Okay, this isn't really conspiratorial territory, but no worries. Perhaps a conspiracy from somewhere else on the Disc could move to the Last Continent, and try to set up a secret base in the Outback. It'd be a bloody stupid thing to do, but *they* might not know that; battles between low-tech Men In Black and irritated cart warriors could certainly get fairly weird.

Scenario Seeds

Blood Will Tell

In that age, it is written, the Great God Om did manifest on the Disc in the guise of a brazen bull. Or perhaps it was an eagle with feathers of silver and gold. Something like that, anyway. And as he passed through the lands of the heathen, he did find one Righteous Man among them, who he did lift up, saying, You Help Me And I'll Help You . . .

Once, centuries ago, the city of Quirm (see p.DI22) was the capital of a mighty kingdom, and its kings were famed for their wisdom and justice. Well, that's one version of the story, anyway. Another says that it was a small kingdom, and most of the kings weren't complete idiots^{xiii}. But whatever the case, there are, as usual, people who would rather live in the past than fix the present, and who dream of that lost age of glory.

The funny thing is, in this case, most of them aren't even based in Quirm. The legend of the Palaeoquirmian Dynasty seems to have a strange appeal far beyond the borders of the old kingdom -- whose inhabitants are, in fact, mostly rather too laid-back, or too obsessed with cheese manufacture, to take much interest in the idea of pursuing lost glories. It seems to be mostly people in other places who would like to see the Palaeoquirmian Kings restored; one possibility is that they're just smart enough to realise that the Old Days where they live were pretty bad, but they can still delude themselves that the Old Days *somewhere else* were great.

To add to the complications, this legend has somehow become entangled with the spreading religion of the Great God Om. It is said, among certain rather heretical Omnians, that Om travelled to Quirm during one of his visits to the material world, centuries ago, and that he founded the Palaeoquirmian Dynasty, or blessed its founder, or something. Now, some of those same Omnians have formed a secret society, dedicated to finding the Lost Palaeoquirmian Heir, and restoring him to his rightful glory. That have fanatic zeal, access to some of the resources of the Church of Om, and a *few* sympathisers in or around Quirm who wouldn't mind cushy jobs in a new government.

This is a bit like those odd people who think that Captain Carrot is the rightful king of Ankh-Morpork, despite his efforts to make sure that no-one can prove it. However, the differences are (a) There's religion involved here (and some of the people involved would quite like to take the Church back to its fine traditions of setting fire to other people), and (b) *No-one* knows who the Lost Palaeoquirmian Heir might be -- though a few people think that they have some idea.

PCs could get mixed up in this plot as witting or unwitting agents of the conspiracy, of the government of Quirm (who are just beginning to find out enough to get worried), or the Church of Om (Orthodox Reformed Division), who know that heretics are at large, up to something, and purloining money from Church funds. (But how high up does the corruption run?) If the GM is feeling really malicious towards one PC, or a PC has some unexplained stuff on his character sheet that fits, the conspiracy could "identify" that PC as the Lost Heir. After all, PCs are forever suffering minor strange events (wild coincidences, rains of fish, surviving battles with mighty wizards) which could, in another light, be taken as Signs and Portents^{xiv}.

One Stone on Top of Another

Conspiracies love pyramids. It's something to do with the symbolism; all that mass of stone, looking wonderfully solid but actually riddled with secret passages and ancient secrets^{xv}. This makes places like Djelibeybi and Tsort favourite subjects of conspiratorial myths -- although there aren't necessarily more actual conspiracies there than anywhere else.

That raises the possibility of PCs being hired to run, or at least guard, expeditions to those places to investigate the crucial dimensions of a pyramid or two. Read up on some of the stranger things believed about the Great Pyramid in our world if you need some *really* silly ideas.

Alternatively, the amazingly incompetent architect "Bloody Stupid" Johnson doubtless built a few pyramids around the Sto Plains, by way of decorative follies^{xvi}. While it's hard to imagine Johnson as a member of even the most third-rate

conspiracy, his handiworks could have their uses; someone might have convinced themselves that they have some arcane significance. The PCs could be hired by a nobleman to investigate the bizarre people who keep sneaking round his garden with tape-measures and theodolites.

Then again, if Johnson *really* screwed up his sense of dimension and proportion during one of his building projects, the resulting building could find itself being used as a temple by a *really* deranged, depraved, Lovecraftian conspiratorial cult.

"They don't get more non-Euclidean than this . . ."

Anarchy in Ankh-Morpork!

Small gods are always good for Discworld game plots, and some of them may be tangled up with conspiracies. Unfortunately, they aren't always noted for their sanity.

This could give a GM an excuse to bring in a more Discordian, irrational sort of conspiracy. A group whose motivations are driven by the commandments of a god with a room-temperature IQ and unstable desires could act in a completely incomprehensible fashion. However, totally irrational opponents just feel boring, silly, and frustrating after a while, so eventually at least, such a group's actions should display an underlying theme.

"Destroying the universe" or "bringing down the established order" might be one option; after all, such a cult would attract members from among the disaffected and reflexively rebellious members of society, and small gods are *always* on the lookout for theological niches -- groups of worshippers not already claimed by bigger gods. Admittedly, those sorts of people are already catered for, to some extent, by the Disc's scattering of demon-worshipping cults, and maybe the odd mad group dedicated to the Things from the Dungeon Dimensions. But wanting to be evil, or mindlessly nihilistic, is one thing; claiming the support of *thinking* nihilists and ideological anarchists is quite another.

Such a chaos cult would probably usually represent an adversary for PCs, especially if it went in for dangerous pranks or outright terrorism. On the other hand, faced with highly organised evil -- a tyrannical ruler, say, or a rival conspiracy dedicated to *control* -- it could make a tricky ally, or even a weird sort of patron. Either way, its biggest asset would probably be the direct assistance of its god, frantically determined to ensure that the cult survives to continue feeding it belief. But how reliable is the worship of a bunch of people who swear that they don't believe in *anything*?

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ⁱ For a reasonably sensible value of "true."

ⁱⁱ The (supposed) trollish secret society run by the likes of the notorious extortionist and loan-shark Chrysoprase.

ⁱⁱⁱ This, by the way, raises the question of what some people might be doing with the long-range semaphore system (described in *The Fifth Elephant* and later novels, and in *GURPS Discworld Also*). It's very new, and it has a limited data transmission rate, but still, it has possibilities.

^{iv} Most of the time, anyway. Although some people might get the unpleasant sense that most of the witches in the world form some kind of loose conspiracy to an uncertain purpose.

^v Up to a point, anyway.

^{vi} Though some, it must be said, are barking enough to indulge in ambiguous and pointlessly indirect communications methods out of sheer divine perversity. If you can think of a plot involving messages from Offler the Crocodile God showing up in the chunks of turnip in an authentic Ankh-Morpork Klatchian curry, run with it. "Can't you see what this MEANS?!"

vii Inna Bun.

viii Perhaps by way of an intervention from The Lady, or someone almost as powerful and whimsical.

ix Unkind GMs can then have that answer be wrong. (Why the heck should anyone trust a *tabloid*?) But that would be very cruel. Especially if it, say, sent the PCs to Fourecks.

x Getting drunk and fiddling expenses. Passing off your bar tab as "Travel and Dry-Cleaning" is especially recommended.

xi They're not, for the most part, strictly speaking, *endangered* species. Some of them were at one stage, but after Mustrum Ridcully left this part of the world to train as a wizard in Ankh-Morpork, they breathed a collective sigh of relief and stopped having to worry quite so much about crossbow- bolts.

xii Or thought to offer the locals money for their stories. You can find out all *sorts* of things that way, very few of them true.

xiii Except for the last one. It's usually the way.

xiv If someone's been crazy enough to take the Disadvantage *Weirdness Magnet* (and the GM has let them get away with it), that could be a good excuse. Equally, if they've got a Secret Patron, this sort of conspiracy would be a good candidate. This may also be the place to mention the Advantage Illuminated, which can be very handy, but which would probably give a PC *and* the GM a lot of migraines in a *Discworld* game.

xv Well, that's one theory, anyway. Another would be that any builder who spends half his time with one trouser-leg rolled up, plotting world domination, is probably incapable of anything more interesting in the way of designs.

xvi Or perhaps some of them were meant to be used as boot-scrappers or speed-bumps on someone's drive, and he got the scale wrong, as usual.

Iotha

Designed by Kenneth Hite
GURPS Fourth Edition Stats by Andrew Hackard

On whichever world Iotha grew up, the forests were tall, and old, and within them walked the elves, her people. Being elves, they knew that details of worlds changed, and they taught her how to find the spoor of those changes and cross with them. Although she never learned to open the doors of shadow and shift, she learned to spot the gateways and trackpaths left by those who did. Upon her 400th birthday, then, she packed up a good longbow of yew, and a lyre, and one or two secret things of her own, and set out upon her Time of Wandering, resolved to travel beyond the Forest of Arden and out into the worlds beyond.

For the first few decades, she merely found doors and roads to other worlds much like her own, with their own elves and orcs and dwarves and giants. Elves she greeted, orcs she hunted, dwarves she bargained with, and giants she slew. As she kept traveling, though, she found more and more of the worlds contained men, of whom she had heard stories, but which she had never seen. They were as fascinating as the songs her mother sang her as a girl, every one of them a Tamlin or a Thomas the Rhymer to her eager eyes. Although among the elves she was counted plain, the men seemed to delight in her as much as she did them, and once or twice she put off her travels to dally with one for the year and a day of tradition.

But in addition to a gift for love, in the worlds of men Iotha also discovered a gift for archery. Matchless at butt or target, on hunt or in battle, she gained a reputation on any world where she stayed for long. Other archers sought her out, and she defeated them in contest after contest. Sometimes their jealousy made them her enemies; sometimes their envy made them her acolytes. Only once, on a world with very few elves left in it, did she find a man who was her equal with the bow. First, she pursued him and his men through the greenwood, angry that he dared to equal her at a skill in which she took an un-elvish pride. But he did not grow jealous, and did not cower; he stalemated her at contests, and held her fast by her own vows. Then, she grew to love him, not just as a man or as an archer, but as a hero. She bided a time with him, and would have stayed forever but for her knowledge that his heart belonged to another maid, kept prisoner by an evil sheriff. So once more, she sought out a pool that flowed through worlds, and left Sherwood forever.

In her new world, she could renounce the forest and dwell in the cities -- in fact, there was little forest left even had she not felt heartsick. In concrete, glass, and steel, she hardened her sensibilities as she had hardened her heart. The city she found to live in was split by a great wall; on one side was freedom, and music, and passion. On the other was none of these things, only a gray cloud that made freedom lies, and music discordant, and passion furtive. Fortunately, her city held men who valued archery, only they used mechanisms of subtle device instead of bows. So she learned the rifle, and the laser sight, and the ways of the hunt practiced in the city. She hunted men, the gray men from the other side of the wall, and gained a reputation in her new world as a deadly assassin. The greatest sniper from the other side of the wall marked her as his own, and they tracked each other through the cities and across the barbed wire borders and into fields and frozen forests. Finally, in the Black Forest, she killed him, and took his weapon as her only trophy, for it was made on the Moon by the gray men, and weighed less than her bow.

But she was back in the forest, and so she went to another world, where a war raged in the ruins between men and leathery things. But almost before she could join the fight, she saw another hero emerge from nothingness, with his comrades, wearing uniforms of green and black. The hero saw immediately what must be done, and although Iotha killed one or two of his enemies from cover, she mostly watched wide-eyed as he and his company destroyed the stone from heaven and its batlike guardians with fiery blasts and weapons even mightier than the moon-rifle she bore. When they returned to their world, she followed them, and although her hero pretended surprise at her appearance, she knew that he had seen her and loved her from the first, much as she loved him. He spoke for her to his comrades, the bold ISWAT, and she joined them at his side.

Iotha

6'1", 125 lbs. (SM 0).

ST 9 [0]; **DX** 13 [60]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 11 [0].

Dmg 1d-2/1d-1; *BL* 16 lbs.; *HP* 9 [0]; *Will* 12 [0]; *Per* 14 [5]; *FP* 11 [0].

Basic Speed 6.00 [0]; *Basic Move* 8 [10].

Dodge 9.

Social Background

TL 8 [0].

CF Elvish [0]; Homeline [1].

Languages Elvish (Native) [0]; English (Native) [4]*; Russian (Native) [4]*.

Advantages

Acute Vision 3 [6]

Elf [70]

Legal Enforcement Powers [15]

Talent (Outdoorsman) 1 [10]

Weapon Master (Bow) [20]

Disadvantages

Dependent (Loved one; built on 50%; 9 or less) [-10]

Duty (To ISWAT; 15 or less; Extremely Hazardous) [-20]

Jealousy [-10]

Unnatural Features (Hair turns dark green in strong sunlight) [-5]

Vow (Always keeps her word, once given) [-10]

Quirks

Delusion ("My lover is the most important person in ISWAT")

Dislikes hawthorn

Dislikes iron

Intolerant of orcs and dwarves

Practices faerie etiquette (Minor Code of Honor)

Skills

Bow-21 (DX+8) [32]

Camouflage-15 (IQ+3) [4]†

Climbing-13 (DX+0) [1]§

Crossbow-13 (DX+0) [1]

Fast-Draw (Arrow)-16 (DX+3) [8]

Guns/TL8 (Rifle)-16 (DX+3) [8]

Hiking-13 (HT+2) [8]

Meditation-13 (Will+1) [4]

Musical Instrument (Lyre)-13 (IQ+1) [8]

Naturalist-14 (IQ+2) [8]†

Poetry-11 (IQ-1) [1]
Riding (Horse)-13 (DX+0) [2]
Running-14 (HT+3) [12]
Shadowing-11 (IQ-1) [1]
Singing-13 (HT+2) [1]‡
Stealth-15 (DX+2) [8]
Survival (Woodlands)-14 (Per+0) [1]†
Throwing-13 (DX+0) [2]
Tracking-14 (Per+0) [1]†
Zen Archery-11 (IQ-1) [4]

* Cost reduced by Language Talent (see Elf template)

† Includes +1 from Outdoorsman

‡ Includes +2 from Voice (see Elf template)

§ Includes +1 from Perfect Balance (see Elf template)

Elf

70 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST -1 [-10]; HT +1 [10].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: Per +1 [5].

Advantages: Appearance (Attractive) [4]; Language Talent [10]; Magery 0 [5]; Perfect Balance [15]; Telescopic Vision 1 [5]; Unaging [15]; Voice [10].

Racially Learned Skills: Connoisseur (Natural Environments) (A) IQ-1 [1].

Old Costumes, New Henchmen

Motivations and Spins On Henchmen Villains

by **Brian Rogers**

Crack the binding on a supers game and you'll find a new world that often looks suspiciously like the old worlds. Many strongly resemble the Marvel or DC universe: The unstoppable flying paragon, the midnight detective, the alien-gifted telekinetic, the speedster scientist, and the warrior woman rub shoulders (or share bodies) with the World War Two super-patriot, the wisecracking outcast teenager, the family of powered explorers, and the heroes the world hates and fears.

Why? You can't blame the game designer's lack of creativity; published comic universes also cannibalize the genre. The iconic clarity of DC's Golden Age heroes (and their Silver Age counterparts) and the personal energy of Marvel's Silver Age define American super-heroes. These tropes are what players want to see, emulate, and play. As GM you have to find beloved tropes for your villains -- without boring the players with the same old thing.

There's a trick to presenting the players with [what they want, but not what they expect](#). Here are three villains who do just that, all using the classic trope of "Plotting Villain with Henchmen" with twists making the henchmen different from traditional greedy thugs or [self-loathing hunchbacks](#). All three are suitable from the early pulp period to the modern day, from beat cops to investigators to mid-range superheroes.

"I have a Question." -- The Inquisitor

Anand Queri moved to Empire City to work at a criminal defense firm and there discovered his talent for ferreting out secrets prosecuting attorneys didn't want revealed. This branched into providing tabloids with scandalous headline fodder. Queri never lied, and failed to see why people who didn't follow the rules should hide their crimes. Combining his firm's resources and his tabloid connections, Queri started a career as a master blackmailer: The Inquisitor! His first step was gathering information on a stable of skilled, tough men (and one woman, on whom his hold is particularly strong) to act as his field agents. Failure to do exactly what they're told would have distressing consequences.

While not violent, the Inquisitor loves being in control, and loves knowing secrets. He never frames anyone; he only targets the honestly guilty and sees himself as an impartial force for justice. That this is itself illegal doesn't bother him. He is a good side plot for heroes with secret IDs, those who break the law, or PCs who use extreme violence while claiming a good-guy image. Hypocrisy draws his attention, making him a stick for getting PCs back on the straight and narrow. If a hero does catch his eye, he'll dig up any dirt they have, then send a taunting video or arrange a personal meeting (backed by some tough Questions and an escape route).

Tri Stat d10 Stats (100 points)

Body 4 **Mind** 11 **Soul** 6
ACV 7/11 **DCV** 5 **Health** 50

Characteristic Attributes

Agents (5) The five Questions, Variable Point Distribution. 40 CP (+2), Restricted: only 5 rather than 7 (-2)
Attack Combat Mastery (4) dependent on Judge Opponent Combat Technique - Judge Opponent (1)
Gadgets (1) Silenced pistol, electronic communication devices suitable to period.
Highly Skilled (3)
Massive Damage - All (2) +20 damage, dependent on Judge Opponent
Organizational Ties - Wall, Stone, Craft, Shelly Law Firm (5) significant influence on setting.
Servant (8) Miss Howe, 80 CP with Skeleton in Closet (3) and Recurring Nightmares (2).
Wealth (1)

Skills

It's also possible that PCs will encounter the Inquisitor in his civilian ID: any criminal hiring Wall, Stone, Craft, Shelly will have Queri on his side. The heroes will see the prosecutor's case shredded as the defense raises questions about all their witnesses. If PCs take the stand, Anand will research their backgrounds as well. Who knows what he'll dig up?

The Inquisitor is a tall (6'2") thin Indian man with a London accent wearing classic upper-class British clothing (including bowler, umbrella, and fresh orchid in the lapel). The bowler has an attached domino mask. He is a brilliant investigator with an instinct for finding and exploiting weaknesses, be they physical, social or psychological. While not a skilled combatant he can quickly judge opponents and take advantage of flaws. He carries a small pistol to threaten his victims and hold off muscle bound brutes, but his main combat skill is pressuring combatants into working for him: the Questions (nicknamed Who, What, Where, When, Why and the delectable Miss Howe) can bloody their knuckles on anyone foolish enough to try escaping his control through violence.

The Questions

These henchmen exemplify loyalty via fear: the Questions' dread of revelation is enough to overcome any aversion to foolish outfits (The Questions wear question-mark shirts and jackets with their "nickname" emblazoned on the back, while ski masks hide their identities) and criminal acts. Since the Inquisitor has a wide stable, most are called infrequently enough that they hope that this is the last one: one more favor and they'll be free. Hope springs eternal.

Fearful henchmen pose interesting problems for heroes. They might expect the henchmen to go calmly after a few hits, but the Questions will never go quietly -- such capture is only slightly preferable to their skeletons being revealed in the Daily Rumor, making them desperate men. Likewise, the heroes might think captured Questions would willingly spill everything, but they would be wrong. They don't know where to locate Queri, but do know that even his death wouldn't stop his revealing their secrets. Untangling such a web is certainly more challenging than a punch in the jaw.

"Your beauty inspires, my darling" -- The Muse

Larry Olive is the greatest stage actor of his generation, in a generation that increasingly embraces cinema. Bored by the roles available and annoyed by the lack of recognition, his talents lead inevitably to crime. The theater world's glitterati (as well as money unjustly flowing through movie studio coffers) provide plenty of dramatic and rewarding acts, the authorities make lovely comedic walk-ons, and the public? Enthralled. Olive knew he'd need a supporting cast, so after many casting calls he recruited nine aides from the loveliest, and best connected of Empire City's debutantes. Drawn to him like moths to a flame, he loves them all in his own fashion.

The Muse is a [theme villain](#) obsessed with theater. He's also a riddle villain, providing hints to show the public the

Computers - Databases (3), Cultural Arts - History (2), Etiquette - All (1), Law - Criminal (2), Management - Fraud (4), Police Science - Criminology (3), Social Science - Psychology (3), Stealth - Conceal (1), Street Sense - Influential Individuals (3)

Defects

Weak Point - Nose (2). It breaks easily and causes him to black out . . .

Skeleton in the Closet - secret identity as Inquisitor (2)

Unappealing - creepy aura and demeanor (2)

Tri-Stat d10 Stats (150 points)

Body 9 **Mind** 10 **Soul** 14
ACV 11 **DCV** 15 **Health** 115

Characteristic Attributes

Agents (4) four loyal 30 point followers, his Chorus.

Combat Technique (4) Blindfight, Block Ranged, Concealment, Lightning Reflexes

Defense Combat Mastery (6)

Divine Relationship (8)

whole play rather than unconnected acts. The money doesn't matter, as Olive lives comfortably and could be quite wealthy if he wished. No, the play's the thing. The Muse desires a repartee with the local heroes: he'd prefer rooftop dialogues before his cunning escape, but will accept cat-and-mouse conversations via the newspapers or radio. He makes a fine villain for anyone in the silver-age idiom, and his Chorus -- in their diaphanous robes with lovely, innocent faces -- should make any true hero hesitate to strike. (By the rules of chivalry, *heroines* can freely clock Chorus members . . .)

Again, it's possible the heroes know Olive socially. He's deeply involved in theater and often appears at galas and evens out the table at dinner parties. This likeable theater devotee persona gives Olive access to the visible stage while he prepares in the wings. Players may quickly identify him as the Muse, but fans of the form may enjoy the "I know but my character doesn't" conversations concerning recent rooftop exploits over canapés at the opening.

Olive is an attractive, charming man dressed as appropriate for the scene. The Muse radiates charisma and favors a variety of bright, weapon concealing costumes, hiding his disguised features under a Grecian dramatic mask.

The Muse is a master actor, seducer, disguise artist, and fencer who packs a mean right hook. He's also lucky as sin, and strange coincidences often help him succeed or escape. He plans obsessively but knows how to improvise, making the best of any situation. His evasive combat style and razor sharp senses makes him hard to capture or surprise. Combine his ability with his distracting (and just a little bit dangerous) Chorus and he's the equal of any one hero or even a small group.

The Chorus

These henchmen do it for love: drawn to Muse's irresistible charisma they freely join his dashing crimes. Wearing revealing robes and trusting that their paramour (and their families) would never let them come to harm, these escapades are a lark. Chorus members have retired and be replaced, and the group sees itself as a criminal sorority. (You could darken this Silver Age romp by emphasizing the implied sexual relations and emotional dominance between the Muse and his henchmen, or internal battles of lust and jealousy within the Chorus.)

Loving henchmen have their own problems for the hero: They are usually in over their heads, unaware of the dangers they face by their beloved's side. Violent questioning is difficult and un-heroic, and while emotional measures are time consuming. Reason doesn't matter so much as passion, and that makes them both duplicitous and determined. While the Chorus hides behind their social status, other loving henchmen might have defenders in social services, and the act of convincing a loving henchmen not to return to a life of crime is a task worthy of real hero.

"Let them know your fury!" -- Zalozhniy

Extra Attacks (1)
Extra Defenses (3)
Features (3) Appearance, Versatile Voice ×2
Gadgets (3) Usually a sword, small throwing weapons and some smoke grenades.
Heightened Awareness (4)
Highly Skilled (7)
Special Movement (3) Balance, Catlike, Swinging, Wall Bouncing
Wealth (1)

Skills

Acrobatics - Flexibility (1), Burglary - B&E 1, City Knowledge - Empire City Theater District (1), Control Breathing - Hold Breath (3), Cultural Arts - Literature (2), Costume - Disguise (3), Forgery - Handwritten (1), Performing Arts - Drama (4), Seduction - Female (5), Slight of Hand - Stage (1), Stealth - Conceal (1), Writing - Drama 2), Visual Arts - Costuming (2), Melee Attack - Sword (2), Melee Defense - Sword (1), Thrown Weapons - Blade (8), Unarmed Defense - Throws (1)

Defects

Skeleton in the Closet - secret identity (2)
Wanted (2)

Sadko Petrovitch was born in Russia's turbulent 1918, and everyone predicted he would live to be one hundred. He immigrated to Empire City in 1935, having confidence that his broad shoulders, sharp mind, and linguistic aptitude would open America's doors. He was wrong; after months of hard labor and growing resentment he stumbled into a crime in progress, where a shotgun cut Sadko's life short by 82 years. The river meant to be his grave spat him back up as a Zalozhniy, a Slavic disquiet dead, fated to walk the Earth for his allotted span with unnatural strength and hatred of the living. While he once worked alone, he found his oratory sufficient to mobilize a rag and bone army: the lost and outcasts who listen to his preaching against those who have what he does not, thinking he speaks of comfort when he means life.

Zalozhniy's goals and motivations are simple -- he hates the living and wants to see them dead. Sometimes individuals are targets of his wrath, other times he causes indiscriminate havoc, but he is most dangerous when he gathers his rag-and-bone army in a scheme of mass destruction. If any heroes stop him, he focuses on them in later incarnations until they finally lay him to rest. This makes him a viable campaign villain for even a more powerful hero: while someone like Superman or Sentinel easily outmatch Zalozhniy's physical form, ending the threat is no easier for him than for a pair of maverick cops (and lacking much by way of armor, the maverick cops can stop his body if they just unlimber enough firepower).

It is unlikely the heroes outside of a magical street campaign directly know Sadko, though they know of him; he has become a legend in Empire as the ghost of the Bowery bums, the monster in the sewers, and his birth identity is part of the legend.

Sadko is a large, broad-shouldered, blunt-featured man, looking normal save for the hole in his chest (thus he affects heavy coats). Stopping his body literally means reducing it to ashes, so after battles he appears in various states of disrepair while his wounds close. His spirit looks like his body with an opalescent glow.

Zalozhniy is the undead. He cannot be killed until his fated time or until some other means is found to lay him to rest. His physical form is incredibly strong but not well-armored -- while he shrugs off pain, destroying his body is just a matter of time and firepower. Doing so doesn't solve the problem; within a month his spirit reforms, and while that can only touch the densest of materials, nothing stops him from plotting or raising another army. After six months as a spirit he can regrow his body exactly as it was. More distressing than his longevity and obscene strength is his resistance to and dampening of local magic. Successfully

Tri Stat d10 Stats (200 points)

Body	Mind	Soul 11
10	7	
ACV	DCV	Health 265 when physical, 105 when insubstantial
11	7	

Characteristic Attributes

Armor (1)
 Attack Combat Mastery (2)
 Block Power (3) All Powers, Reduction: Magic Only (-2)
 Henchmen (8) 2/level, 125 henchmen
 Highly Skilled (2)
 Invisibility (2) Precognition, Postcognition
 Mind Shield (5)
 Natural Weapons (1) Iron hard nails
 Nullify - Drain (2) All Powers, Area 3, Duration 1, Defect: Permanent (-1), Reduction: Magic Only (-2)
 Power Flux (1) has 36 flux points to split between Insubstantial, Super Strength and Tough.
 Reduction: Must all go into either Insubstantial or Superstrength (5) and Tough (8), changing to Insubstantial linked to Reincarnation (-2), Duration 1 (takes 6 months)
 * Insubstantial (10) Permanent (-3) Detectable - gives off an unearthly glow and chill (-1)
 * Super Strength (5)
 * Tough (8)
 Reincarnation (2) takes 1 month
 Sixth Sense (1) Life, Area 3
 Special Defense (16) Age, Air, Disease, Magic (Divination), Hunger, Sleep, Poison and Pain all ×2

Skills

City Knowledge - Empire City Sewers (3),
 Intimidate - Street (2), Languages - Eastern Europe (3), Performing Arts - Public Speaking (2), Street Sense - Empire City Poor (3), Unarmed Attack - Strikes, Grapple (2), Occult - Spirits (1), Urban Tracking - Underworld (1)

Defects

Achilles Heel - Magic (2)
 Blind Fury - In presence of healthy, happy people (2)

targeted magic causes him extra pain, so a powerful sorcerer can defeat him if he can be found; magical divination or psionic powers cannot read his mind, trace his past, or predict his actions. Zalozhniy can also sense the living. Heroes may not see him coming, but he can feel their approach.

Famous - the Ghost of Empire's Bowery (1)
Less Capable - Agility (1)
Less Capable - Luck (1)
Marked - hole through chest where heart should be (2)

The Rag and Bone Army

These are the henchmen of hate. Empire City has a constant influx of foreign and lost, and even the small percentage drawn to Zalozhniy's message gives him a regenerating army willing to lash out against their "oppressors." Mostly unskilled, many are also deranged, and will attack without regard for safety when ordered. Zalozhniy is presented as an equal opportunity hate-monger with supernatural trappings.

Unfortunately, hate is an all-too-common motivator for henchmen, and it makes them hard to predict or contain. While they may be as deluded as loving henchmen and as desperate as fearful ones, they are the most difficult to question or reform. The only real way to end the threat is to prevent their recruitment, and this means removing the causes of their hate: in Zalozhniy's case it revolves around protecting immigrants and ending inner city poverty. While such a battle equates to bailing out the ocean for heroes used to flying above the rooftops, hate-filled henchmen should make clear that it is a battle worth fighting.

New Ways of Battle

Fighting Styles for the *d20 System*

by Anthony Phraner

One of the more interesting things that can be done with prestige classes in the *d20 System* is the creation of distinctive and unique fighting styles. This article contains five new styles suitable for most campaigns. Four of the styles, Five Elements Master, Practitioner of the Forms, Speed Fighting, and Stick Dance use weapons that are common to almost all game worlds, and with a few tweaks are quite appropriate as Advanced classes in a *d20 Modern* or a futuristic setting.

Five Elements Master

"I thought I was strong and tough when my father made me attend the School of the Five Elements. I thought I knew all about combat. I was wrong."

--Lord Gerin Toll

Students of the Five Elements School believe the world is composed of five primal elements: Earth, Water, Air, Fire, and Spirit. By mastering each of these elements as part of their combat training, students seek to become both better in battle as they become more spiritual. The elements are mastered in the reverse order of flexibility; the more yielding an element, the later it is mastered.

Level	BAB	Fort	Ref	Will	Special
1	+1	+2	+0	+0	Master of Earth
2	+2	+3	+0	+0	Master of Water
3	+3	+3	+1	+1	Master of Air
4	+4	+4	+1	+1	Master of Fire
5	+5	+4	+1	+1	Master of Spirit

Requirements

Base Attack Bonus: +5.

Knowledge: Elemental Philosophy 3

Feats: Dodge Endurance, Mobility, Toughness, Weapon Focus (Any)

Hit Dice: d8

The Five Elements Master's skills (and the key ability for each skill) are: Bluff (Cha), Craft (Weapons) Climbing (Str), Jump (Str) Knowledge (elemental philosophy)(Int), Sense Motive (Wis), Swimming (Str) Climb (Str)

Skill Points at each level: 2+Int modifier.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Five Elements Masters gain no weapon or armor proficiencies.

Special Abilities

Master of Earth (Ex): The Master of Earth gains the unyielding strength of the element of Earth. When this ability is mastered the character gains 1/4 Damage Reduction. This stacks with any levels gained in other classes. In addition,

any rolls to avoid being tripped, disarmed, slammed, or otherwise forcibly moved are at +4.

Master of Water (Ex): The character learns to flow with attacks. He gains a +2 bonus to reflex saves. This stacks with the lightning reflexes feat if appropriate. Also if an attacker rolls a 1 on a melee attack against the Master of Water an attack of opportunity, may be taken immediately against the attacker.

Master of Air (Ex): The Master of Air gains a +2 bonus to AC if entering or leaving a threatened area. This stacks with the mobility feat. Continuous training gives the Master of Air the Run feat, and a 5' bonus to movement. The movement bonus stacks with other appropriate abilities. If the player has the Run feat, the abilities stack.

Master of Fire (Ex): The Master of Fire gains a reckless enveloping attack style. Up to five points of AC may be substituted on a one for one basis for a bonus to hit on a single attack. The penalty to the armor class lasts for the next round. This ability may not be used with Expertise, Fighting Defensively, or Total Defense.

Master of Spirit (Ex): The Master of Spirit gains a +2 Bonus to Will saves. The bonus stacks with iron will. Also if a will save is failed while in combat the master of spirit may re-roll, one time only.

Master Archer

"The Archers were all lined up, bows in hand. When they fired, Oh gods. The sky was a storm of shafts. There was nowhere we could hide they couldn't find us."

--From *Memories of the Great War*, a compendium of war stories

The bow is among the deadliest weapons of the ancient world. Feared by noble and commoner alike, the bow can deliver silent death at great range. The Master Archer trains many years to perfect his craft but those are years well spent. With a bow in hand few foes can withstand him.

Level	BAB	Fort	Ref	Will	Special
1	+1	+2	+0	+0	Shooting Through
2	+2	+3	+0	+0	Become the Arrow 1
3	+3	+3	+1	+1	Long-Shot
4	+4	+4	+1	+1	Become the Arrow 2
5	+5	+4	+1	+1	
6	+6	+5	+2	+2	Become the Arrow 3
7	+7	+5	+2	+2	Arrow Storm
8	+8	+6	+2	+2	Become the Arrow 4
9	+9	+6	+3	+3	
10	10	+7	+3	+3	Perfect Shot

Requirements

Base Attack Bonus: +6.

Feats: Weapon Focus (Any Bow), Far Shot, Improved Critical (Any Bow) Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot,

Hit Dice: d8

The Master Archer's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are: Craft (Bows and Arrows) Hide (Dex) Move Silently (Dex) Spot (Dex) Wilderness Lore (Wis)

Skill Points at each level: 2 + Int modifier.

Class Features

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Master Archers are proficient with all bows (not including crossbows) and one martial melee weapon, usually a Short Sword, Long Sword, or Hand Axe.

Special Abilities:

Shooting Through (Ex): Any target that can be affected by a critical hit takes an additional 1d6 damage.

Become the Arrow (Ex): As the Master Archers skills increase he gains the ability to ignore an opponents cover. Each level of become the arrow reduces an opponents cover by 1 step to a minimum of zero.

Long Shot (EX): The Master Archer gains the equivalent of the far shot feat. This stacks with his regular far shot feat.

Arrow Storm (Ex): The character gains the rapid shot feat. If he already has the Rapid shot feat the character may make an additional attack as part of a full round action but all attacks that round are at -5.

Perfect Shot (Ex): The master archer may ignore any miss chance do to blinking, displacement or other magical effects. He still suffers any to hit penalty.

Practitioner of the Forms

"You come here to learn to fight," the old master said flatly. 'Good. But I am not going to show you how to fight.' A few of the students looked confused. One, a little man in dun-colored trousers and tunic, spoke up: 'Then what are you going show us?' The old man grinned. 'How to win.'"

The Forms are a system of systemic armed and unarmed combat. It is a very rough art, concentrating on basic combat augmented by blows and attacks to vital areas of the body.

The deadliness of the training and the intimate knowledge of the body (and how to wreck it) means that many of the Practitioners are excellent healers by necessity

Level	BAB	Fort	Ref	Will	Special
1	+1	+2	+2	+0	Killing Blow
2	+2	+3	+3	+0	Killing Grapple
3	+3	+3	+3	+1	Throw of Break
4	+4	+4	+4	+1	Breaking Open
5	+5	+4	+4	+1	Master of Opportunity

Requirements

Base Attack Bonus: +5

Feats: Combat Reflexes, Improved Unarmed Combat, Improved Disarm, Improved Trip

Hit Die: d10

Skill points per level: 2+Int modifier

Class Skills: The Practitioner of the Forms class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Balance (Dex), Bluff (Cha) , Heal (Wis) Jump (Str), Sense Motive (Wis) Spot (Wis), Tumble (Dex)

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Practitioners of the Forms do not gain any weapon or armor proficiencies

Special Abilities

Killing Blow (Ex): All hand-to-hand damage done by the Practitioner may be lethal or subdual at the player's choice. Also by spending one attack of opportunity the Practitioner may add 1d4 damage to any attack. This ability does not work on creatures immune to crits.

Killing Grapple (Ex): Also if a Practitioner is unarmed or armed with a weapon 2 size categories smaller than he is and an attack of opportunity is spent the character may make another attack. This is treated as a Killing Blow ability. This may be done only once combat and does not cause the loss of a grapple

Throw or Break (Ex): At 3rd level, a Practitioner gains a +2 with competence bonus with the improved trip ability and the improved Disarm ability

Breaking Open (Ex): By Spending 1 attack of opportunity he may subtract his Level in Practitioner of the Forms from his opponent's armor class. This may only be done once per opponent per round.

Master of Opportunity: The character gains his Int bonus in additional attacks of opportunity. This does stack with Combat Reflexes

Stick Dancer

"The worst memory I have of the rebellion were those drums pounding into the night and the wild dances. We thought ourselves kind because we let them dance. Little did we know they were hiding terrible secrets."

--A Slaver's Journal

A people enslaved who long for freedom will find a way. For one group of people, the way was the stick dance. Since overt martial training was forbidden, the Stick Dancers continued the fighting traditions of their people and gave the enslaved a way to fight back.

Level	BAB	Fort	Ref	Will	Special
1	+1	+2	+2	+0	Dance of Defense
2	+2	+3	+3	+0	Sweeping Dance
3	+3	+3	+3	+1	Even in Chains
4	+4	+4	+4	+1	Shatter Dance
5	+5	+4	+4	+1	Killing Dance

Requirements

Base Attack Bonus: +5

Skills: Performance (Dance) 4 Perform (Drumming) 3

Feats: Improved Unarmed Combat, Weapon Focus (Staff or Club), Dodge, Mobility, Skill Focus (Perform, Dancing)

Hit Dice: d8

Class Skills: The Stick Dancer skills (and the key ability for each skill) are: Bluff (Cha), Craft (Any) (Wis), Disguise (Cha), Escape Artist (Dex), Jump (Str), Tumbling (Dex), Perform (Dance), Profession (Int)

Skill Points at each level: 2 + Int modifier

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Stick Dancers are proficiency with simple weapons, Nunchaku, Kama, Tonfa, and the Scythe

Special Abilities

Dance of Defense (Ex): If the Stick Dancer fights defensively or takes a full defense while lightly armored or unarmored he gains an additional +3 Bonus to his AC.

Sweeping Dance (Ex): The character gains the Improved Trip Feat.

Shatter Dance (Ex): The Character gains the Improved Disarm Feat. If he already has Improved Disarm he gains the Sunder feat.

Even in Chains (Ex): The Stick Dancer takes no penalty for being restrained with any unarmed to hit roll. If his hands are restrained he may attacked with unarmed combat as normal. In addition, he gains a +2 competence bonus with Escape Artist.

Killing Dance (Ex): The deadly ability may be performed a maximum number of rounds per day equal to the level in Stick Dancer plus his Con mod. During a Killing Dance a feint can be performed as an attack. Also during this deadly display all attacks are at +2, unarmed attacks do killing damage and all damage done with club, staff, or unarmed Combat is shifted up 1 die.

Speed-Fighting

"The first time I fought a speed fighter was the last time. I am no slouch with a blade or my fists but the ugly misses was so fast I didn't have a chance. That'll be the last time I underestimate a woman."

--Sarn Thorm, Mercenary

The key to understanding speed fighting is knowledge of its basic doctrine: The relentless attack. A good speed fighter never stops and is always in motion, trying to overwhelm his opponents. Even the defensive moves are fast and aggressive in nature. Most of the students of this style are known for their reckless bravery and furious combat styles.

Level	BAB	Fort	Ref	Will	Special
1	+1	+2	+2	+0	Swiftness of Motion
2	+2	+3	+3	+0	Furious Attack
3	+3	+3	+3	+1	Offensive Storm
4	+4	+4	+4	+1	Defensive Storm
5	+5	+4	+4	+1	Surge of Speed
6	+6	+5	+5	+2	Uncanny Speed

Requirements

Base Attack Bonus: +6.

Feats: Dodge Endurance, Improved Initiative, Improved Unarmed Combat, Mobility

Hit Dice: d10

Class Skills: The Speed Fighters class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are: Bluff (Cha), Climbing (Str), Jump (Str) Ride (Dex), Sense Motive (Wis), Swimming (Str)

Skill Points at each level: 2+Int modifier

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Speed Fighters gain Simple Weapons, Martial Weapons Proficiency and Light Armor Proficiency.

Special Abilities

Swiftness of Motion (Ex): The Speed Fighter gains a bonus to his initiative equal to his level in the Speed Fighter class.

Furious Attack (Ex): If using a full attack action the character may make an extra attack at -5.

Offensive Storm (Ex): As a free action the speed fighter may declare one enemy he is in melee with as the target of an offensive storm. The target loses dexterity and dodge bonuses to AC equal to the characters levels in the speed fighter class. If the targets bonus is reduced to 0, the target is considered flatfooted for purposes of special abilities. Use of this ability does not provoke an attack of opportunity. An Offensive Storm is draining and may be used a number of times per day equal to the constitution modifier +1 (minimum 1).

Defensive Storm (Ex): This ability is identical to and stacks with the expertise feat Surge of Speed. The character may take an extra partial action a number of times per day equal to speed fighter level + Dex modifier.

Uncanny Speed (Ex): If using a full attack action the character may take an extra attack at -2.

Pyramid Review

Link:West

Published by [Link Media Inc.](#)

Written by Rodney Brazeau & Lee McIlmoyle

System designed by Mark C. MacKinnon & Jeff Mackintosh

Edited by Rodney Brazeau

Art & Graphics by Lee McIlmoyle, Rodney Brazeau, & HandsOn Graphics

112-page b&w softcover; \$19.95

Nothing seems to say "western" more these days than adding a hint of the supernatural to the American Frontier. *Link:West*, a new RPG from Link:Media Inc., also adds that touch to this game but little else.

Link:West is a world that superficially mirrors ours in the 1860s (or thereabouts -- there's a lot here that isn't clear). The planet's history has played out much differently, even as early as 2000 BE (Before the Exodus). After a series of power exchanges involving the rise and fall of guilds, city-states, and guild-states, the execution of a teacher who spoke for the people prompted a revolution that left the Guilds scrambling to reestablish a real peace. They now contend with emerging governments.

Even with the massive changes to Earth's history, we get Euroboros (the game's equivalent of Europe -- the setting is full of bits of clever wordplay like this). From here, sailors caught in a freak storm accidentally discovered Amerius. Unlike our colonial origins, the established eastern cities of this new land are smaller or less developed, and more of the country has a frontier feel (though much of the setting is left deliberately vague).

The rest seems to be what you'd expect from the genre. The Indians here are more properly called the Incans, having swept up from South America, and they're still at odds with the White Man. Small towns spring up in the middle of vast areas of desolation, offering our heroes a land to tame and a home from which to do it. The default campaign setting is the greatest of these cities, Tumbleweed, a town in the Arzon Expanse dominated by the shadow of the Spire. The Spire is a great mesa atop a looming tower of rock whose purpose and summit are enduring mysteries (it sticks out of a river-carved canyon called "The Great Big Hole" -- poets these frontiersmen are not).

Every game that boasts magic has to have its bogeyman, and for *Link:West* it's The Dark. The Dark (also Darklings, Darkness, and Dark Lords, resulting from Dark Dealings) live in deserted cities and feed on bioelectric energy (most prevalent in native shamans and savvy Sourcerers). Their attacks infect humans and force them to go through the Darkening, a slow process of degradation that turns them into Darklings. First we're told anyone who gives in to The Dark is lost and becomes NPC, then the authors tell us PCs may become the Risen. The Risen are those who have passed through the other side of this whole process and who may now reinfect Darklings and turn them back into people . . . but the Risen may become reinfected by their contact with The Dark.

Very little information is given about the background, and much of what there is comes in the form of expositional fiction. The first such piece is about a criminal investigation in Euroboros where steam-based technology holds sway

and there's some sort of queen or noble in charge. The second, set in Amerius, shoves all the dramatis personae of Tumbleweed together in haphazard fashion. The town isn't detailed much from a cultural standpoint, but at least there's a cast of characters for the GM to use as plot hooks. The setting is almost impossible to describe beyond that -- the details are that sparse.

The belief systems of the native population are written up, and the authors bend over backward so far to avoid any potential offense to these peoples they can almost touch their heels. Yet the next section is a brief comparative theological/magical essay, and all manner of religion is dealt with here in an almost flippant manner. The magic of this world, thought the stuff of myth by folks in general, stems from "The Source"; hence "Sourcery." It gets two pages of space (you're supposed to use the powers in character creation to duplicate magic), and most of that goes into what Sourcery isn't.

The mechanics are the strange hybrid that resulted from the combination of the *Tri-Stat* and *d20 System* used by Guardians of Order -- strange, that is, for any game that isn't *Silver Age Sentinels*, et al. While ostensibly a melding of mysticism and the Old West, the game plainly offers most of the strange options of its parent game -- GM control is needed, or *Link:West* could easily turn into a superhero version of frontier life.

The editing is slack, but then it's edited by one of the writers. It's small wonder the game is so unfocused and confusing: No fewer than six companies have had a hand in it to one extent or another, and the writers don't list their own company the same way twice on the cover page. HandsOn Graphics did the uninspired cover, and the interior art is cartoonish or else looks like hatched retouchings of decent period pictures (provenance unknown -- it could all be part of the artist's style, or they might be clipart with retouchings).

Flowery but uninformative writing, nebulous setting details, stilted flow from a lack of editing, liberal extractions from a publicly available host-system document with little attention to context -- given its overwhelming problems, it's not surprising *Link:West* is an underwhelming product.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

ABUSE: the Final Insult

Published by [Eos Press](#)

Designed by Greg Stolze

Graphics by Carlos Samuel Araya

80-card deck, two rule sheets; \$9.95

ABUSE: the Final Insult is the first all-new release from new publisher, Eos Press. Designed for two to four players per deck, this is the card game of dishing out slanderous quips, barbs, and insults to your opponents before they can do it back to you. Play is simple: Participants create their insults from the cards in their hands and then lay them down on the table. The insulted might be able to reply with an equally sharp riposte, but the way to win is to hand out the slander, in the process reducing both the size of a hand and its value by the end of a round. In other words, players win for sinking the lowest and delivering the most insults.

ABUSE consists of 80 cards and two single-sided sheets of rules marked "1" and "2," all done in red, black, and white. The cards are divided into 24 Start, 32 Link and Special, and 24 End cards. The various card types are boldly designed and clearly marked, with the white text of the insult laid over a black number on a red background. Start, Link, and Finish cards are also marked with a mixture of red and white arrows that must line up when making a sentence. Finish cards are marked with a fist symbol, while Comeback cards, used to block incoming insults and to strike back with a riposte, are marked with a double fist symbol. Furthermore, cards have that word on them and are used to link one sentence to another. Their use is the only way a player can deliver more than a single insulting sentence on their turn. Blank cards work as wild cards and enable a player to insert a suitable word or phrase into a sentence. One-Liner cards have both the start and finish symbols on them, and are self-contained insults that do not need linking to any other cards. They do, however, work perfectly after a Furthermore card has been played.

At the start of the game, each player is dealt a hand of seven cards, and the top card of the Draw Pile is turned over face up to form the start of the Discard Pile. On their turn, a player can choose to take either the top card from the Discard Pile or the Draw Pile. If they take from the latter, another player can take the top card from the Discard pile, but must take a second card from the Draw Pile as well. The current player then attempts to lay down a sentence, beginning with a Start card, followed by none, one or more Link cards, and ending with a Finish card. This must be done so the colors and directions of the arrows on the cards match from card to card. As it is laid down, the sentence is directed at another player and read out with as much glee as the situation demands. Examples, with breaks marked with a "--," include: "Your greasy granny -- is -- bowel-looseningly -- duller than a sack of rocks" and "Your taste -- can eat my shorts."

Of course the targeted player might be able to respond with a Comeback such as "Say it, don't spray it!" or "Gosh, it's almost like it's trying to speak!" A Comeback blocks an insult, but the insulting player can riposte with his own Comeback leading to an exchange of them. If the insulting player wins the exchange, the insult is delivered and they get to discard a card from their hand. The insulted must draw an extra pair of cards to add to their hand. If a Comeback card blocks the insult, the insulting player keeps their insulting sentence.

The game continues in this fashion until one player manages to empty their hand of all cards. They are now out, the round ending with that player scoring no points. The other players then add up the value of the cards held in their hands and these are noted down on a scorepad. After a total of five rounds, or more if the players agree, the game ends, and the player with the lowest score is declared the winner.

The most obvious fact about **ABUSE** is everyone needs to have a thick skin and a sense of humor in order to play. At the same time, the insults are understandably generic and perhaps not as cutting as some players might want. More problematic, we found it difficult to put a sentence together, though the deck being given a very thorough shuffle may offset this. It also becomes more difficult to lay down a sentence as a hand size decreases. The rules are clearly written, except for two points. They do not explain what happens when a player cannot lay a sentence down -- we just had the player pass on that turn. Nor do they explain what happens to an insult once it is successfully delivered. Does it end up on the Discard Pile or in the insulted player's hand? We went with the latter, but this raised the problem of a player just reassembling the same insult, which was not all that fun. These problems could have been offset with the inclusion of an example of play, but none is given, although there is plenty of room on the back of each rule sheet.

ABUSE: the Final Insult has a subject that will appeal to most gamers -- slandering the heck out of each other! It is not unplayable, but players will need to decide upon some house rules that cover the game's omissions. Either that, or wait for the errata.

--*Matthew Pook*

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



The Illusion of Freedom (or, the Freedom of Illusions)

One of the biggest appeals of most RPGs have is that they provide complete freedom and opportunity for their players; anything is possible, and the entire gaming world is an oyster, entirely open to the heroes.

Which is, of course, a complete and utter lie.

Most games simply can't handle unfettered freedom. Or, more correctly, most GMs and/or players can't handle unfettered freedom. I note this by looking at most space RPGs. Space is, almost by definition, one of the most expansive game settings available. If there are lots of other explorable worlds out there, and the PCs are able to hop back into their spaceship and wander off to another world at any time, then there's theoretically not much to keep them in line. The problems of fleshing out any location on Earth are multiplied by the number of worlds out there. These problems are compounded even more so by trans-dimensional, time-traveling, or cross-world campaigns. (Let's see . . . the work of fleshing out one game world times infinite worlds is . . . um . . . lots and lots!)

This is why most established science fiction games have some structure to limit the available sandbox the heroes have to play in. Most *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* campaigns limit adventures to whatever missions the PCs' governing body assigns them to. And I believe FASA's original *Doctor Who* RPG recommends most adventures begin with a TARDIS malfunction or other calamity that strands the heroes at their current date and place. (I can't be more certain because my copy is currently in the bottom of a locked filing cabinet stuck in a disused lavatory with a sign on the door saying "Beware of the Leopard.")

Other games, however, offer more seeming freedom; the typical fantasy campaign, for example, seems to offer the entire world to the players, letting them choose where they want to go next. But even these are deceptive, as I shall show momentarily.

So what is freedom, then, in an RPG, and how can it be presented and limited? Here are some broad categories based on various campaigns, as well as how to incorporate some of the ideas into your own games.

Some games relish having a fairly small, controlled environment. Campaigns such as *Over the Edge*, *GURPS Prisoner*, and "[The Hole](#)" are usually built around the idea that the heroes have complete access (more or less) to the entire explorable world, but their freedom is limited to that sole sandbox. This is actually one of the easiest and most fun campaign types, but it isn't terribly popular among publishers. (I suspect it's because game companies realize small, controlled settings mean they can't release jillions of sourcebooks.) Smaller settings mean the players (and characters) have a greater stake in adventure outcomes; in a town-to-town wandering fantasy campaign, there can be a subconscious realization that, if things get *really* bad, the PCs can wander off to the next town . . . an impossible option if the PCs are trapped in one spot!

Fortunately, although rare in published campaigns, it's also possible to incorporate ideas of the small, controlled setting into other games. All that's necessary is to give the heroes access to a setting that's large enough to be interesting but small enough to be contained and controllable. For example, although *Deep Space Nine* and *Babylon 5* games are theoretically set in the vast milieu of space, they can be structured around one setting (a space station) which can be much more fully mapped, explored, and quantified. The analogy in a fantasy setting is often the fully detailed city, such as Green Ronin's *Freeport* setting.

Regardless, in small, controlled settings the freedom generally comes from the heroes' unrestricted options . . . within the confines of the game world. And it's possible for a campaign to start with a controlled setting, and then "release" the PCs into the wild once the players and GM are more comfortable with a broader game world. But this isn't necessary; it's entirely possible to tell entire campaigns' worth of stories in one locale, just so long as it's interesting enough. And it's a good way to breathe some new life into a familiar campaign; a *Torg* campaign is *much* different if it revolves around one city and its heroes, trying to keep the multiversal war from corrupting or destroying it.

Another option to curtail PC freedom is by controlling access to broader areas. For example, the *Fading Suns* game

has a campaign universe of worlds connected by a "jumpweb." Traveling to each of those other worlds requires a "jumpkey" -- a physical object that is strictly controlled by a guild. So if the GM wants to initially limit players to, say, a trading route of three worlds, all he needs to do is make sure the PCs only have access to those three keys. This technique is easy to transplant to many space settings; so long as the coordinates, hyperspace access codes, or similar McGuffins are rare or controlled, it is easy to keep the heroes in a more controlled environment. Of course, the GM should also be prepared for those McGuffins to be the most sought-after elements of the campaign, especially if the players like their freedom. In this case it can be a simple matter of talking with the players: "I won't be able to handle it if y'all run slipshod around the universe!"

This technique is much harder to use in modern or fantasy games, since there are few logical reasons to restrict access to other parts of the world. ("Sorry; before this ruined road can be ridden on, it requires . . . err . . . the Horse Code of Power!") On the other hand, it *can* be used to limit game worlds with other-dimensional or other-worldly elements; perhaps the heroes can't access the Abyss unless they know the right ritual or have the proper runic stone.

Another common limit for most games is scope. In a fantasy campaign, for example, most starting campaigns are limited to horseback travel, which is a quantifiable and guessable quantity; if the GM draws, say, the circle representing a weeks' journey by horse around the starting city, then to start with he only needs to worry about detailing explorable elements within that circle. Of course, this doesn't work for many campaigns; in space settings, for example, traveling to the other side of a world is often trivial. And in games like *In Nomine*, it's intrinsically part of the setting that the PCs will be able to explore three levels of reality at once. But in some campaigns, it's possible to limit "freedom" to that which the heroes can access easily.

And it *is* possible to structure a campaign around near-unlimited freedom on the part of the PCs. Only one of two things is required in that case (although having both can be useful). First, if the players structure the game such that their characters only enter a new or "unfamiliar" part of the game world at the end of an adventure, this will give the GM a chance to make up or research the new section before the next game. Second, it's possible for a game world to have enough published information to allow near-unfettered access . . . presuming the GM owns all the material, of course. Of established game worlds, the only ones I'm familiar with that might provide enough information would be the *Forgotten Realms*, *Traveller*, and maybe *Dragonlance* and *Shadowrun*. But, thanks to the Internet and other research techniques, any modern setting would be pretty easy to allow much more freedom; although I don't know anything about Monaco, if the players decide their heroes go there then I can learn enough to wing it in an afternoon.

However, probably the most popular option to keep most game freedom in line is the organization, which tells the PCs where to go and what to do. Whether it's a Federation, an Archangel, or a Council of Elders seeking help, adventures of this sort come directly from an outside source. In this case, freedom -- such as it is -- is either limited by downtime (which is similar to the horse-circle limit above: "You have two weeks before your next mission" means the heroes can only go places that are a week's travel each way) and/or the freedom to solve missions as they see fit. For example, if subspace radio requires a week to send messages each way, then the heroes will have at least two weeks before they can seek clarification . . . and in the interim they're forced to muddle along and wing it as best as they can.

There are other ways to limit freedom, and I might come back to this topic some day. But these broad categories should hopefully give you some ideas to work with, and mixing up various approaches to controlling otherwise broad settings can make a campaign feel new and different.

And, to quote *The Prisoner*, "Feel free!"

--Steven Marsh

LudiCROUS -- The Sport of the Future!

by [Chad Underkoffler](#)

Genre: Sports

Style: Action and/or Silly

Themes: Adaptation, Challenges

Are you bored by the same old humdrum athletic competitions? Do you love reality TV? Are you sick of watching and ready to participate? Well then, LudiCROUS is what you've been waiting for!

Get canny. Get crazy. Get in the game.

Developed by the renowned genius Dr. Leonardo Wilmar (see "[Polymath Prep](#)"), *LudiCROUS* -- meaning "the game of Chaotic Recapitulation Of Unified Sports" -- ramps up both the physical and the mental challenges of athletic competition. And you, the viewer, are a necessary component of the experience!

What Everybody Knows

Everybody knows that wacky old Doc Wilmar made the name up as a joke, but it's a "ha, ha, only serious" sort of joke -- Wilmar was quite open in his hopes for LudiCROUS. Disheartened by the emphasis on the physical aspects of popular sports and the overemphasis on highly-specialized skills (that rarely even translated well to other athletic endeavors), the good doctor decided to create an activity that could fully engage the adaptive abilities of the body *and* the mind.

Using the wide-variety of tools available to his incredible intellect, he developed LudiCROUS to fill that perceived need.

The Rules

There's really only one main rule for LudiCROUS, and that's *Rule 1*.

Rule 1: The rules can change at any time.

Everything else is negotiable. The *Rulesmongers* (see below) of each competing team meet three days before the Match to hammer out the "game contract," which spells out any and all pre-existing changes to an inherited ruleset or even formulates a completely new game from the bottom up. This is called the *pre-Match* in LudiCROUS slang.

Rule 1 changes may range from the shape or size of the field, to the number of teams (or number of players on a team), to elimination of rules, changes to how goals are counted, imposition of new penalties, alterations in the scope of rules, and so on. Most importantly, the limits of in-play implementations of Rule 1 for the Match must be spelled out: who has the right to change a rule (coaching staff, player, Spectators), how the rule is vetted (Referee acceptance, Spectator votes, impartial judge decision, automatic acceptance, etc.), and how many uses of Rule 1 are permitted (one per minute, three per period, one per game, etc.). The three day time period of the pre-Match also -- in theory -- permits the local LudiCROUS Globe (see below) to be reconfigured so as to support the game, and the participating teams can put in a little specialized practice.

During League play, a formal *Rules Judge* will preside, acting as a referee and interpreter of events stemming from Rule 1s.

Types of Game

That being said, there are two main types of LudiCROUS Match: *inherited games* and *new games*.

Inherited Games: Inherited games begin with the rules of an established game or sport -- baseball, chess, curling, football, jai-alai, hockey, Parcheesi, poker, soccer, weightlifting, etc. -- and alter them. Some examples that have done quite well include *pentaball* (baseball played on a pentagon rather than a diamond), *three-way soccer* (played on a triangular field), and *dojo chess* (where, to take a piece, a karate bout must be won in the target square).

New Games: New games are usually constructed from a toolbox of elements:

1. *Ground Rules:* What is the basic type and goal of the game?
 - Capture the Flag
 - Combat
 - Hit and Catch
 - Hit the Goal
 - Hunt and Avoid
 - Physical Contest
 - Some combination of the above

For example, basketball, hockey, soccer, and football could be defined as basically Hit the Goal sorts of games, while boxing and chess would be Combat; baseball, jai-alai, and tennis would be Hit and Catch; freeze tag and "get the guy with the ball" would be Hunt and Avoid, etc.

2. *Field Rules:* What is the nature, shape, and construction of the field or arena upon which the game is to be played?
3. *Player Rules:* How many players does a team have? Are there established specialized positions (pitcher, quarterback, goalie, dealer, etc.)?
4. *Gameplay and Scoring Rules:* What are players allowed to do? What are they not allowed to do? How do they score points? What happens after that? Are any actions penalty-worthy? What form does a penalty take?
5. *Equipment Rules:* Is there any special equipment that must be used in play? Any specific rules that govern that use?
6. *Rule 1 Rules:* The outline of who, what, when, where, why, how much, and how many of the rules above can be changed in play. "Can't be changed during the Match" is an acceptable choice, if both teams' Rulesmongers agree to it in the pre-Match. However, the "boilerplate" agreement for Rule 1 Rules in League Play (see below) goes something like this:
 - Three Rule 1s per game subunit (quarter, period, heat, inning, round, etc.).
 - Rule 1 implementations cannot directly "unimplement" another Rule 1 use.
 - Rule 1 implementations can be "unimplemented" by a two-thirds majority vote of the total number of *Spectators* of the Match; however, goals scored or advantages won under the stricken Rule 1 are not "erased." (Spectators are those officially registered through the LudiCROUS League.)
 - Rule 1 implementations have a one-minute (or other reasonable amount of time for the game) period of "immutability" where its effect cannot be compromised by another new Rule 1 use, but compromises caused by interacting with an existing Rule 1 are possible.

Styles of Game

The three most popular styles of play for a LudiCROUS Match are distinguished by the Rule 1 Rules. These are: *boilerplate*, *freak-for-all*, and *sadomatch*.

Boilerplate style means that Rule 1 works as detailed above.

Freak-for-all means that any player may create a new rule at any time during play (a related but more limited form of freak-for-all is called *fair-for-all*, and only permits one rule per player to be created, until all players have created a rule).

Sadomatch style Matches permit any Spectator to submit a rule to his fellow Spectators for consideration, which will be implemented if it receives a two-thirds majority of the votes cast within a five minute review period. (A rare form of sadomatch, used with small groups of official Spectators, is called *voxpop-alyipse*, where only the Spectators may call for new Rule 1s, which are implemented without the need for voting.)

Guidelines and Examples for Using Rule 1

The most important thing for LudiCROUS participants to keep in mind when using Rule 1 is to phrase the change as a *rule* that is widely-applicable to all Players, a substantial class of Players, the playing field, or the equipment used in play. Good rules will generally have some effect on all participants; bad rules provide unreasonable penalties or advantages to a small number of participants. Ultimately, the acid test of a suggested rule is if the rule will make the Match more interesting (requiring greater strategy) or more fun.

"Players named Avery Ritter cannot score points!" or "The player with the highest number of at bats must bat while wearing a blindfold!" are probably bad rules -- both are aimed at messing with a single player in a petty fashion. However, "Players with an E in their name score negative points!" and "Players will be blindfolded every other time they are at bat" are more acceptable -- nearly everyone suffers (or benefits) under these rules, and game tactics can be changed to ameliorate the damage from (or take advantage of) them.

Here are some examples of Rule 1s for each of the game elements listed above (in *Types of Game*):

- **Change Inherited Rules:** Baseball innings have four outs. No punting in football. Boxing counts go to five.
- **Change Field Rules:** Set areas of the field become Opposite Zones (where Players must do everything "backwards"; this sort of Rule 1 almost always involves the oversight of the League's Rules Judge) or Song Zones (where players only retain possession of the ball/puck if they sing). Increases or decreases in size of the playing area. Addition of pits, snares, or obstacles to field.
- **Change Player Rules:** Soccer goalies cannot use their hands during odd-numbered minutes of play. Baseball batters never run after hitting the ball, they must have a designated runner.
- **Change Gameplay and Scoring Rules:** All penalty shots are taken between periods. Negative scoring: each football Team starts with 100 points, loses points by scoring goals, and the Team closest to zero wins. Chess rooks may only move four spaces.
- **Change Equipment Rules:** Capes must be worn for the duration of the game. Cricket batsmen must use tennis rackets instead of bats. Badminton birdies have integral micro-jets, which activate randomly.
- **Change Rule 1 Rules:** Add a corollary to an earlier Rule 1. Reverse an earlier Rule 1 completely. Mandate that no further Rule 1s can be put into play.

Depending upon the Match, a new Rule 1 can be announced over the loudspeakers in the Globe, displayed on the scoreboard(s), or left hidden until a Player violates it.

Here are some examples of the types of LudiCROUS Matches that are fairly popular:

LudiCROUS Example 1 -- Ratmaze Paintball: Ratmaze Paintball is in essence Capture the Flag played in a 100 yard long, 20 yard wide, and 3 yard high hedge maze, with two (or more) teams of six Players. A Player can continue playing even if they've "lost" one arm and both legs, but loss of all limbs or a torso shot takes him out of the game. Each Player is equipped with a compressed-gas paintball gun (the field captain gets two, and the flag-guard gets a paint-shotgun instead). Games last for six hours, or until one team wins, whichever comes first.

LudiCROUS Example 2 -- Keepaway Freak-for-all: Also known as "Get the Guy With the Ball" (among other less-savory names), Keepaway can be played as a Team or an individual sport. In either case, victory goes to the Team or Player with the longest time of possession of the ball. It is usually played on a circular turf field 20 yards in radius in hour-long matches. Rule 1s in Keepaway generally revolve around setting up different Zones (Backwards, Dancing, Freeze, Hopping, Humming, One-Handed, Shakespeare, etc.) or adding obstacles. Messing with the ball is also popular -- depending upon the capabilities of the setting, balls could get heavier, slipperier, or hotter as they are held by a Player, resetting to normal (or not) when dropped or stolen. When you add in the Freak-for-all -- all Players can make

new rules at any time -- aspect, it becomes clear that Keepaway is a game for those who are both nimble in mind and body.

LudiCROUS Example 3 -- Starball Sadomatch: Starball starts with baseball, and twists it. Instead of a diamond, the base paths are in the form of a star (see diagram). This adds another base (Fourth Base) and five sub-bases (Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, and Epsilon). Any member of the fielding team can use a sub-base to automatically out a runner, and runners can tag-back to a sub-base if necessary; however, a runner cannot stand on a sub-base while another Player is batting. Each Team fields ten players (a pitcher, a catcher, four basemen, three outfielders, and one infield rover). The Sadomatch variant of Starball, where Spectators submit Rule 1s, is quite popular among the fans -- though less-so with Starball Players. (And no Team has agreed to play a voxpop-alyse Starball game in over a decade, after the Richmond Rutiles fiasco.)

Field



Joy "Clyde" Slaughter ran like a madwoman, swerving wildly, and the visiting Team's flag fluttered in her hands. Paintballs from the pair of enemy scouts following behind splattered into the wall in front of her. She ducked down the next left, then pounded down the next right, making for home base.

The Defensive Coordinator's voice came over her helmet radio. "Clyde, from where you are, go second left first right. Thor, go left, left, third left and cover her."

"Roger-wilco."

"Okie-doke."

The Rulesmonger, Magnus Sontag, came on the air. "Joy, okay, at the T turn left and make for the red tiles. When you hit 'em, start singing something from your favorite Broadway show. Just like in practice."

"Gotcha!" She ran, riffling through her memory for something appropriate. Enemy paintballs began zipping past her again as the enemy players caught sight of her fleeing back. She flinched involuntarily from one that grazed her ear, making it sting. Then, like a hymn from above, she heard the distinctive double-whine of Thor's pistols discharging. The big man's voice crackled through the static: "You're clear for now, Clyde. Move it!"

The grating loudspeaker voice said, "Two kills for the Rhinos, Avery 'Thor' Ritter."

*"Thanks!" she cried into her throat mike as her turned left at the T and . . . no red tiles.
"Magnus!"*

At that moment, the loudspeaker said, "Red area is now an Invincible Show Tune Zone," and the path in front of her suddenly went crimson.

Joy took a deep breath, and started belting it out. "One! Singular sensation! Every little step she takes. . ."

Six enemy paintballs stung her like angry bees, but she just walked on, invulnerably, singing all the while, until she could hand off the flag to Rocky.

Rule 1 Stats

An interesting element of LudiCROUS is that the statistics for coaches, players, and official Spectators involved in Rule 1 implementations are tracked alongside the more typical sports stats of home runs, yardage, lap times, etc. Abstruse calculations give points -- and may lead to the same prestige and regard that other sports numbers grant -- for successful rules implementations, the number of points/goals scored under those rules, the number of Match-winning points under those rules, successful unimplementations, and so forth. Indeed, there are Spectators who are more famous than professional Rulesmongers and players, due to their stats!

LudiCROUS Teams

So, where do LudiCROUS Teams come from? And who makes up the Team?

Sponsor: Professional League teams are always sponsored by a larger, more powerful entity. Depending upon the underlying setting, the Sponsor of a Team could be anything from a Baron, to a city government, to a corporation, to a school, to a diocese (or entire religion), whatever. Sponsors provide the initial capital for teams, and may make up the difference when receipts don't match expenses. Also, the Sponsor sets where a Team's "Home" is.

Team Name: Every Team has a unique name, generally incorporating that of their Sponsor and/or Home; alliteration is pretty common, as are names that lend themselves to licensable logos and icons. Examples could include: Baron Gurlak's Grindstones, Pittsville Pilots, RexCorp Rhinos, Sylvania Tech Songbirds, Fawley Diocese Franciscans.

Coaching Staff: Each Team has a *Head Coach*, who is responsible for dealing with the Sponsor, managing the rest of the coaching staff, and overall strategy. The *Offensive Coordinator* deals with training and play decisions relating to achieving accomplishments (goals, points, yardage, etc.) against an opposing Team. The *Defensive Coordinator* deals with training and play decisions relating to denying accomplishments (goals, points, yardage, etc.) to an opposing Team. The *Rulesmonger* has primary responsibility for negotiating the foundation rules of the game during the Pre-Match, shepherding Rule 1 changes through the required authority (Referee, Spectator votes, judge panel, etc.) during a Match, studies the Team's capabilities that might be tapped for new Rule 1s, analyzes opposing Teams' Rule 1 vulnerabilities, runs Rule 1 drills during practice with the Coaching Staff and Players for adjusting to sudden rules alterations (both their own and likely ones of their opponents), and arranges suites of possible "plays" for Player-directed Rule 1s. (Also, see *Team Staff Level* below, for other staff position ideas.)

Players: Players are the highly-skilled, multifaceted grunts who thread the strange mazes of games generated by the intersection of Ground Rules and Rule 1s. They tend to be above average people, in mind, body, and spirit, who can adapt quickly to changing circumstances: perfect adventurers.

Drones: Sometimes, a Team doesn't have enough Players to fill the needed positions in a game. That's when Drones come in. In some settings, they're just random passersby grabbed off the street, made to sign a contract, and

given a uniform and a check for their participation. In others, they're magical constructs or robotic automatons, controlled by a *Dronerunner*.

The LudiCROUS Globe

If the setting and genre allow it, LudiCROUS Matches can be played in a Globe -- the next level in sports arena architecture, like if the Epcot Sphere and the Astrodome had a kid. A sphere provides the maximum space within for any number and types of games. The floor level and surface can be changed simply, and "wild walls" and modular units can be quickly shifted into place. Various technologies (lighting, "weather" systems, antigravity, psionic static, etc.) can be employed within its confines to wreak even crazier changes, yet keep people inside and outside contained and safe.



PC Opportunities: Levels of Play

A LudiCROUS-focused adventure or campaign can be played on several levels:

Official Spectator Level

This level of play is probably best if LudiCROUS is not the focus of a campaign, instead serving as a background element. PCs can be followers of specific LudiCROUS Teams -- or play pick-up games of their own with buddies or schoolmates. No big whoop, the game just takes the place of football, soccer, or golf in the campaign. Globes can be settings for other adventures; perhaps the coaching staff of the local Team might hire the PCs to keep an eye on their players, the visiting players, or help bug the room set for the pre-Match rules meeting.

However, if one or more PCs are really tried-and-true "Ludites," they may own season tickets to their local Globe. Heck, they may be registered as official Spectators (which could allow them to garner some sort of response and standing -- even allies and enemies! -- in LudiCROUS fandom). Indeed, a well-regarded official Spectator with decent stats could be "scouted" as a Rulesmonger for a new expansion Team (leading into the *Team Staff Level* of play; see below)!

Player Level

In this level of play, PCs are Players on a LudiCROUS Team. Down in the trenches, they are the ones swinging the bat, blocking the puck, carrying the ball, capturing the flag. It is their actions and reactions that determine victory or defeat!

A fine LudiCROUS campaign can deal with the Players on a Team, traveling from Match to Match in their tour bus (wagon train, jet plane, hovercraft, spaceship, etc.), solving mysteries and raising hell along the way. Or perhaps they each do their own thing, having their own adventures, until they receive the Ultrapriority LudiCROUS call on their Team Communicators, and have to assemble in a faraway city to play for the big bucks!

Additionally, PCs on the Player Level might have extra duties, responsibilities, positions, or roles to fill:

Field Captain: The Field Captain is the nominal leader of the Players, and is expected to help manage them (on and off the field) and serve as their representative to the Team Staff and Sponsor (and the players' union). A Captain may have authority in recommending or enacting Rules 1 changes during play in certain Matches.

Goalie: The Goalie protects the Team's goal/flag/scoring area, in games that have those. Goalies often serve as

Alternate Captains or a Captain's "executive officer."

Team Staff Level

At the Team Staff Level of play, each PC is a member of the Coaching Staff, with all the commensurate responsibilities and authority. They also, during a Match, may control a number of sub-PC Players -- think of Grogs in *Ars Magica* or pawns in chess. On smaller Teams (or with smaller PC groups), Staff roles may be doubled- or tripled-up.

Campaign play would be more strategic, dealing not only with the nitty-gritty of Matches, but also arranging and running training sessions, analyzing opposing Teams' methods, mediating Player-Sponsor disputes, making the Team budget work, adapting to whatever alterations the Sponsor wishes to make to the Team, keeping a tight rein on Players who want to party-hearty after winning a spot in the playoffs, etc.

Here are some of the possible positions on a Coaching Staff (see also above, *LudiCROUS Teams* for more ideas: *Head Coach*, *Offensive Coordinator*, *Defensive Coordinator*, *Rulesmonger*, *Special Teams*, *Dronerunner*, *Manager*, *Spectator Wrangler*, *Team Doctor*, etc.).

Meta-Team Level

Simply, each player controls an entire Team: its Staff, Players, and Drones. While the Meta-Team level of play can reduce the one-on-one player-character identification, it can add a certain *Civilization*/wargame flavor to the proceedings, making for excellent one-off games in the beer 'n pretzel vein.

NPC Backgrounds

Each character below has their most important *strengths* (generally positive qualities, abilities, skills, or effects) and *weaknesses* (generally negative qualities, abilities, skills, or effects) detailed. In descending order, the ranks are Master, Expert, Good, Average, and Poor. Depending upon the conception of what a character is like, any quality can be a strength or a weakness.

For example, suppose a character has "Spoiled Brat" as a quality. If it's ranked Average or above, it's a strength: the character always gets his own way, can wield undue influence by threatening to sic their Mommy or Daddy on others, might possess lots of cash or gadgets, and people may fawn over them, making life easy. But if the character has "Spoiled Brat (Poor)," this is a weakness: the character has led a pampered and sheltered life, rubs people the wrong way, and expects everyone to bend over backward to fulfill his most minor needs.

Since many game mechanics provide prose "benchmarks" to understand stat or skill levels, the ranked qualities below should be easily adaptable into any desired system.

The RexCorp Rhinos

Sponsored by the multinational conglomerate RexCorp Industries, the Rhinos are a strong, veteran LudiCROUS Team on a hot streak towards another Final Match -- and maybe their fourth World Championship victory. Their equipment (field and training) is more than adequate, their coaching staff is top-notch, and their Players are well-paid and highly-skilled. They are the Team to beat.

Head Coach Michael Sands aka Peppy. In his youth, Peppy Sands was a stellar LudiCROUS Player -- some say that he's the reason that Sylvania Tech made it to the College Finals three years running. Alas, the tragic accident during the Final Match of his junior year ruined his shot at the pros (or so he believes). A short, stocky, eye-patched mass of muscle, Peppy's sturdy exterior cloaks a nimble and insightful mind. He's an excellent Coach (Expert), Still in Shape (Good), and Smarter Than He Looks (Good); he also possesses Gruff Wisdom (Good), One-Eye (Average), and a Trick Back (Poor), which "goes out" on him at intervals. He also smokes stinky cigars.

Offensive Coordinator **Benjamin Orchid aka Oni**. Even though he'd be a fantastic field Player, Oni never liked getting sweaty too much. Fooling around in a Globe with friends was one thing, but putting in the work to play for the school Team seemed silly. Still, he's a huge fan, and held the highest Official Spectator rank for several years. He consistently turned down staff position offers until his mother fell ill, then he joined up with the Rhinos. He's a fantastic Tactician (Expert) and has a Photographic Memory (Expert); he's also skilled at Game Theory (Good) and Computer Modeling (Average). Unfortunately, his lack of experience with the physicality of professional play makes him Dismissive of Player Concerns and Limitations (Poor), which has occasionally led to problems on the field and off.

Defensive Coordinator **Patricia Annalee Weisel aka Stonewall**. Stonewall Weisel has three great things going for her as a Defensive Coordinator: she's Paranoid (Average), Compulsive (Average), and Sneaky (Expert). A Player for the Pittsville Pilots until her pregnancy, she was an adequate scorer, but a *tremendous* spoiler. Concerned for the safety of "her Guys and Gals," she bends her efforts at Defensive Analysis (Expert) to protecting them and their Team goals. While this helps the Team while they're in the Globe, it often becomes Maternal Smothering (Poor) in the locker room and beyond.

Rulesmonger **Magnus Sontag aka Redbear**. Redbear Sontag is an inveterate fiddler: messing with x to see what y's will pop out, overclocking a to get more b, taking apart a q and labeling all its bits, that sort of thing. Under laboratory conditions, given sufficient analysis time, and left to compile a complete dossier on an opposing Team, no one can beat Redbear's understanding of Rule 1 Strategy (Master). Unfortunately, under a time crunch, he has Trouble Improvising (Poor). He's a decent Negotiator (Good) and okay at Communicating Training Needs (Good) to his fellow staff during the Pre-Match crunch practices. This means that so long as the Rhinos are participating in a fairly standard Match, he'll do well. However, if a proposed Rule 1 throws him for a loop (in the negotiation or in play), he'll be a little slower than he should be in advising the Players how to react. He's an Aficionado of Fine Wines (Good).

Avery Ritter aka Thor. Avery is a big, Strong (Master) guy who's Funny (Good) to boot. He loves LudiCROUS, and takes advantage of his minor celebrity to serve as a Spokesperson for a Number of Charities (Good) in addition to offering support with his money. Unfortunately, when he gets mad (especially when his buddy Clyde -- see below -- gets injured), he gets a little Crazy (Poor), exhibiting the classic berserker-type symptoms: all brawn, no brains, and heaven help whoever gets in the way.

Brittany Summers aka Slinky. At age 12, she won Olympic Gold as a gymnast. It was all downhill from there. You can drink a lot on multi-millions of endorsement money -- and people are so willing to cover their eyes (while still peeking through their fingers) at the bad behavior of the wealthy and famous. It took Brittany a decade to hit rock bottom, and a decade and a half to climb back up with the help of LudiCROUS. She won't slide again. Today, she's still quite Agile (Expert), and a helluva Dancer (Expert). Brittany Understands the Rules (Good) and has a Sarcastic Wit (Good), but is no standout in the physical clinches -- she's barely adequate at Judo (Average). As a Recovering Alcoholic (Poor), she has to fight the lure of the bottle every day, and only the game keeps her sane.

Captain Nelson C. O'Reilly aka Rocky. Captain O'Reilly is one of the most highly-decorated Marines to ever serve in the Corps. The details of his court-martial (and subsequent Honorable Discharge) over the Muir Affair remains a mystery -- an Ultraviolet Clearance enigma. Always a fan of the game, "Rocky" turned to LudiCROUS the day he got booted out, and hasn't looked back. Rocky has superhuman Perseverance (Master), able to fight through any pain and adversity when pursuing a goal. He's a warrior -- in addition to his Marine (Expert) training, he holds Multiple Black Belts (Expert). Unfortunately, his Stoicism, harsh manner, and unwillingness to appear weak make him Unpopular (Poor) with Team-mates and fans alike.

Doctor Dawson Richards aka Brainy. When Sylvania Tech forced Doctor Richards onto sabbatical after his "episode," the genius mathematician found himself at loose ends. He began to amuse himself with constructing logical problems out of Rule 1s. On a whim, he tried out for a minor league Team, and easily made it. His stellar play quickly drew the attention of some important scouts, and before the season was out, he got promoted to the majors. He basks in his newfound celebrity and wealth, and worries about the day when he'll no longer be able to cut it on the field. Richards is a world-renowned Mathematician (Master), skilled in many sorts of Games and Gambling (Expert), and is in Decent Shape for a Man His Age (Good). While quite Charming (Good), he's unfortunately also Narcissistic (Poor)

and Suffering from a Mid-Life Crisis (Poor) -- and all three are what probably led to his little "episode."

Ysabel Blanco aka Lucky. Ysabel Blanco is a salt-of-the-earth type of woman, ready for anything. Somewhere in that gray area between "Soccer Mom" and "Grandmother," she took up LudiCROUS at the YWCA to keep fit. She ended up being surprisingly good at it. While Athletic (Good), the talent that makes her a professional Player is her uncanny Common Sense (Master), which allows her to easily and smoothly adjust to any Rule 1 as if it had always been in play. She also possesses "Wild Luck" (Expert/Poor): sometimes things go outrageously well for Ysabel, and sometimes they go ridiculously bad, sometimes both within a span of seconds.

Joy Slaughter aka Clyde. Joy Slaughter is a youngish, never-married, bubbly ball of fire. She worked her way through a UCLA Drama degree on a LudiCROUS scholarship, and performed superbly on both the boards and the turf. She met Thor (see above) in school, and they've been fast friends ever since. Blessed with Perfect Timing (Good) and Cuter Than Hell (Good), she's a fine Actor (Good) and a better Comedian (Expert). She is Sporty-Squared (Expert), and a dab hand at any field sport you care to name. Her biggest flaw, however, is she's a Spotlight Hog (Poor), which often interferes with being a Team Player. Still, let her show-off a bit or call a Rule 1 from the field, and she'll play well with others. Mostly.

Events & Possible Story Arcs

Work (Over) The Crowd

In Matches that rely on Spectator votes to pass new Rules 1s, social engineering becomes critical. The Rulesmongers need to have Spectator Wranglers "working the crowd," urging them to support the Team's efforts and block those of their opponents. While all Teams use overt Wranglers (like mascots, cheerleaders, dancers, etc.), and most use covert ones (ticket-holder "plants" and such), one Team has started pulling really dirty tricks -- like having their covert Wranglers carrying subsonic broadcasters (to make the watchers in the visitors' stands irritable and headachy), addition of mild laxatives to the stadium food at away games, and arranged "disturbances" at Official Spectator venues during important games.

Promoted to the Majors

Like in the *Official Spectator Level* section above, a new Team -- the Mersey Magnets -- has reached out to a Spectator with high stats to join their Staff as Rulesmonger. There's something odd here though: the highest stat of Spectator Rudyard Jones is his astronomically-high count of last-minute losses through Rules flubs he initiated or supported. In all other regards, Jones is a decent rules crafter and evaluator, but not the sort of guy you call up for the big league. Why are the Magnets doing this? Is it an error in their scouting process? Are they hoping that with the proper training, Jones' record can be turned around? Or do they have something devious in mind?

Endorsement Bling-bling

A Player is sought after as a spokesperson for Rooty Rite Cola, and the manufacturer is ready to drive dumptrucks full of money up to the Player's door. Initial negotiations go very well: Rooty Rite is willing to bend over backwards to land the Player. However, on the day of the contract signing, a news report comes out that the drink may contain a dangerous additive. While there's no direct proof of any hazard to Rooty Rite drinkers, the media are having a field day. Also, the Rooty Rite people become even more generous to the Player, adding 50% more money and perks to the endorsement contract . . . though they become strangely reticent when asked about the additive foofahrah. What does the Player do: take the money and make the commercials? Or does he turn down all that loot?

It's All Fun And Games Until Someone Loses an Idea . . .

The simplest sports plot complication ever: the playbook for the upcoming Match -- containing all the analysis of the opposing Team's playstyle, recommended offensive and defensive plans to take advantage of strengths and

weaknesses, and the meanings of the Team's code words and cadences -- is now missing. Has it been stolen? Just misplaced? What does the Team do?

Advice, Opportunities, & Pitfalls

Sports Advice

*Spanning the globe to bring you the constant variety of sports . . . the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat . . . the human drama of athletic competition. This is ABC's **Wide World of Sports**.*

Compared to other genres, that of Sports seems to have been somewhat neglected in the RPG industry, with only a few contenders taking the field. While the reasons for this exclusion are probably worthy of a separate article, this section aims to give advice on how to include athletics as a defining feature of a campaign, rather than merely as an occasional scenario.

In short, there's very little that's different, conceptually, between a PC-NPC brawl in an alley and a PC-NPC brawl on the ice in hockey. The big difference is the primary goal of the brawl: in a standard RPG fight, the PC goal tends to be to drive off or kill the NPCs; in a hockey match, the brawl is incidental to the main action -- the play of the game. This is not a tough mental adjustment to make. For example, say a PC is carrying a vial of antidote to save Tru Tessheart while being chased by ninjas on motorcycles. Is this so different from a PC speeding through a maze carrying the opposing team's flag as they splut! paintballs at him?

The two watchwords of Sports are *competition* and *sportsmanship*. Players test themselves, individually and as a Team against folks very much like them, also individually and as a Team. It's just the goals -- and the stakes -- that are different. And the manner in which those goals are pursued -- with fair play and courtesy in mind -- is vitally important.

Adaptation Advice

As A Theme: One of the primary themes for campaigns involving LudiCROUS is that of *adaptation*. When a Rule 1 throws play for a loop -- what do the characters do? How do they adjust to the change? What sort of Rule 1s do they put into effect in response?

Adaptation is how we learn, live, and triumph. . . and LudiCROUS is designed to encourage and train the human ability to do just that.

To Specific Genres: All things considered, the *Internal Cyberpunk* genre -- where everything happens inside a virtual reality program -- is probably the best underlying setting for a LudiCROUS game: all rules changes and their responses can be enacted quickly and easily, no matter how odd or abstract ("Blue-eyed players score negative goals!" might cause the Defensive Coordinator to have to hurriedly recode the eye color of some players on their Team) and everyone can watch easily just by plugging into the feed.

The *External Cyberpunk* (chrome, cybereyes, and wired reflexes), *Fantasy*, *Science Fiction*, and *Supers* genres all also can support the more radical changes of Rule 1s required in a LudiCROUS Match with a little tweaking. Big robotics, magic spells, ultratechnologies, or superpowers can elide many of the "realities" of explaining how to instantly fill a football stadium-sized area with water (or fog, or cotton candy, or . . .).

A *Realistic* or *Modern-Day* LudiCROUS game is very possible, if major configurations to the Globe are minimized during play (perhaps reserved solely during the pre-Match negotiation). After all, Rule 1s work best as alterations to player behavior: that's what makes them fun!

Ludi-League Play (Campaign)

Making LudiCROUS the core of a campaign is easy -- just follow a season's worth of major league play (10 Matches). Then, from all corners of the world, the top 16 Teams (evaluated on an arcane calculation of win-loss ratio and overall Team stats) compete in the playoffs. The ultimate winning Team of the playoff elimination tournament's Final Match becomes the World Champion Team. Generally the sharpest and most skilled Spectators are in attendance, trying to use their inputs into the Final Match to further enhance their standing. This is their last chance to do so for the season, and the holders of the top Spectator stats are announced and rewarded at the closing ceremonies, alongside the leaders in Player and Team stats.

Quick and Abstract League Play

Instead of laboriously statting out several NPC Teams worth of Players and running every LudiCROUS match in the League, here's a quick and abstract method to generate wins and loss for all NPC Teams:

Give each Team a Team Skill Level: If a Team is made up of talented *and* experienced Players, give them a Level of 3. If a Team is made up of talented *or* experienced Players, give them a Level of 2. If a Team is just all-around average, give them a Level of 1. If a Team sucks, give them a Level of 0.

Give each Team a Specialty in one (or more) Types of Ground Rules: Each Specialty in a Type of Ground Rules that a Team is equal to one additional Level when they play in a Match of that Type.

LudiCROUS Match Type: Randomly roll for a general Match Type:

1. Capture the Flag
2. Combat
3. Hit and Catch
4. Hit the Goal
5. Hunt and Avoid
6. Physical Contest

Home Team Advantage: Playing on your own turf is worth one additional Level.

Weather Report: Perfect weather is worth one additional Level for all Teams, Bad Weather subtracts one Level from all Teams, and Horrible Weather can end a Match.

Streak Modifier: If the Team won their last game, add one Level. If the Team lost their last game, subtract one Level. If the Team tied their last game, no effect.

Roll 1d6 for each Team and Add Their Total Levels. Highest score wins; ties are ties.

So, let's say that two NPC Teams -- the RexCorp Rhinos and the Lincoln Logsplitters -- are playing against each other in Lincoln, NE. The Match type is Hit and Catch, and the Weather is average.

- The Rhinos are fairly talented (Level 2), have Specialties in Hit and Catch (an additional Level) and Hit the Goal, and won their last Match (an additional Level), for a total Level for this Match of 4.
- The Logsplitters are okay (Level 1), have a Specialty in Combat (no effect), have the Home Team Advantage (an additional Level), and tied in their last Match (no effect), for a total Level for this Match of 2.
- Both Teams roll and 1d6 and add their levels -- let's say: the Rhinos get 4+4=8, and the Logsplitters get 5+2=7.
- The Rhinos win!

Other Resources

[A League of Their Own](#)

- Battle School, from Orson Scott Card's [Ender's Game](#)
- [Blood Bowl](#) (Games Workshop)
- [Brian's Song](#)
- [Bull Durham](#)
- [Calvinball](#), from Bill Watterson's [Calvin and Hobbes](#)
- [Devlin](#) (Best [theme song](#) ever!)
- [Fluxx](#)
- The Game, from Piers Anthony's Apprentice Adept series (start with [Split Infinity](#))
- The [Harlem Globetrotters](#) (and [Super Globetrotters](#)) cartoons
- [Knightmare Chess](#)
- [Major League](#)
- [Nomic: A Game of Self-Amendment](#), by Peter Suber
- "The Oldest Game" (sort of a shapeshifting contest/riddle game) as shown in *Sandman*, issue 4, "[A Hope in Hell](#)"
- Parkour -- [What Is Parkour?](#) and [Parkour FAQ](#)
- Quidditch, from JK Rowlings' Harry Potter series
- [Wildcats](#)

Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Infinite Opportunities For Alternate Infinities!

"Every single event is the offspring not of one, but of all other events prior or contemporaneous, and will in its turn combine with all others to give birth to new: it is an ever-living, ever-working Chaos of Being, wherein shape after shape bodies itself forth from innumerable elements. And this Chaos, boundless as the habitation and duration of man, unfathomable as the soul and destiny of man, is what the historian will depict, and scientifically gauge, we may say, by threading it with single lines of a few ells in length!"

-- Thomas Carlyle, "On History"

Thomas Carlyle was openly contemptuous of the notion of "scientifically gauging" History, of measuring the span of "all other events prior or contemporaneous" with lines and grids and rules and charts. However, Thomas Carlyle wasn't writing **GURPS Infinite Worlds**, so he had that luxury. I, by contrast, have to give it the old college try, and figure out how to organize the "ever-working Chaos" that is not just one History, but all of them. Fortunately, most of the decisions have already been made; we know that the various alternate histories clump together in a small number quantum field states in no very predictable pattern. Although this core system of the Infinite Worlds has been laid out since 1991 and **GURPS Time Travel**, there are other ways one could set things up. In the infinity of possible worlds, there must be alternate Infinite Worlds, too. Herewith, a little design discussion for those of you running or preparing such games; it's not complete, but it seems fairly comprehensive. Who knows? Some of it may show up in **GURPS Infinite Worlds** after all, if the historical branches break right, or if I need two thousand words to fill a chapter and avoid entering the hellish dystopia where Ken misses his deadline.

"Several hundred alternate worlds are now known. They are spread through an 8-dimensional space in a pattern which seems almost predictable. These worlds are divided between a number of different energy levels, or quanta. It is easy to reach a world on the same quantum, hard to travel outside your own quantum. We're on Quantum 5 (Q5). We can reach Quantum 4 and 6 fairly easily, Q3 and Q7 with difficulty."

-- Steve Jackson and John M. Ford, **GURPS Time Travel**

The first way to organize a passel of alternate Earths is by means of an *arbitrary map*. In an arbitrary map, you take your worlds and place them solely with regard to your larger game plan. Which worlds can communicate with or reach each other, which worlds are connected and how, and so forth, is fixed by world-design fiat. If you don't want the Nazi Earth to invade the Gandhi Earth, don't let them touch. If you want the Nazi Earth and the Roman Earth to be implacable rivals, let both of them touch a passel of rich, neutral worlds. If you want their struggle to be a Cold War proxy-fight, they can't reach each other; if you want it to be a World War multi-global strategic conflict, they can reach each other once they've conquered the intervening worlds. You assign the worlds according to the logic of the setting and the story, and then make up an explanation to suit yourself.

This is how the Infinite Worlds system works; as laid out in **GURPS Time Travel**. Homeline is safe from its worst enemy, Centrum, because Centrum is three quantum levels away, and you can only travel two quanta away from your own reality. Reich-5 is in a quantum that Centrum can't reach -- this prevents an alliance between the two, and avoids harsh decisions about aiding one or the other enemy. The "neutral worlds" that can go either way -- the "echoes" -- lie between Homeline and Centrum. The explanation for the arbitrary map doesn't have to be technobabble about quantum field strengths or energy barriers. You could lay out a multiverse in an enormous mansion, with each room leading to another world, but only worlds in the same wing or on the same floor could interact. (Butlers and other servants can go to all the rooms, and one can bribe servants to bring messages to, or hide cameos in, rooms you theoretically can't reach.) Any system in which the only real determinant of which worlds can reach each other is the GM's intentions is an arbitrary map system.

"Sectors are areas of paratime on any level in which the prevalent culture has a common origin and common characteristics. They are divided more or less arbitrarily into sub-sectors. Belts are areas within sub-sectors where conditions are the result of recent alternate probabilities."

-- H. Beam Piper, "Police Operation"

The next order of alternities is the *somewhat arbitrary grid*. With this kind of system, worlds that share certain

independently-determinable characteristics will be "closer" to each other than worlds that don't. You get some of this in Roger Zelazny's *Amber* series, as "shadow walking" depends on moving "toward" specific features of the landscape and shifting the others "away." All the worlds with green suns and blue humans are "next to" each other in such a system, and you have to travel some distance in one "direction" to get yellow suns and brown humans and still "farther" before you get to red suns and pink humans. H. Beam Piper's Paratime series divides the five Levels (which are fairly arbitrary, but seem to roughly equate to technical progress in the past) into Sectors such as the Alexandrian-Punic, Indo-Turanian, Aryan-Transpacific, Europo-American, and so forth. These depend on the "prevalent culture" in that Earth, as defined by the Paratime Patrol. On a meta-game level, the Sector is defined by the GM but interpretable (to some extent) by the players. Within those sectors, he has various sub-sectors apparently clustered around major "world-historical" events within a prevalent culture. We hear about the "Hispano-Columbian Sub-Sector" in the Europo-American Sector, and the "Styphon's House Sub-Sector" in the Aryan-Transpacific Sector. Less world-shaking (or more recent) events make up Belts; the "Hitler Victory Belt" might eventually become a Sub-Sector, if it turns out to affect very much over the long term. If most Nazi Germanies fall apart in 1989 and leave the U.S. to pick up the pieces in Europe and fight al-Qaeda in the 21st century, though, it might not.

To get a somewhat arbitrary grid, the GM needs to determine what decides proximity. Defining an x and y axis (which will, again, be more or less arbitrary GM fiat) can start things off. Here's one option: Postulate two axes, of Western civilization (x) and Eastern civilization (y). The negative end of x (the left margin of the grid) is the Irish or Gallic anarchies, mystical and tribal and poetic. The positive end of x (the right side of the grid) is the Roman Empire, imperialistic and trans-national and logical. On the y axis, the positive end (the top of the grid) is the Ming Dynasty, inward-looking, conservative, and pious. The negative end of the y is the Song Dynasty, diasporic, innovative, and commercial. A global Taliban would be in the far upper right; samurai Japanese worlds would be in the upper left (perhaps the Maya would be in the far upper left); the Indian statelets would be in the lower left (a hippie-libertopian America, or a [Pirate Republic of the Coast](#), might be in the far lower left); a dominant Venetian Republic would be in the lower right, and so forth. Add a z-axis for "reality." A positive z value is overt psionics, then magic, then high-fantasy and gods; a negative z value is scientific departures -- meteor impacts, alternate plate tectonics or climate, and finally intelligent dinosaurs at the bottom. A Hollow Earth might be a high, magical z or a very low "divergent planetary formation" z.

"I do not know whether there are parallel futures, but I do know that there are many pasts leading up to that time from which I have come. Not all of them are accessible. The sideroads have a way of reverting to wilderness when there are none to travel them. Do you not know that Time is a superhighway with many exits and entrances, main routes and secondary roads, that the maps keep changing, that only a few know how to find the access ramps?"

-- Roger Zelazny, *Roadmarks*

Even less arbitrary than that is the *tree of worlds*. This system uses history as its trunk, with alternate realities "branching off" at the appropriate point. Even if the branches [vary wildly](#), the organizational scheme is intact and relatively transparent to the players. If the timeline is a superhighway, as in Zelazny's *Roadmarks* or my old [alternate Autoduel setting](#), there are off-ramps at 1588 and 1776 and 1861 and 1940 and so forth, each one of which might lead to a road that itself branches off. A road, a river, or a literal trans-world Ygdrasil can become the central "passageway" from place to place. Players always know where the alternates are, because they can drive (or float, or climb) to them and see for themselves; they can always find an alternate if they need to, unless the GM flat out refuses to let a world where the Bantus migrated north into Europe (diverging around 150 AD) exist. The GM can decide that the off-ramps on the north side of the road lead to "para-scientific" worlds, and the off-ramps on the south side of the road lead to "magical" ones, or any other scheme, to add a little bit of spice to matters.

The [Empire State Building](#) makes a fine variant on the "mansion plan" arbitrary map, adapted for the tree of worlds. For those who know the sequence of buttons to push, the elevators take people up and down through time. The 101st floor is the 21st century A.D., and so forth down to "street level" and the beginnings of human cities in the 80th century B.C. (What's in the basement? Dinosaurs.) Express elevators whisk travelers past the dull Neolithic, letting commuters off in Cheops' Egypt (55th floor), Confucian China (74th floor), or Shakespeare's London (96th floor). They can walk down the corridors to "branch offices" opening onto alternate Earths, or to subsidiary elevator banks running a few floors up and down these new timelines. The GM can still decide where the office doors eventually open (in a city, one hopes, regardless), and which tenants have their own stairway keys, and so forth. Along those same

lines, a GM could introduce a "Reality Subway," with stops at various key points along the timelines. Take the Purple Line from Alexandria to Samarkand, switch to the Brown Line, and ride it to Mongol-occupied London. The GM can re-impose some control by only picking a few transfer stops where lines cross, making the cross-time commute from Pharaonic Pittsburgh to Nazi Sydney nearly impossible at rush hour.

"Just how many corners d'you think the world has?' . . . 'None, because it's a sphere. More or less, anyhow.' . . . 'A sphere's a concept, a limiting case; so they don't say no corners, they say it's got an infinite number. And Steve, know what? Every which one of those corners is a place. Places that were, that will be, that never were save that the minds of men gave them life . . . touching and mingling with every place at many points.'"

-- Michael Scott Rohan, *Chase the Morning*

The subway map, and any other version of the tree of worlds, still depends on lines. If a world isn't connected up by a line, it can't be reached. The *open pattern* infinity removes that. Once you've found the secret to cross-time travel, you can go anywhere you like. The GM in such cases is reduced to deciding how many people can find that secret, and what kind of cargo they can bring. If the Nazis can bring Das Afrika Korps across the worlds, that's one kind of game -- if they can only bring Hanna Reitsch, Ernst Udet, and Adolf Galland, because only Legendary Airmen can fly the Infinite Sky, that's another.

One version of the open pattern is the open nexus; rather than a "journey" between worlds, it's more of a "doorway." The open nexus is a single location that touches all the worlds, and can let people travel between them through it. Sometimes it's in the same location (the Bermuda Triangle? Stonehenge?) in every world, sometimes it's just "in the city's old neighborhood" with the city varying from world to world. Neil Gaiman's Worlds' End Inn, where all the worlds cross over, is such a place, as is the Horatio Club from *GURPS Time Travel*. (A place where people from all the worlds can meet, but they have to go back to their own world, like Callahan's Crosstime Saloon, or Poul Anderson's Old Phoenix, doesn't really count for our purposes.) The location is usually violence-proof, or else the Nazis would always be attacking it. It's usually neutral, or else you couldn't ever have bad guys follow you through infinity. It's almost never under the control of the PCs, because that would be just too scary for words.

But a GM might want to let PCs pick their own destination. Possibly everywhere is connected to everywhen, and you just have to find a nearby gate using the Map from *Time Bandits*. Or perhaps, for those who know the right dockyards, you can sail out on the Sea of Infinity and set a course for anywhen. Cold currents lead into the world of rational logic; warm currents into magic and wildness. An east wind blows you to worlds where India, China, or Japan set the global pattern; a west wind blows you to Roman, Alexandrian, or Spanish worlds; the south wind takes you to Malay-flavored alternates, or those spiced with the Maya, the Inca, or Zimbabwe; the north wind blows you up to the Dutch, the English, the Americans, the Russians, and the Germans. If you arrive at dusk, you arrive at the culture's twilight -- America in 2200, Rome in 450 (or Rome-4 in 1450). Arrive with the noon tide, and you catch them at the flood -- Naziwelt in 1970, the Glorious Caliphate in 800 A.H. Arrive at dawn, and you have a chance to assist at the birth of Vinland, or snuff out Leninism in its cradle. All I ask is for a tall ship, and a timeline to steer her by. Sail on! Sail on!

Pyramid Review

Cthulhu Dark Ages

Published by [Chaosium](#)

Written by Stéphane Gesbert, Lynn Willis, Brian M. Sammons, & Charlie Crank

Edited by Charlie Crank, David Mitchell, Lynn Willis, Hannes Kaiser, Frank Heller, & Brian Courtemanche

Based on the book by Pegasus Spiele

Art and graphics by François Launet, Stéphane Gesbert, Andy Hopp, David Grilla, Meghan McLean, Björn Lensig, Gero "Zodiak" Pappe, & Kostja Kleye

176-page b&w softcover; \$23.95

Since the strange alien gods that populate the fiction of H.P. Lovecraft are themselves timeless, you ought to be able to play an RPG about them no matter the setting. Perhaps spurred on by the success of those White Wolf products set during the period, Chaosium has provided players with *Cthulhu Dark Ages*, a self-contained roleplaying book. The bad news is that anyone in the (ahem) dark about this time period isn't going to come out feeling much smarter about it than they were going in.

The self-contained part is on-target. The Basic Roleplaying System (or BRP) is included, and contains all the rules you need for period equipment and character creation. Modern chaff has been removed, and there are numerous occupations written up with suggested skills and possessions. You have combat and action resolutions (and a Resistance Table with errors aplenty), and a magic system that encompasses some suitably disturbing spells. It isn't a replacement for the core book, since some sections have been left out for space concerns or because they were anachronistic.

The Mythos are covered in pages of creatures foul and fantastic. The author has tried to arrange it all in some sort of order, apparently using the hierarchy of the source materials, but it's still awfully confusing trying to tell an Old One from a Great Old One. Other things just don't track: Satan is included, but apparently only so the writer can elaborate on the evolution of the name. It's not surprising there are no statistics for him, Loki, or Leviathan (Cthulhu and Co. are not in the book themselves), but you don't get any clues as to how they'll behave in the game, either, even if they're just working behind the scenes for a cult (and Loki, it says, hasn't even got a following). It's not like the rest of the bestiary comprises a bunch of pushovers, so why the reluctance to put more of these creatures to work antagonizing the investigators?

The Dark Ages information feels a little flat. It touches on a lot of important material like timelines and the major contemporary sites and countries, but there's little atmosphere. In fact, there's not much commingling of the real world and the secret history that characterizes Lovecraft's work -- most of it is deliberately presented separately. This wouldn't be so bad, making sure the keeper knows where fancy ends and textbook history begins, but mixing the

themes ought to be a key part of such a tome and we're left to fit the pieces together alone.

The writing tries too hard in many places, but it does make the subject painless. Here again, however, most of what we find could just as easily be covered by what you'd find in a . . . *For Dummies* book on the subject or even a decent webpage, and though there are limitations of space, the time and place described are the book's raison d'etre. The book should be striving to give a feel for this mysterious age, and instead it comes across like a list of bulleted items.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The included adventure, "The Tomb" (which accounts for a full quarter of the page count) puts the player characters on the road to meet some monks at the small town of Laa, only to find they or someone close to them may unwittingly possess something the dark forces desperately wish to acquire. People disappear from the roads, cloaked figures loom at the edge of one's vision, and the party is accused of a horrible crime. Before they're finished, most of the surrounding countryside may be depopulated.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

It's all illustrated with art that is suitably Lovecraftian -- which is to say, some of the graphics are of low-quality, like something scribbled in a high-school notebook, and yet, in an odd way, they work marvelously. The maps for the adventure are simple, but there are some strange, important twists to the "dungeon" layout, and the fact that it's missing some reference letters does not bode well. This accounts for the minority of the material, and the bulk of the adornment is queer and creepy (and thankfully foregoes the strange little silhouettes that show up in many of the older Cthulhu books). The page design, we are told, is taken from the original German version of this game put out by Pegasus Spiele.

The author knows what's workable in this time period. He suggests accepting certain popular misconceptions about the period rather than slavishly detailing every pitfall and prejudice of the setting. This doesn't excuse the lamentable shortage of good, practical GMing advice, though, and such oversights are only made plainer by the fact that Gesbert is a talented writer with terrific story seeds and a malignant imagination that could set the world of Lovecraft on fire if he budgeted his word count better.

Had Chaosium instead removed the system material and made this a supplemental volume to the line -- and there's no telling what was necessary to license the book from the original company, or if Pegasus had already made this cross-pollination agreement when borrowing the Chaosium material -- *Cthulhu Dark Ages* would have been an easier pill to swallow. As it is, only a fan whose tastes are as tightly targeted as the book's title would suggest stand to benefit from picking this item up.

--Andy Vetromile

Last Ticket Off Bataan

An adventure for WWII-Based Games

by Jason Reade Weiser

Introduction

The adventure below is based upon the last stages of the fighting on Bataan. For obvious reasons, if your GM hasn't run this scenario, then you really should stop reading now to preserve surprise. Some aspects of the scenario, such as the presence of the *Pelican*, are fictionalized to make this a challenging scenario, rather than an unsatisfying rehash of the Bataan Death March.

Synopsis

The players will have to brave shellfire, air raids, and the chaos of a collapsing army to escape Bataan before the surrender. The adventure will see the players use what means they can to get to Marivales and will have to beg, borrow or steal their way onto a Navy ocean-going tug, and end the adventure with a flock of Japanese Zeroes trying to sink them and their ticket out of Bataan.

The End (But Not for Our Heroes)

The players should start off attached to A Company, 57th Infantry (Philippine Scouts). The date is Tuesday, April 7th, 1942. It's okay for the heroes to be of mixed backgrounds, or even services, as by this point, anybody who's well enough -- a relative term considering the amount of food and medical help available to USFIP (US Forces in the Philippines) -- is in the line with a rifle. At least one character should be mechanically inclined. Worse, ammunition of all types is in short supply and many of the men's uniforms are rotting off their backs. Many of the men's spirits are low, but there is still a measure of fight left in the 85 men left in the Company. But the worst-kept secret on Bataan is that this Japanese assault is going to be the one that finishes matters here on Bataan. Marauding Japanese Zeroes and dive-bombers range the roads and rear-areas at will. And when they aren't pummeling the hapless American and Philippine troops, then the Japanese artillery is. Ammunition is down to 5 rounds a man on average, and the grenades and mortar bombs are World War I surplus (so the odds of misfires or malfunctioning are significant), when they are available. Anti-Tank weapons are in short supply and the two light tank companies on the peninsula are lucky to have 10 running tanks between them by this point, what, with gasoline practically nonexistent.

The first thing the protagonists should notice is the groups of Filipino troops streaming south in no semblance of order; the traffic is mostly on foot. Many are dazed, without weapons or officers, their blue denim uniforms in rags. Have the PCs witness one MP attempt to stop a group of them, only to have the dazed Filipinos look at him blankly, as if nothing he said mattered, and continue south.

Word should soon come down to break camp and prepare to move north to launch a counterattack against the Japanese advance. It should be painfully obvious to the PCs, as well as their Company Commander, Captain Alex Cross, that this is insane and would be rather a short fight. Within minutes, he gives the order for all remaining ammunition, food, and medical supplies to be distributed by the First Sergeant, and tells the remains of his company to scatter and try to save themselves. At this point, the GM should feel free to give the players extra equipment, within reason, as everything is in short supply on Bataan and this was the Company's "emergency hoard." Filipinos are given discharge papers, to better help them "fade away" and hide from the marauding Japanese. Captain Cross takes the Company Jeep and drives to Battalion Headquarters, presumably to see if any transport can be had for the remaining Americans south to Marivales. He and his driver will not be seen alive again.

The characters have been left to their own devices in a chaotic situation, with the mobs heading southwards getting more panicked and desperate. Seemingly every inch of the roads is being strafed and bombed or simply blasted by artillery. Men are fighting and in some cases, shooting each other for a place on a truck headed south.

At this point, PCs may either search their memories (which should be difficult) or ask around and investigate (which should be easier, depending on contacts or roleplaying abilities). If successful, they remember that an ocean-going Navy Tug, the *Pelican*, is at Marivales waiting to take on Army Nurses from General Hospital Number 1 at Corps Headquarters Area in Marivales for Corrigador. Perhaps they could convince the skipper to get them the heck out of the Philippines? Hey, McArthur left, why not them?

The first problem is that it's 10 miles from where they are to Marivales, all of it under shellfire and air attack. The second is, who says there aren't any other guys on Bataan with the same idea? As a GM, you really shouldn't allow our heroes too much time to make up their mind. Punctuate the time factor by having some shells land nearby and kill a few extras. Don't hesitate to use fright check or similar morale rules during this; the players are portraying folks who have been blasted, bombed, and starved for months, not to mention they are probably suffering though malaria and dysentery; a car backfire could be enough to spook them at this point. If that fails to motivate our heroes to move, then you can start to have the foot traffic dry up, and for them to hear a *lot* of motor vehicle traffic headed right for them. (If this doesn't give the players a big hint, then maybe their characters deserve to spend four years in a Japanese POW camp.) By now, the players should have joined the pell-mell flight south, and they should see that all is chaos and it is moving at a snails pace. Even officers and MPs can't stop the flood along the East Road to Marivales. Civilian and military traffic is intermingled and it's all moving very slow, which makes an excellent target for Japanese gunners and pilots. Have the heroes suffer a few close calls, and be liberal with the fright checks.

After this, the heroes come across a broken down Navy duce and a half, with a party of sailors from the *Pelican*.

Serendipity

The truck was fetching a 15-foot length of copper tubing from a forward supply depot for the ship's boilers. The trouble began with a group of very angry MPs stopping the truck in the midst of a strafing run by a pair of Zeroes, which promptly shot up the vehicle. Mercifully, the tubing was unscathed, but the truck's radiator and engine has seen better days . . . not to mention the goo that was the unfortunate driver. (Make a fright check for the heroes the first time somebody peers inside the truck cab.) The MPs say they will fix the truck, and they can, but only if the Navy shore party ditches the tubing and gets them and some buddies of theirs (20 in all) on the truck and to Marivales. The Chief Petty Officer in charge of this detail (an old salt by the name of Charton) is not buying this, and one can see by the way he is fingering his .45 that he is ready to shoot the MP Sergeant and be on his way. However, the .50 cal that is trained on his truck by the MPs is rather dissuasive. Enter the heroes into this situation. What do they do?

- **Side with the MPs:** This isn't the brightest idea, since, without that tubing to fix the boiler, the *Pelican* is going nowhere fast. Such a decision would probably only lead to everybody being stranded on Bataan, and eventual Japanese captivity.
- **Side with the Sailors:** This should depend on whether or not the players make the connection that the shore party is from the *Pelican*. If they do, the MPs might get violent out of desperation. A lot of persuasion rolls or good roleplaying might be needed to allow leveler heads to prevail.

Either way, this situation could get ugly, very fast.

Assuming the players do manage to resolve the situation, one way or the other, all the while not getting hit by occasional Japanese artillery or strafing runs, it should be easy to fix the broken radiator line and clean up what was left of the driver from the cab. There won't be much space in the back of the truck, between the four sailors and the copper tubing, but the truck has some fairly nice running boards, so they can hang on to that, for dear life (with appropriate physical abilities). But then this leads to the next problem, when the heroes get to Marivales that evening.

Marivales, Hell on Earth

When the PCs get to Marivales, things should be unmitigated chaos. The GM should describe large groups of beaten, dispirited men milling around without weapons, looking as if the bottom has fallen out (and considering the near-constant Japanese bombardment, it's not hard to imagine why). The various headquarters have small bonfires going, with staff members burning documents by the bushel, the pyres lighting up the night sky and inviting all sorts of unpleasant attention from the Japanese. As the truck pulls into Marivales, a very harried-looking American officer strides up to the heroes with a party of several armed MPs in tow. His name is Captain Jack Harris, and he has got a real problem: He has to blow the main ammunition dump on Bataan. It's in a cave against the cliffs overlooking Manila Bay on the Corrigador side. The trouble is, he doesn't have enough hands to blow the dump. If pressed, Captain Harris will volunteer that he had heard from Corps Headquarters that General Jones was going to send a parliamentary to seek terms from the Japanese tomorrow. "Whatever happens, we can't let the damn Japs have the dump, and I haven't got enough guys to set all the explosives . . . and as for recruiting some of these scarecrows," -- he waves his hands at the milling soldiers -- "forget it! They barely know where they are, let alone have the presence of mind to be using any explosives."

Blowing the dump should be a straightforward set of demolition roles, but this can be complicated by more strafing runs and shellings by the Japanese. None of the heroes should die during this, unless they are incredibly unwise or unlucky, or it's dramatically appropriate. However, just as the explosives go off, matters are complicated by an earthquake. (This did, in fact, happen when they blew up the ammo dump in real life.) Again, the heroes should have to rely on their wits and physical prowess to survive both the blast with tons of ammo cooking off) and the earthquake. How difficult this is can vary, but to set the stage for drama the GM may have the soldiers get involved in trying to succor the wounded and dying in this unholy mess. Once the dump is blown, have Captain Harris shake their hands, weeping like a child and saying, "Thanks fellas; now get the hell out of here before the Japs get you, too."

With that, he walks off, unbuttoning the flap to his .45's hip holster, and goes down a short rise; it isn't long before the report of a .45 is heard. The heroes should take the hint and move posthaste for the *Pelican*.

All Aboard!

By this point our heroes should be all too eager to get off Bataan; however, so is everybody else. Point out that Americans are trying all kinds of sea-going contraptions (with varying degrees of success) to make the journey to the "Rock" (Corrigador). Once they board the *Pelican*, they should be assigned to assist on one of the amidships .50 Caliber mounts to make up for crew casualties. The skipper of the *Pelican* is Lieutenant Rodger McMillan, a dour, cigar chomping, red-haired Irishman who is fighting his tug like a destroyer, and is eager to get away from Bataan before General King surrenders the whole kit and kaboodle to the Japanese.

The nurses haven't arrived and McMillan isn't happy; he's pacing the weather bridge of his tiny command when the air raid siren goes off. This time it's three Zeros coming from the north, and they've spotted the *Pelican*. Run the air attack with the Zeroes making two strafing passes; these should be tense, and the GM shouldn't hesitate to kill off members of the crew or damage the ship. However, the heroes should have a chance for some payback. On the last strafing run, 20mm cannon shells shatter the bridge, and it becomes a maelstrom of broken glass. Any characters that are able to do so should be encouraged to run to the bridge, perhaps by the Pharmacist's Mate grabbing at them and screaming, "Help me, dammit!" The bridge ladder is a mess, and is hanging precariously onto the deckhouse. The heroes should once more need to rely on physical abilities or clever plans to make sure they don't collapse the ladder. The door to the bridge is open, with the interior of the bridge being nothing more than a charnel house of the dead and dying. (Again, fright checks in suitable systems would be very appropriate here.) Lieutenant McMillan is holding his intestines in after a piece of glass disemboweled him. He is dying, and there is nothing anyone can do for him. He grabs the nearest hero and whispers to him, "Save my ship; take her to Australia." As the Lieutenant dies, the engineering officer, Lieutenant (JG) Forster comes up from below to take command. Once the heroes inform him of McMillan's wishes, he looks out on the burning Bataan and the mess of the bridge, and sighs. "Well, we're a tug, not a warship, and this is no place for us." He then sets course south.

What occurs after this? There are a number of personalities, but the stage is set for a rip-roaring trip through Japanese held territory to Australia.

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- <http://members.aol.com/bcmfofnm/> -- A website dedicated to the New Mexico National Guard's 200th Coastal Artillery (Anti-Aircraft) who were among some of the real "Battling' B*****s of Bataan" and memorializes those who did not survive the battle, or the subsequent captivity.

* * *

*Dedicated to the real "Battling B*****s of Bataan." Thanks for enduring the unendurable. We will always remember.*

Arthur Rainmaker, Psychic Playboy Detective

for *GURPS*

by Mark Gellis

Arthur Rainmaker was born to a wealthy family in New York in 1890. At the age of 27, he joined the United States Air Service, and became a fighter pilot. In the winter of 1918, he was shot down over France by a German pilot. He survived the crash, but spent several days in a coma before recovering. He returned to active duty and did well, managing nine confirmed kills by the end of the war.

What Arthur did not tell people was that he had somehow developed psychic powers. He had always had a good sense for people, but now he could sense things that simply could not be explained away just by being "a good judge of character." He had always been lucky, but he now seemed to have *extraordinary* good luck. If he really concentrated on something going right, it was very unusual for it to go wrong. If he was in danger, he usually knew it (and he knows that this had saved his life on more than one occasion). If he looked someone in the eye and concentrated, he could tell what they were thinking. Eventually, he even learned how to "travel in the astral plane," leaving his body behind and observing things and people at a distance.

After the War, Arthur returned to New York and rejoined the family business. His family owns a large and well-known department store in mid-town Manhattan.

Arthur, the youngest of three brothers (of his three siblings, only his sister is younger than he), does not expect to inherit the bulk of the family fortune, but knows that he has a place in the family business as long as he wants it.

He is not an outstanding businessman. He enjoys being wealthy but really he is not particularly interested in running a business, which was one reason why he enlisted in the first place. He is, however, competent, and his extraordinary luck has kept him from having any extraordinary failures. (In fact, depending on when a campaign is set, it is likely that his luck has helped prevent him from suffering any catastrophic losses in the Crash.)

His real love is flying. He owns a two-seater biplane and often spends his days off cruising the skies above the Hudson River or Long Island. He also enjoys using his astral powers to wander where no aircraft can take him, "walking" among the clouds, spying on the city's street life, or plunging into the waters that surround Manhattan. In fact, he has helped solved a number of crimes by making anonymous phone calls to the New York City Police after seeing something or someone dumped into the East River.

He also enjoys solving mysteries and having other adventures; he has, more than once, considered "chucking it all" and making his way to South America or the Far East and working as a troubleshooter and pilot-for-hire. Not surprisingly, he has done some reading on his own about how the criminal mind works and about strange phenomena. (Obviously, psychic powers are possible in a campaign world where Arthur appears, but the GM will need to determine how common they are and whether other supernatural elements exist.) He has become a competent amateur detective and the police know he can usually be counted on.

And, not to put too fine a point on it, when Arthur is not working or solving mysteries, he likes having a good time, which in his book usually takes the form of gambling, or seducing beautiful women. He is especially good at the latter because he is quite willing to use his psychic abilities to find out what a woman wants and what she thinks of him.

Arthur can be a bit annoying at times. He is a genuinely extraordinary individual, and he knows it, which means he sometimes thinks he can handle anything. He is also stubborn; even when he is wrong or outgunned, it is hard for him to give up. The fact that his psychic abilities so frequently give him a jump on the bad guys really does not help; he has gotten away with so much, so many times, he is likely to think he can take on just about any challenge.

Despite his failings, Arthur Rainmaker is one of the good guys. He is basically a decent man; it is simply that his brush with death has made him less willing to fight temptation. He firmly believes that one should eat, drink, and be merry, because it is quite possible that tomorrow (or even tonight) one may die. On the other hand, while he does not feel compelled to serve humanity by stalking the darkened alleys of the city, seeking out criminals to thrash and then deposit, neatly bound and gagged, at the local police station, he would certainly not abandon someone who was in urgent need of help. In fact, his love of adventure usually makes him more than willing to step in and offer assistance.

He keeps his psychic abilities secret for fear of embarrassing his family. He believes if people ever learned about his abilities they would consider him a freak. (He also thinks people would stop playing poker with him if they knew he could read minds, even though he has never used his powers to cheat at cards.) People do notice that he seems to be able to tell things, uncover secrets and solve mysteries, know if there is danger, and so on, but he does not make a big deal of it. He simply says he is "just lucky," or "a good judge of people," and lets it go at that.

He is troubled by nightmares, often reliving being shot down over France, falling, trying desperately to keep his plane under control, but finally crashing. He often sees the faces of fellow pilots who did not survive the War. And sometimes he sees other faces, watching him, studying him. He does not recognize them, but they fill him with dread.

Using Arthur in a Campaign

Arthur could get involved in a campaign in a number of ways. He and the PCs might be independently investigating the same mystery and, once they know about each other, decide to join forces. Or Arthur might hire them to assist him in solving some really big mystery that he has (amazingly) figured out even he cannot tackle on his own.

Introducing him to a group of heroes should not be difficult. First and foremost, his love of mystery and adventure would encourage him to introduce himself to those investigating dark perils to modern civilization. In addition, it is possible that the characters might meet him through one of his other passions, such as flying or gambling. He is likely to come across as a bit cocky, a wealthy amateur who sees solving mysteries or fighting criminal masterminds as a lark. This might annoy some PCs, but it will soon become clear that, while he is no Sherlock Holmes, he can pull his own weight as an investigator.

Another way to get Arthur involved is if any of the player characters are attractive and female. Arthur knows what he likes, and he goes after it with a passion. He is usually quite suave, and he does know how to show a lady a good time, so there is no reason why his attentions will be considered odious. If he does not give up the first time he is politely discouraged, some women may be annoyed, but others may find it flattering.

It also possible that the player characters might seek out Arthur, rather than the other way around. Mutual friends or allies (including police, newspaper reporters, or wealthy uncles that the heroes did not even know they had) might point them in his direction, suspecting that he might be able to help them crack a case or bring a particularly dangerous foe to justice.

One adventure seed would stem from his nightmares. Arthur often sees faces that he does not recognize. What if they are not simply the product of a tortured imagination? Are they ghosts that he can somehow detect with his astral powers? Are they others with psychic abilities, trying to make contact? Or are they are something else, something monstrous? Whatever they are, they seem to be drawn to him.

Another possibility is if one of Arthur's family were kidnapped or attacked. In this case, he would not only investigate the crime but hire others to assist him. His siblings are all capable individuals, and do not appear often enough to count as DNPCs, but he is quite fond of them and would drop everything to help them if any of them were in danger.

Using Arthur does present GMs with one special challenge. He is a potent ally because of his psychic abilities. The fact that he is wealthy and debonair, a pilot, a capable amateur detective, and a good shot with everything from a pistol to a machine gun does not hurt, either. The trouble is that he might overshadow the PCs. He can serve as a mechanism for gathering a critical clue, help the heroes finish off a dangerous foe, or even serve as a rival for the romantic attentions of a female player character or NPC, but a GM has to be careful to make sure he is not the one who is

always saving the day. He is, after all, only a supporting character.

Alternate Versions

Arthur Rainmaker is designed with the Cliffhangers era in mind, but he could be used in any 20th-century setting with minimal changes. Depending on the campaign, the Rainmaker family might be situated in London or Los Angeles as easily as in New York. Arthur could have served in the Pacific, Korea, Vietnam, or the Persian Gulf instead of Europe, and might know languages spoken in those regions of the world instead of French or German. Finally, depending on the era, his Light Airplane skill might be replaced with Heavy Airplane or High-Performance Airplane.

Another variation would be to assume that Arthur had "chucked it all" and was operating an independent airline in some isolated corner of the world (this is probably the only business about which he is likely to be passionate). This version of Arthur Rainmaker would have about five or ten extra points in Piloting (Heavy Airplane) and additional Language and Area Knowledge skills.

This version of Arthur Rainmaker could be used to develop a variety of adventures. He might hire the player characters to protect important passengers or help him retrieve valuable cargo from an isolated crash site. Or, he might have learned of some mysterious treasure rumored to be hidden in the jungles of some Pacific island; he is willing to provide the player characters with equipment and transportation, but only if he is allowed to join the expedition. Arthur and the player characters might also be affected by the ambitions of some warlord or dictator. And, finally, there are those dreams. Arthur thought he could escape them by leaving New York, leaving his old life behind him, but the nightmares are getting stronger now, the strange faces leering at him out of the dark. But who are they? And what do they want? The only thing Arthur knows for sure is that they are planning something, something terrible, and it will not be long before they make their move. Will Arthur turn out to be the key to thwarting some monstrous conspiracy or is he simply going mad? Only the GM knows for sure.

Arthur Rainmaker in *GURPS*

Male; Age: Late 30s to early 40s; 5'11", 170 lbs.; Hair: Brown, Eyes: Brown; Normally, he will be wearing a good suit and driving an expensive car like a Cadillac LaSalle.

ST: 11/12 [10] **DX:** 13 [30] **IQ:** 13 [30] **HT:** 11 [10]
Speed: 6.00 Move: 6 Dodge: 7 Parry (Brawling): 10
Damage: Punch 1d-2; Kick 1d; Thrust 1d-1; Swing 1d+1.

Advantages: Absolute Timing [5]; Charisma +1 [5] Combat Reflexes (Fright Check: 15-) [15]; Danger Sense [15]; Extra Fatigue +1 [3]; Extraordinary Luck [30]; Fit [5]; Reputation +1 (Competent amateur detective, recognized by certain police officers and others who follow such things in the newspapers; this can be treated as "Small Group, Sometimes Recognized") [1]; Status 2 [5]*; Voice [10]; Wealth (Very Wealthy) [30]

*Cost modifiers: Wealth

Disadvantages: Lecherousness [-15]; Nightmares [-5]; Overconfidence [-10]; Secret (Psychic powers) [-10]; Stubbornness [-5]

Quirks: Enjoys adventures [-1]; Loves flying [-1]; Will not use telepathy to cheat at cards [-1]

Powers: Astral Projection 8 [24]; Telepathy (Telereceive only) 4 [12]

Skills: Accounting-12 [2]; Acting-13 [2]; Administration-13 [2]; Area Knowledge (Europe)-12 [1/2]; Area Knowledge (New York)-14 [2]; Aviation-13 [2]; Brawling-14 [2]; Carousing-12 [4]; Criminology-13 [2]; Dancing-12 [1]; Driving (Automobile)-12 [1]; Economics-12 [2]; First Aid-13 [1]; Gambling-12 [1]; Gunner (Machine Gun)-14 [1]; Guns (Pistol)-15 [1]; Guns (Rifle)-14 [1/2]; Intimidation-13 [2]; Leadership-13* [1]; Mechanic (Propeller Plane Engine)-12 [1]; Merchant-12 [1]; Navigation-13 [4]; Occultism-12 [1]; Piloting (Light Airplane)-15 [8]; Psychology-12 [2];

Research-12 [1]; Riding (Horse)-12 [1]; Savoir-Faire-15* [0]; Savoir-Faire (Military)-14* [1/2]; Sex Appeal-13* [2]; Shadowing-13 [2]; Stealth-12 [1]; Streetwise-13 [2]; Tactics (Air-to-Air)-12 [2]

*Cost modifiers: Charisma, Voice, Wealth.

Languages: English (native)-13 [0]; French-11 [1/2]; German-11 [1/2]

Psionics: Astral Projection-14 (Base range: 3,840 yards in eight minutes of astral travel) [6]; Astral Sight-14 (Range: 64 yards) [6]; Telereceive-15 (Eye Contact Only, -20%; Range: 2 yards) [6-1/2]

Total Points: 270

Weirdness Starts in Your Own Backyard

There's a way you can tell if you're watching cheesy science fiction movie.

Okay . . . outside of the silhouette of the robots in the front row. Or the existence of catchwords like "phantom" or "menace" in the title.

No, a hallmark of a cheesy science fiction movie is visiting a locale that is the pinnacle of anything, or something impossibly . . . well, *impossible*. You know:

- The edge of the universe.
- A Dyson sphere.
- The center of the galaxy.
- The heart of the data matrix.
- The beginning of time.
- A battle station the size of a moon.
- Orson Welles' secondary snack bar.

These places usually have certain things in common: The laws of time and space break down, visuals are represented by the latest in special effects, and just about anything is possible (at least, anything the creators think of).

A moment's thought indicates *why* these are interesting locales. Most fantastic genres, but especially science fiction and space opera, get a certain amount of their narrative thrust from providing a sense of wonder and amazement, especially when boldly going where no one has gone before. And what better way of instilling a sense of amazement with something that you've *really* never seen before?

The problem is, once you've been to the Nexus of Reality or even the Universe's Tallest Mountain, it's awfully tough to come up with an encore. And, in my opinion, these settings all fail on some level (for me) because they show the creators don't trust their sense of setting.

Now, I've discussed settings [before](#), including ways to make them more [organized](#). But there's a secret that some writers and GMs use to spice things up . . . a secret I will withhold to make you all anticipate things a bit longer.

So, for some illuminating background, let's once again turn to that pinnacle of storytelling: the *Star Wars* series. <HRRGLHT!> <thud>

Sorry; my internal organs tried to expel themselves through every orifice in an effort to end my existence. It happens.

Anyway, imagine you're Luke Skywalker. You want to get off your dirtball planet, see the galaxy, and eat paste on *other worlds!* This old guy shows up with a weird story and you decide to follow him, knowing that you'll be seeing interesting places any time now.

And, sure enough, you soon find yourself in a very interesting place. It's a bar, and, in fact, it's the most wretched hive of scum and villainy in existence.

And the Mos Eisley Cantina has been about 20 minutes from your front door all this time.

Now, it's possible that ol' Obi Wan hadn't really canvassed the galaxy, in search of the most vile tavern. After all, the Jedi are [pretty lazy](#). But the point remains; the Mos Eisley Cantina is a pretty interesting place, and it wasn't all that difficult to get to.

And this is an extrapolation of the mysterious secret I alluded to seven paragraphs ago. See, creators know that using impossibly grand settings and locales is an unnecessary "cheat"; you don't need to send characters to the Vortex of

Absolute Zero, because interesting locations are *everywhere*.

I'm sure we've all had an experience similar to this: You're someplace unfamiliar, and you enter a store, building, or attraction that piqued your curiosity . . . and you realize you're well off the yellow brick road, and the winged monkeys are closing fast.

Once, while driving from Montana back home to Tallahassee, we stopped at a restaurant in . . . darned if I remember. Some flat square-ish Midwestern state. Oklabraska, I think. Anyway, having driven all day, we stopped in a family-dining-style restaurant. It was a Sunday, and it was around 4 P.M. We were asked if we wanted to eat at the buffet. We looked at the buffet. There were 12 kinds of meat, macaroni and cheese, and nothing else. Every tray had an odd crust, well beyond the usual buffet pale, that resembled how I envision I would look if I spent six hours in a [tanning booth](#).

My companion and I decided against the buffet, and ordered something from the menus. I ordered something suitably meatless, while she ordered a steak, rare.

Five minutes later, the chef came out. At least, my sanity can only *assume* he was the chef. He was a large, scary-looking guy, with an indeterminate number of teeth in abnormal positioning, wearing a white apron covered in light brown stains that I assume were blood, hopefully belonging to nonsentients. He also carried a knife. He looked as if he had escaped from a Stephen King novel by questionable means. He came over to our table -- we were the only ones in that part of the restaurant, so we knew he was coming for us -- and, in an indeterminate Midwestern accent, asked, "Who ordered the steak?" His question had far too much menace in it, and I immediately and instinctively pointed to my companion; I sold her out so fast, I'm convinced I would have pegged her as Spartacus if the need arose.

Having found his target, he continued: "You ordered it rare?" She answered in the affirmative. "You know what that means, *right*?" Again, she answered in the affirmative, although I had images of "rare meat" involving a squirming, writhing mass, wailing in some anguished, forgotten tongue. "Well, okay," he continued. "I just wanted to make sure you know what rare was, you know. Just wanted to make sure." And then he wandered back to his kitchen.

We breathed a sigh of relief, ate our meal, and bid a hasty retreat, content to drive as quickly as possible away from that state. (The steak, my companion reported, was quite tasty.)

So, what was supposed to be a mundane meal turned into something of an adventure. And, in a gaming universe, no doubt that encounter *could* have been something much more interesting.

Not every encounter needs to be a weird, wonder-inducing odd-fest. But just about any circumstance can be a chance to introduce such elements, without needing to pull out extreme universe-bending concepts. Who needs to create a pocket dimension when the train station conductor is a man of infinite [quirks](#), or the location itself is a Heathrowian labyrinth? In a universe with modest magical or paranormal effects, boring places can become equally compelling. (For those looking for ideas, I can recommend Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* to show you just how weird settings with real-world trappings can be.) And adventures can also happen in places most normal characters (or at least most normal gamers) might never consider:

Most towns have at least one small museum or other educational tourist-type place; quite often the curator is *the* foremost expert on some esoteric bit of knowledge, especially for items of regional interest. Dealing with the museum, the curator, or the quirks of the town can be an adventure unto itself.

Perhaps an NPC with vital information is at a church, mosque, or synagogue, and the PCs need to be respectful of the unfamiliar customs and traditions to make the best of the encounter.

As shown above, any restaurant or social gathering place can be totally strange and awe- (or terror-) inducing.

And anything can serve an alien function different from its original purpose. (For example, in a fantasy campaign I once had the PCs kidnapped and taken to the "astral plane." In reality, it was an abandoned warehouse, decorated with shiny ribbon and bits of scrap metal, and a large painted sign that said, "ASTARL [sic] PLANE." When the heroes

finally escaped and made a report about where they were, they were able to say, "The astral plane" . . . although not with a straight face.)

As a bonus setting-building tip, it's also possible to take locations that *should* be alien and wonder-inducing and make them completely familiar. Douglas Adams did this with the Restaurant at the End of the Universe, the dining facility at the end of time that, while interesting, still had many of the trappings and customs of a typical modern dining experience. Perhaps it's an exotic, foreign town that welcomes the PCs with open arms . . . or a subterranean village that has somehow heard of the heroes . . . or an alien world that has built its culture based on the *Star Trek* franchise. Regardless, following the "[unexpected the expected](#)" mantra, sometimes having something *not* live up to its awe-inspiring potential can be the most interesting choice.

Regardless, once the heroes have been someplace impossibly fantastic, it can be difficult to make mundane locations exciting. Instead, instilling locations that *should* be mundane with a sense of the fantastic can go a long way toward making each gaming session memorable.

But if you're in the City on the Edge of Forever, just don't order your steak rare.

--*Steven Marsh*

Pyramid Review

Dead Inside: The Roleplaying Game of Loss & Redemption

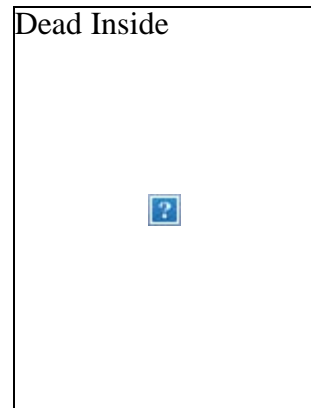
Published by [Atomic Sock Monkey](#)

Written by Chad Underkoffler

Cover by Steve Archer

Illustrated by Chris Cooper & Chad Underkoffler

122-page black & white perfect bound book; \$25
or 7.3 meg PDF from [RPGnow](#)



Chad Underkoffler is best known in these parts for his *Campaign in a Box* column series, but he has also contributed to a number of supplements for [Unknown Armies](#), *GURPS*, and [Gamma World](#), and he also runs his own small press publishing company. Through the amusingly named Atomic Sock Monkey, he labors on a number of "SEKRIT PROJEKTS," of which the first major title to see release is *Dead Inside: The Roleplaying Game of Loss & Redemption*. "Loss" because our protagonists -- the player characters -- have lost, misplaced, sold, had stolen, or indeed never *had* a soul; and "Redemption" because this game is all about getting it back. Not through acts of greed, brutality, and lethality, but by being nice, and by confronting personal weaknesses.

Each player character starts in the same situation. One day he wakes up feeling empty and hollow -- quite literally, for that void is where his soul once rested. Just its shards remain to remind him of what they once had. Very quickly someone will be able to tell him what is going on, that they are "Dead Inside," bodies without souls. With their soul gone, their eyes are no longer shielded from the strangeness of the world around them, which will now feel cold and unwelcoming. Further, ordinary folk, their souls intact, instinctively know that there is something lacking about the "Dead Inside." Fortunately, the friendly voice can tell them that their Soul can be regained. Some methods can cause Soul Decay, such as eating a Ghost (a soul without a body) or stealing another soul. Other methods, such as buying it back, finding the Soul Egg it is trapped in, or working with other Dead Inside to help others and thus cultivate a new soul, all take a lot longer, but do not engender Soul Decay.

For the most part, this does not take place in Real World, but in the Spirit World. Accessed by gates -- either created on the fly, or located at particular times and places -- the Spirit World is a warmer, more attractive place to a Dead Inside. In parts though, it is not always a friendlier place. At its heart is The City, a Dali-esque fusion of Toontown and the Dreamlands, where the Dead Inside will find friends, allies, enemies, and other dangers. This is surrounded by four archetypal landscapes: Mists, Sea, Wood, and Wastes. The nature of these can change depending upon the mood and personalities of those traveling through them and how they treat the environment around them. Beyond the Spirit World lies the Source from whence all souls originate, while its counterpart, the universe consuming Voids on the far side of the Real World.

Once shown or told, a Dead Inside instinctively knows how the fabric of the Spirit World can be altered and manipulated to a variety of different effects. These include abilities such as Change Landscape and Self, Dream-leap, and Second Sight, and powers such as Change Others, Create Object, and Healing. Mastering any of these is a different affair, and many require the sacrifice of a small part of the soul. This is especially so in the Real World where using these abilities is more difficult. They also learn how to trade for simple everyday goods and services, from

snacks to train tickets, with small copies of their memories.

Character generation in *Dead Inside* is a relatively simple affair. After deciding upon a concept and how his character lost his soul, a player assigns ranks to several qualities. These can be skills, professions, advantages, or innate abilities, and can be as broad or as narrow as the GM allows. One quality must be a weakness rated at Poor, while others can be rated Average, Good, Expert, or Master. They have a personality type; a virtue, an indication of their spiritual strength; and a vice, where they might be tempted to stray. In addition, a special quality ranks their character type, which in the game's default set-up is Dead Inside and starts at Average. This rank is a measure of their skill with the various powers and abilities. They also begin with a single Soul Point. Thus a Crime Scene Investigator could be quickly defined as Expert [+4] Forensics, Good [+2] Law Enforcement, Good [+2] Esoteric Trivia, Poor [-2] Partial Deafness; Type: Average [0] Dead Inside; Personality: Thoughtful, Virtue: Integrity, and Vice: Despair.

The process creates a character for the author's "Prose Descriptive Qualities" or PDQ system. The task resolution is so very simple that it might also be labeled the "Pretty Darn Quick" System. A roll of 2d6 plus any appropriate quality ranks is made against a difficulty value set by the GM, while opposed rolls are made for Conflict Resolution. This can cover physical and spiritual combat, and social interaction, with the loser suffering damage directly taken from their quality ranks. At the end of any conflict, characters recover a d6's worth of damaged quality ranks. Essentially, the system abstracts the effects of damage, nor does it emphasize any particular form of Conflict Interaction over the other two. The design of the PDQ system also means that *Dead Inside* could be run using *Fudge* as much as the mechanics given here.

From their starting rank of Average [0] Dead Inside, a character can progress in ranks to Master [+6] and beyond to ensoulment. This may mark the culmination of a closed *Dead Inside* game, but in an open-ended campaign, a character can become a Sensitive (a body with more soul), and then a Mage (a body with twice as much soul). From there they might be able to become an immortal, but this is outside the scope of this game. Conversely, should they lose Soul Points, a Mage can backslide back through Sensitive and down to Dead Inside. They then have to progress back up, but worse still, if a Poor [-2] Dead Inside, Ghost, or Zombie (a dead body without a soul) should backslide in this way, they "Husk." Literally they collapse into being a monster known as a "Qlippoth," and now connected directly to the Void, they also become an NPC.

The key to improvement, whether improving quality or type ranks, lies in the acquisition of Soul Points. While every Dead Inside begins the game with a single Soul Point, as they gain more the players will need to maintain a careful balance, between burning them to fuel abilities and powers and keeping them for character improvement. Acquiring Soul Points is in principle, simple -- helping people. In actuality, it is more than just helping old ladies across the road, clearing a neighbor's path of snow, or placing more than a dollar in a beggar's tin.

Soul Point gain -- and loss ? is governed through the mechanics for Soul Cultivation Ticks and Soul Decay Ticks. Players are encouraged to both justify and role-play their actions in the face of tests against the game various virtues (Courtesy, Fortitude, Generosity, Hope, and Integrity) and vices (Avarice, Cowardice, Cruelty, Despair, and Hypocrisy). Primarily, these will be against a player's listed virtue and vice, which will change as the game progresses. Successful tests against a vice or virtue will gain a Dead Inside a Soul Cultivation Tick against the appropriate virtue or a Soul Decay Tick against the appropriate vice. Gain five Soul Cultivation Ticks and a Dead Inside will be awarded a Soul Point, gain five Soul Decay Ticks, and they will lose a Soul Point. A "Virtue & Vice Check Flowchart" provides a handy guide to the GM on Soul Cultivation. At the same time as the ticks measure Soul Point loss or gain, they perform a second function in monitoring how a player role-plays their Dead Inside, and in particular their listed virtue and vice. Essentially, what they monitor is how "good" or "moral" a Dead Inside's actions are.

Besides the guidelines for Soul Cultivation, the author provides plenty of help to run a game of *Dead Inside*. The advice covers the creation of magical or enchanted items; trade and commerce in the Spirit World; playing the game with evil or skeptical characters, or with a mix of character types; overseeing character creation; and perhaps most importantly judging interaction between characters and Imagos. These are fundamental archetypes that at a personal level are usually a reflection and a complement to a Dead Inside's psyche. This is their "Shadow," not necessarily their evil counterpart, but an amoral one that gain the Soul Points lost to a Dead Inside's Soul Decay. While usually helpful, it should not be forgotten that they are driven by base instinct. Other Imagos are more strange, and do not seem tied to

a particular individual.

The advice also goes right back to the basics with a discussion of how to assemble a gaming group to play *Dead Inside*. Done in a somewhat chatty style, it is perhaps *too* basic for some, but others might welcome this short refresher on the subject. From this it goes on to look at the specifics of scenario and campaign design, which is bolstered by the adventure, "Brave New Spirit World." Intended for play with *Dead Inside* characters only, this introductory scenario is a closed affair, ending when the characters have ensouled themselves. It also does an excellent job of showcasing the game in play.

The book is engagingly and intelligently written, especially so the color fiction, which while helping to set the scene and tone for the game, comes to an end all too soon. If the look of *Dead Inside* is marred by anything, it is its artwork. The predominately scrawny, scratchy style does little to effectively convey the strangeness of the author's creation. The captured images of the radio alarm clock are better, the bright red digital readout altered to say words such as, ".HE:LP," ".SO:UL," ".HO:PE," and ".GA:IN." These possess both a starkness and an unreality to them that captures the feel of the game very well.

Inspired by sources as diverse as Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* and *The Sandman* comic series, *Little Nemo*, the films *Dark City* and *Spirited Away*, *Dead Inside* feels like a reinterpretation of White Wolf's *Wraith: the Oblivion* by way of *Nobilis*. Pleasingly, the author is not shy about listing or discussing these inspirations in the solidly informative bibliography. Despite such influences and comparisons, *Dead Inside* stands very much as a game of its own, one that joins the recent [My Life with Master](#) in being a post-World of Darkness RPG.

Further, in comparing both of these self-published games, it is clear that both enforce (and in *Dead Inside's* case, also rewards) a particular type of behavior through their mechanics and game play. However, *Dead Inside* contains more possibilities and is more open-ended, with potential for play with characters as either Sensitives or Magi. To get there, its directed behavior is that of being good, or even moral . . . a rare occurrence in *any* RPG. The back cover of the book boldly asks, "got soul?" In reply, and because it what the game encourages the players to get and justify, it is very clear that *Dead Inside: The Roleplaying Game of Loss & Redemption* does indeed have Soul.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

VIPER: Coils of the Serpent (for Champions)

Published by [Hero Games](#)

Written by Scott Bennie & Steven S. Long

192-page b&w softcover; \$26.99

There's nothing quite as satisfying in a superhero game as walloping a horde of evil minion types. It's even better when they're all wearing the same color . . . usually green, for some reason. A serpent motif? Even better!

VIPER is Champions' default villain group, spawning dozens of villains over the game's history, and providing a steady stream of cannon fodder to plot everything from bank robberies to world domination. In 1993, Hero Games released a sourcebook for VIPER, outlining the members of that evil organization and a number of ways for them to be used in a game.

Of course, that was 10 years, three companies, and one edition ago. So now the reconstituted Hero Games has produced a new VIPER supplement for use with *Hero System 5th Edition*, with *VIPER: Coils of the Serpent*.

VIPER's history and leadership has been revamped for the new version. The origin of the organization is somewhat less silly this time around, but not significantly. Instead of VIPER being the minions of a slacker space probe, they serve an African snake god, which is a little better. Sure, it's not quite "ex-Nazis," but it'll do.

Excessively clever origin aside, VIPER evolves in a fairly straightforward manner. The book provides some info that would be helpful in using VIPER and its forebears in a historical context (Pulp-, WWII-, Silver-, and Disco-Age games), although a few examples of equipment or vehicles for historical settings would have been nice. However, *VIPER: Coils of the Serpent* is designed to present the organization for a modern setting, and it does a fairly good job of that.

The biggest difference between this book and the original is the focus. The original had info on VIPER agents and equipment, and a lot of details on the super-forces VIPER employed. So many super-villains worked for VIPER that it became a little supers heavy. The original *VIPER* sourcebook, for example, had almost 80 pages of super-villain stats. This revision covers Dragon Branch (which houses all the super-powered individuals) in 20 pages . . . and the two books have almost identical page counts.

The supers include a few standard *Champions* villains (HalfJack, Ripper, & Oculon), as well as a revised Viperia. The improvements to Viperia are almost shocking. While the previous version was somewhat sub-par, the new one is a great character. The art, stats, and history are all improvements on the original, and make her a great threat to any superhero or team.

So what did they add instead of characters and adventures? Why, information about VIPER, of course! VIPER agents are expanded upon, with dozens of package deals allowing the construction of forces from the greenest grunts (no pun intended) to the elite Golden Serpents. There's also a list of equipment, from knives to pistols, rifles, flamethrowers and other implements of personal destruction. The chapter lists a selection of defensive equipment and personal transport devices as well as vehicles. These seem okay, although the Dragon Jet is a little clumsy-looking. There's a quick reference chart for the various weapons, which is useful, although it would have been better located in an appendix, rather than the center of the book.

Lots of information is included on the care and feeding of a VIPER nest, as well as several sample nests and info on

their leaders. The package deals for the various VIPER specialties are a nice variety. There are a number of standard combat specialists (snipers, melee/martial arts specialists, and knife fighters), in addition to technical and intelligence packages. Intelligence VIPERs handle interaction with the media and organized crime, or are specially trained to perform surveillance. Technical agents handle, as probably seems obvious, technical jobs such as computers and medicine. One technical package of interest is the Crime Evasion Specialist, an agent whose job is to destroy evidence left behind at the scene of a crime. It might have sounded a bit better as Crime Scene Eliminator, but that's a bit too much a cheesy pop culture reference.

Each of the divisions has a basic level I package, and level II packages that build on top of those. On top of those, there are some "special" VIPER package deals. These include biologically engineered semi-super agents, a package for nest leader, a serpent mage package, magician VIPERs, members of the Serpent Cult, and a package for VIPER ninjas.

The GM info for running VIPER is also useful. It takes certain source/game issues, such as hostage taking and over-enthusiastic telepaths, and explains how to avoid related pitfalls in their use. There are also guidelines for running agent battles that don't take longer than some Hollywood marriages. The GM chapters also include information on how to run VIPER in various genres (Champions, Pulp, SF, Fantasy) and as heroes (including the "VIPERs in the Dust" campaign). The Super Agents genre is handled in little more than a sidebar, which is somewhat disappointing. It also seems more oriented to being a G.I. Joe-type game, rather than a S.H.I.E.L.D. or UNTIL type game.

The book is reasonably clear of gaffes, although the division patches includes one for Moccasin division, of which there is none. The index also needs a little work, since none of the divisions are mentioned in it. The margins are a bit on the generous side, although a lot of the art is placed into the margins, and there are a fair number of sidebars. In all, **VIPER: Coils of the Serpent** is a worthy successor to the original VIPER sourcebook, and is an obvious choice for those looking to add this organization to their games.

--Justin Mohareb

Class Feats

by Owen K.C. Stephens

Feats are a great way to specialize characters. Two fighters of the same level can be radically different, if one has Power Attack and Cleave and the other has Point Blank Shot and Precise Shot. Feats allow characters to specialize and bend the normal rules of the game.

However, most feats are designed for specific roles, rather than classes. Any high-Strength character that expects to get into melee combat is going to find Power Attack useful. A ranger and a fighter may look a lot alike if both are focusing on two-weapon fighting, or if both are depending on ranged weapons. For some games this blurs the lines between classes, and makes characters seem less distinct. Only a few feats, such as Weapon Specialization, Spell Mastery, and Extra Turning are limited to one or two classes.

The idea of class-specific feats can be very helpful for giving characters options to be different from other PCs. It also allows two characters of the same class to focus on different aspects of their abilities, while maintaining game balance. This is especially useful in a campaign with multiple characters of the same class.

Many of these feats are inspired by abilities from older fantasy RPGs, allowing players to make *d20 System* characters act more like classes from a decade or two ago. Others are inspired by popular fiction, or the author's frustration at the limitations of a given class. These feats are at the upper end of power for feats, though none are truly unbalancing. If a GM wishes to tone down their appeal, each can have additional minor feats added as prerequisites (especially feats that just give skill bonuses).

A GM can limit feats' availability even more than they already are to create further specialization. For example, Mage Sight might be available only to wizards, while Witchlight is given solely to sorcerers, or only clerics of a particular church might gain access to Holy/Unholy Beacon. This is a good way to make different orders, guilds, and even kingdoms distinct from one another.

Class Feats

Barbarian Feats

Danger Sense	Barbarian 2+
Strapping	Barbarian 1+, Con 15+, Endurance
Surge of Strength	Barbarian 1+, Str 15+
Uncanny Senses	Barbarian 5+

Bard Feats

Hornblower	Bard 7+
Mage Sight	Bard, sorcerer or wizard 1+
Old School	Bard 1+
Sway the Masses	Bard 1st Level, Cha 15+

Cleric Feats

Begone	Cleric 5+, Wis 15+
Cloistered Priest	Cleric 1+
Holy/Unholy Beacon	Cleric 1+

Druid Feats

Animal Tongue	Druid level 1+ or cleric with animal domain 7+
Hearty Form	Druid 5+, Str 15+
Mighty Form	Druid 5+, Con 15+
Skilled Form	Druid 5+, Wis 15+
Swift Form	Druid 5+, Dex 15+
True Form	Druid 5+ Level, Wis 15+

Fighter Feats

Armor Specialization (heavy)	Fighter 4+, Armor Specialization (light), Armor Specialization (medium)
Armor Specialization (light)	Fighter 4+
Armor Specialization (medium)	Fighter 4+, Armor Specialization (light)
Armor Specialization (shield)	Fighter 4+
Weapon Group Focus	Fighter 6+, Weapon Focus
Weapon Group Specialization	Fighter 1+, Weapon Group Focus

Monk Feats

Free Fall	Monk 4+, Dex 13+
Hard Style	Monk 4+, Power Attack, Str 13+
Soul Strike	Monk 10+
Wall of Fists	Monk 6+, Dex 15+, Deflect Arrow, Snatch Arrows
Weapon Kata	Monk 4+, Weapon Familiarity
Weapon Style	Monk 4+, Weapon Familiarity

Paladin Feats

Foe Sense	Paladin 6+, Wis 13+
Healing Touch	Paladin 6+, Wis 15+
Stalwart	Paladin 9th or blackguard 5th, Cha 15+

Ranger Feats

Arcane Hunter	Ranger 4+
Greater Companion	Ranger 4+
Pathfinder	Ranger 4+
Terrain Focus	Ranger 1+, Wis 13+

Rogue Feats

Backstab	3d6+ sneak attack
Hide in Plain Sight	Rogue 17+
Tricks of the Trade	Rogue 5+, Cha 13+

Sorcerer/Wizard Feats

Mage Sight	Bard, sorcerer, or wizard 1+
Warder	Sorcerer or wizard 7+, able and eligible to summon a familiar
Witchlight	Sorcerer or wizard 1+

Feat Descriptions

Animal Tongue [Special]

You have learned the speech of animals.

Prerequisites: Druid level 1+ or cleric with animal domain 7+

Benefit: You may speak with animals, as if you always had a *Speak with animals* spell in effect.

Arcane Hunter [Special]

You have learned both arcane and divine magic while delving into the mysteries of the wilderness.

Prerequisites: Ranger 4+

Benefit: When you take this feat, you may add one spell of a level you can cast from the sorcerer/wizard spell list to your own spell list. You may prepare and cast this spell as an arcane spell, though if you wear light armor you may ignore arcane spell failure. At every second level after taking this feat, you may add one additional spell to your spell list. You may never have more arcane spells of a given spell level than you do of the level below it. Thus an 8th-level ranger taking this feat must select a 1st-level arcane spell, and cannot take a 2nd-level spell until 10th level.

Armor Specialization (heavy)

You have learned to use all heavy armor more effectively.

Prerequisites: Fighter 4+, Armor Specialization (light), Armor Specialization (medium)

Benefit: When wearing heavy armor, you gain a +3 dodge bonus to AC.

Armor Specialization (light)

You have learned to use all light armor more effectively.

Prerequisites: Fighter 4+

Benefit: When wearing light armor, you gain a +1 dodge bonus to AC.

Armor Specialization (medium)

You have learned to use all medium armor more effectively.

Prerequisites: Fighter 4+, Armor Specialization (light)

Benefit: When wearing medium armor, you gain a +2 dodge bonus to AC.

Armor Specialization (shield)

You have learned to use shields armor more effectively.

Prerequisites: Fighter 4+

Benefit: When carrying a shield (other than a tower shield), you gain a +1 dodge bonus to AC.

Backstab [Special]

You have learned to strike deadly blows from stealth.

Prerequisites: 3d6+ sneak attack

Benefit: If a target is unaware of you, you may make a sneak attack even if they aren't flanked or denied their Dex bonus to AC. You must be able to make a Hide check (so your target cannot be observing you, even casually) in order to backstab. As a standard action, you can make both a Hide and Move Silently check as part of a single melee attack. If you beat both the target's Listen and Spot checks, your melee attack gets your sneak attack dice. Note that creatures normally immune to sneak attacks are still unaffected, even by a backstab.

Normal: A character normally doesn't gain sneak attack dice unless his target is flanked or denied his Dex bonus to AC.

Begone [Special]

You can use divine power against foes of your religion.

Prerequisites: Cleric 5+, Wis 15+

Benefit: A cleric with this feat chooses one type of creature from the following list -- construct, dragon, elemental, fey, giant, magical beast, monstrous humanoid, ooze, outsider, or plant. The cleric may use a turn or rebuke undead check against creatures of the chosen type to turn them. This counts as a use of turn or rebuke undead. Creatures can only be turned, not rebuked (even if the cleric rebukes undead), and are treated as if they were 4 hit dice higher for all turning purposes. To turn creatures with SR, the cleric must make a successful caster level check.

Creatures turned cannot be destroyed, no matter how few hit dice they have.

Special: This feat may be taken more than once. Each time, the cleric chooses a different type of creature.

Cloistered Priest [Special]

You have turned your back on the trappings of violence, dedicating your energies to meditation and divine power.

Prerequisites: Cleric 1+.

Benefit: The Cloistered Priest feat grants a cleric an additional domain spell at each spell level, and casts all domain spells at +2 caster level. However, this additional power comes from an act of faith -- forgoing the use of armor. If the cleric wears anything that grants an armor bonus (including magic items, though not spells), he loses the additional domain spell per level until he gains an atonement.

Danger Sense [Special]

You often know when danger lurks.

Prerequisites: Barbarian 2+

Benefit: Any time a surprise round occurs, you may make a DC 10 Wis check. On a successful check you get to act in the surprise round.

Foe Sense

You can feel the presence of certain kinds of evil.

Prerequisites: Paladin 6+, Wis 13+

Benefit: A paladin with Foe Sense can use his detect evil ability to detect one specific kind of enemy, chosen from the following list -- aberrations, dragons, giants, humanoids, magical beasts, monstrous humanoids, outsiders, undead. This is part of the detect evil ability, and the paladin learns the number and location of the foes, but nothing else. Only evil foes of the chosen type are revealed.

Special: This feat may be taken more than once. Each time, the paladin chooses a different type of foe to detect.

Free Fall

Your ability to land without injury is amazing.

Prerequisites: Monk 4+, Dex 13+

Benefit: You may use your slow fall ability even when not in arm's length of a wall. You also gain a +2 bonus to all Jump checks.

Greater Companion [Special]

You have a more powerful than usual animal companion.

Prerequisites: Ranger 4+.

Benefit: When determining what animal companion you may have, your effective druid level is equal to your full ranger levels.

Normal: A ranger normally determines his animal companion from half his ranger levels.

Hard Style

Your fighting style involves many hard, powerful blows.

Prerequisites: Monk 4+, Power Attack, Str 13+.

Benefit: You may make a single unarmed attack as a standard action. This attack is treated as if it is a two-handed weapon (giving x150% your Str bonus to damage, and affecting your damage bonus from Power Attack).

Healing Touch

You are imbued with additional healing powers.

Prerequisites: Paladin 6+, Wis 15+

Benefit: The paladin may choose to have his weekly *remove disease* ability do one of the following things instead -- *cure serious wounds*, *lesser restoration*, *remove blindness/deafness*, *remove curse*, or *remove paralysis*. Each use takes one of the weekly *remove disease* uses.

Hearty Form [Special]

Your great Constitution stays with you when you assume a new form.

Prerequisites: Druid 5+, Con 15+

Benefit: When you assume a form with wild shape, you gain a +4 innate bonus to your Con, as well as 2 temporary hit points per hit die.

Normal: A druid normally takes the Str, Dex, and Con of a typical example of a form assumed, and his hit points do not change.

Hide in Plain Sight [Special]

You can escape the most severe scrutiny.

Prerequisites: Rogue 17+

Benefit: As long as you are in an urban setting (not in wilderness), you can make a Hide check even if being directly observed.

Holy/Unholy Beacon [Special]

You can turn/rebuke more powerful undead.

Prerequisites: Cleric 1+

Benefit: You gain a +2 bonus to your turn or rebuke check, as well as your turn or rebuke damage.

Hornblower [Special]

You have learned to combine martial and bardic talents.

Prerequisites: Bard 7+.

Benefit: You may cast bardic spells in medium armor without making an arcane spell failure check.

Mage Sight [Special]

Your innate magic allows you to see well in the dark.

Prerequisites: Bard, sorcerer or wizard 1+.

Benefit: You gain darkvision. If you already have darkvision, you gain low-light vision. If you already have both, your darkvision's range is increased by 50%.

Mighty Form [Special]

Your great Strength stays with you when you assume a new form.

Prerequisites: Druid 5th Level, Str 15+

Benefit: When you assume a form with wild shape, you gain a +4 innate bonus to your Str.

Normal: A druid normally takes the Str, Dex and Con of a typical example of a form assumed.

Old School [Special]

You come from an ancient tradition of bards who combine arcane and divine power.

Prerequisites: Bard 1+.

Benefit: When you take this feat, you may add one spell of a level you can cast from the druid spell list to your own bard spell list. You may select and cast this spell as a divine spell, using your Wis modifier to determine its save DC. At every second level after taking this feat, you may add one additional druid spell to your spell list. You may never have more druid spells of a given spell level than you do of the level below it. Thus a 1st-level bard taking this feat must select a 0-level druid spell, and cannot take a 1st-level spell until 3rd level.

Pathfinder [Special]

You can ably lead others through difficult terrain.

Prerequisites: Ranger 4+

Benefit: A ranger with this feat can guide others through rough or difficult terrain by finding the easiest path. If the ranger takes a standard action and makes a DC 15 Survival check, he gives any ally within 60 feet a +3 circumstance bonus to Climb, Jump, Swim, and Tumble checks for the round.

Skilled Form [Special]

You've learned to act as an animal does when you take its form.

Prerequisites: Druid 5+, Wis 15+

Benefit: When you wild shape into a new form, you gain any two skill bonuses or feats it has.

Special: This feat may be taken a second time, granting the druid up to 4 skill bonuses or feats of a form he assumes.

Normal: A druid normally does not gain any skill bonuses or feats of a form assumed with wild shape.

Soul Strike

You have learned to infuse your unarmed blows with your alignment.

Prerequisites: Monk 10+

Benefit: A good-aligned monk with this feat deals good damage with unarmed strikes. An evil-aligned monk deals evil damage with his unarmed strikes.

Stalwart [Special]

When wielding an aligned weapon, you become resistant to opposing magic.

Prerequisites: Paladin 9th or blackguard 5th, Cha 15+

Benefit: When you are holding a holy weapon (if a paladin) or an unholy weapon (if a blackguard) you gain Spell Resistance equal to your levels in paladin/blackguard + your Cha modifier. This SR only applies to spells with an opposed designator or opposed moral alignment (i.e.. A paladin's SR applies to spells and spell-like abilities with the Evil descriptor or cast by an evil foe, while a blackguards works vs. good).

Special: This feat may be taken more than once. Each time it is taken, it increases your SR by +2.

Strapping [Special]

You are able to survive harsh conditions for long periods of time.

Prerequisites: Barbarian 1+, Con 15+, Endurance

Benefit: You can operate on one half the normal amount of sleep, food and water without penalty for up to a week. After a week, you begins to suffer normally. You must have a week of rest and plentiful sustenance before you can use this ability again.

Surge of Strength [Special]

You are capable of amazing feats of Strength.

Prerequisites: Barbarian 1+, Str 15+

Benefit: Whenever you make a Str check to break or bend something, or a grapple check to escape a pin or grapple (but not for any other grapple check) you gain a +6 bonus.

Sway the Masses [Special]

You can convince crowds to think differently with your performances.

Prerequisites: Bard 1st Level, Cha 15+

Benefit: You may attempt to sway the mood and attitude of a crowd. This requires a use of your bardic music ability, and takes a full round action to begin. You make a Perform check, and treat it as a Diplomacy check against all characters hearing or witnessing the performance. If attempting to sway a crowd in your favor, this simply has a chance to change their attitude in your favor (see diplomacy). If you wish to sway the crowd for or against some other idea or individual (against new taxes, in favor of Baron Sweagan, etc.) you take a -10 penalty to the Perform check, and targets are considered initially hostile to the idea or person.

Once you've changed a crowd's mood, it stay changed as long as you keep playing (a standard action). If you play for 10 minutes, any creature brought to a Friendly attitude must make a Will save (DC 10 + ½ your bard levels + your Cha modifier) or have it's attitude changed until another effort is made to sway it.

Swift Form [Special]

Your great Dexterity stays with you when you assume a new form.

Prerequisites: Druid 5+, Dex 15+

Benefit: When you assume a form with wild shape, you gain a +4 innate bonus to your Dex.

Normal: A druid normally takes the Str, Dex, and Con of a typical example of a form assumed.

Tricks of the Trade [Special]

Along with everything else you've picked up, you;'ve learned a little magic.

Prerequisites: Rogue 5+, Cha 13+

Benefit: This feat allows a rogue to cast a limited number of sorcerer spells. The rogue chooses three 0-level spells from any spell list, and may cast any combination of them to a total of three castings per day. The rogue's caster level is half his rogue level.

Every other three levels the rogue adds one 0-level spell and one casting per day.

True Form [Special]

When you assume a form with wild shape, you gain more of its qualities than most druids.

Prerequisites: Druid 5+ Level, Wis 15+

Benefit: When you wild shape into a new form, you may gain any two of the following special qualities if the form assumed has them -- blindsense, blindsight, hold breath, ink cloud, jet, low-light vision, scent, sprint.

Special: This feat may be taken a second time, granting the druid up to 4 special qualities of a form he assumes.

Normal: A druid normally does not gain any special qualities of a form assumed with wild shape.

Uncanny Senses [Special]

You can sense the unnatural forces of magic and the undead.

Prerequisites: Barbarian 5+

Benefit: A character with uncanny senses can smell magic and the undead. Treat this as the scent ability, but it only applies to magic auras (those which can be detected with a *detect magic* spell) and the undead (creatures of the undead type).

Wall of Fists

Your ability to block arrows is unsurpassed.

Prerequisites: Monk 6+, Dex 15+, Deflect Arrow, Snatch Arrows

Benefit: You can deflect a number of ranged attacks equal to 1 + your Dex bonus (using the Deflect Arrow feat and subject to all its other restrictions). You may only snatch one (using the Snatch Arrow feat and subject to all its other restrictions).

Warder [Special]

You have bonded with a warrior who defends you.

Prerequisites: Sorcerer or wizard 7+, able and eligible to summon a familiar.

Benefit: You gain a special cohort rather than a normal familiar. The cohort's level is determined using the rules of the Leadership feat, though you automatically gain the bonus for great renown and having special powers. If you are a wizard, you use your Int modifier rather than your Cha to determine your leadership score.

Your warder cohort may only have barbarian, fighter, monk, ranger, rogue and paladin levels, and must be the same alignment as you. Since the cohort is similar to a familiar, it gains the alertness, share spells, empathic link, deliver touch spells, spell resistance and scry on familiar special abilities just as a familiar would (based on the sorcerer or wizard's level), though not any other familiar abilities or augmentations.

If a warder cohort dies, the caster suffers the same effects as if a familiar has died. A warder cohort may not be replaced for a year and a day since its death.

Weapon Group Focus [Special]

You have learned to use all the weapons of a given group more efficiently.

Prerequisites: Fighter 6+, Weapon Focus

Benefit: Choose one weapon group (listed below) for which you have Weapon Focus with at least one weapon. You gain the benefits of Weapon focus with all the weapons in the group you are proficient. For weapons you are not proficient, you suffer only a -2 non-proficiency penalty.

Weapon Groups

- *Axes*: Dwarven waraxe, battleaxe, handaxe, greataxe, throwing axe.
- *Blades*: Dagger, gauntlet (spiked), kukri, punch dagger, rapier, scimitar, short sword
- *Bows*: Shortbow, longbow, composite shortbow, composite longbow, crossbow (hand), crossbow (heavy), crossbow (light), crossbow (repeating).
- *Flails*: Flail Heavy), flail (light), net, nunchaku, spiked chain.
- *Great Blades*: Bastard sword, greatsword, falchion, longsword
- *Maces*: Club, greatclub, hammer (light), mace (heavy), mace (light), morningstar, sap, warhammer.
- *Polearms*: Glaive, guisarme, halberd, ranseur.
- *Scythes*: Kama, kukri, scythe, sickle.
- *Spears*: Javelin, lance (heavy), lance (light), longspear, shortspear, trident.

Weapon Group Specialization [Special]

You have learned to use all the weapons of a given group more effectively.

Prerequisites: Fighter 1+, Weapon Group Focus

Benefit: Choose one weapon group for which you have Weapon Group Focus. You gain the benefits of Weapon Specialization with all the weapons in the group.

Weapon Kata

Your fighting style closely incorporates a weapon.

Prerequisites: Monk 4+, Weapon Familiarity

Benefit: Choose one weapon your are proficient with that can be used with your flurry of blows ability. When dealing damage, replace the base damage of the weapon with your unarmed damage.

Weapon Style

Your fighting style incorporates an unusual weapon.

Prerequisites: Monk 4+, Weapon Familiarity

Benefit: Choose one weapon your are proficient with. You can use your flurry of blows ability with this weapon.

Terrain Focus

You are particularly familiar with a few forms of terrain.

Prerequisites: Ranger 1+, Wis 13+.

Benefit: You may pick a number of terrain types equal to your Wisdom bonus. You are very familiar with these types of wilderness, and gain bonuses when in them. The types are -- arctic, desert, forest, hill lands, jungle, mountain, ocean, plains, subterranean, and swamp. Within that wilderness type, you gain a +2 competence bonus to all Climb, Handle Animal, Hide, Knowledge (nature), Move Silently, Swim, and Survival checks.

Special: This feat may be taken more than once. each time, the ranger may select additional terrain types equal to his Wisdom bonus. Bonuses gained do not stack.

Witchlight [Special]

You can summon light at will.

Prerequisites: Sorcerer or wizard 1+.

Benefit: You can cast light at will as a free action, as long as you have a least one spell still available. You don't use the available spell, you simply must have some arcane energy left.

Stranger Synergisms

More Goodies for *Strange Synergy*

by Joe Taylor

The super-powers combat game *Strange Synergy* offers a staggering number of power combinations with its 100 Power Cards. Despite the variety it offers, most people who play the game quickly think of new powers, new teams, or new variant rules that would make the game even cooler. Almost everyone immediately thinks of other game maps they already have that *Strange Synergy* could be played on. The game even thoughtfully comes with markers for two extra teams that are left undefined.

Below you will find new variant rules, new team powers, and new Power Cards. Incorporating these into your *Strange Synergy* games will require some ingenuity, since additional figures, team cards, and power cards are not provided. Index cards can easily serve as Warrior Cards, new Gadgets can be hand-drawn and cut out (or existing unused Gadgets can serve as substitutes), and almost anything of the appropriate size can serve as a warrior's figure. New powers can also be written on index cards, but these will be obviously different than the Power Cards that come with the game; in fact, it would be nearly impossible for homemade efforts to duplicate existing Power Cards well enough that they could be shuffled together and dealt out without anyone knowing who got some of the new powers. A simple way around this is to go ahead and print the new powers on index cards (or whatever you like) and deal one out to each player, then deal out only eight Power Cards from the original set. Some of the new powers also require markers that do not exist in the original game -- notably "Flying," "Fallen," and "Shrunk" markers -- which can easily be produced by hand.

New Teams

Strange Synergy comes with flags, bases, figures, and Warrior Cards for four different team colors (red, green, blue, and yellow). It also comes with a base and flag for hypothetical orange and purple teams. Below are optional team powers for the four existing teams, and two different team powers for the orange and purple teams. In games that use more than one set of colors (with two green teams, two red teams, and so on), this allows teams with the same color to have different powers.

- **The Pirates (orange):** The Pirates draw an extra power card at the start of the game.
- **The Changelings (purple):** The Changelings can rearrange their powers. The player can swap any number of non-gadget power cards between his warriors on a one-for-one basis. This requires a strike by one warrior involved.
- **Gang Green (green):** These anthropomorphic plants regenerate 1 hit point at the end of any turn during which they do not move. This only heals damage, it does not allow them to exceed their starting number of hit points (though it can heal hit points provided by Power Cards as well).
- **The Gadgeteers (blue):** Once per turn, the Gadgeteers may add or subtract 1 to any roll they make involving a gadget. They may also pick up one gadget per turn without using a strike.
- **The Psychics (red):** Their impressive mental abilities allow them to add 1 to any Mental damage their powers inflict. They can choose for their basic strike to do 1 Mental damage, rather than Hard damage.
- **The Mutants (yellow):** For any attack power that is a Super-Power or Mutation, add 1 to the damage it does.
- **The Undead (orange):** When your warriors die, they become Zombies on your next turn, under your control. An Opponent with the Wake the Dead power can use the power to take control of one of your Zombies on a roll of 4+ but the effect only lasts one turn.
- **The Sorcerers (purple):** Add 1 to the to-hit roll of any Magic power. For any Magic power that does not require a to-hit roll, add 1 to its range, or increase its area of effect by 1 per side.

Map Hazards

Fans of *Frag* may want to add hazards to the map. Whenever a warrior first moves into a square containing a hazard, roll one die. On a 5+, the warrior managed to avoid it, otherwise, he suffers the effects of that hazard.

- **Flames:** 1 hit of Energy damage.
- **Spikes:** 1 hit of Sharp damage and lose the rest of your movement.
- **Acid:** Roll one die: 1-3 = 1 hit of Sharp damage, 4-6 = 2 hits of Sharp damage.
- **Ice:** You fall down! Lose the rest of your turn and place a Fallen marker on the warrior. A fallen warrior must spend 1 square of movement to stand up (remove Fallen marker) or 2 if he is still on a patch of ice and may then move normally. A fallen warrior is still subject to random movement and knockback, and may teleport, but when he arrives at his destination, he is still fallen.

When incorporating the new powers described below, it is possible to have more than one hazard occupying the same square. The hazards interact in the following ways:

- **Fire and Ice:** These cancel each other out. Remove both hazards from that square.
- **Acid and Ice:** These cover each other up; apply only the effects of the hazard on top.
- **Acid and Fire:** The flames consume the acid, resulting in noxious fumes. Remove both hazards from that square, and place a Smoke counter there instead. Any attacks through or in that square subtract 2 from their roll to hit. Remove the Smoke counter after one turn.
- **Spikes and anything:** You now have flaming, icy, or acid spikes, depending upon the mix. Apply the effects of BOTH hazards to any warrior that fails to avoid them.

Walls

Some players will want to use or create other maps to fight on. For maps that replicate buildings and similar structures, you may wish to include rules for breaching walls. Unlike obstacles which occupy map squares, walls run along the line between squares. A warrior on one side of a wall is unaffected by powers unleashed on the opposite side -- if a wall would block the line of sight between two warriors, those warriors cannot use powers on one another. Only Hard or Energy attacks can breach a wall. Mental attacks don't harm inanimate things and Sharp attacks merely poke holes through them. For Strikes that require a roll to hit, add 2 when targeting a wall. If a wall runs along the edge between squares, it is considered to be 'in' any square it touches. If a wall takes 3 or more hits from any single attack, it is breached on that square -- place a marker on it. A warrior may now move through the breach normally. To simulate tougher or weaker walls, raise or lower the damage required for a breach.

New Powers

GRENADA LAUNCHER

Gadget, Magnetic

Strike

Range: 6

Energy (1-3)

Auto

You have an unlimited supply of grenades and may launch one per strike. A grenade may be shot 6 squares in a straight line. A grenade may be launched into a square with a warrior, but not into a square with a solid obstacle.

Wherever a grenade lands, it explodes, doing 1-3 damage to all warriors within the 3 × 3 area around the target square. In addition, all warriors within the 3 × 3 area are knocked one square away from the target square. Warriors ON the target square roll randomly.

SHRINK RAY

Gadget, Magnetic
Strike
Range: 4
Special
4+

Your victim shrinks to one-half his normal size! Place a SHRUNK marker on him. At the end of his turn, the victim may roll one die, on a 4+, he regains his normal size. While shrunk, his movement, the range and area of any powers, and the damage his strikes do are all reduced by half (round down). Unless the warrior is a Mad Scientist, while Shrunken, he may only carry one gadget (Mad Scientists can carry two while shrunk).

ACID STREAM

Mutation
Strike, Defense
Secret
Range: 4
Sharp (1-2)
4+

You can shoot a stream of powerful acid from your body. If you shoot this stream at a warrior, you hit on a 4+ and roll one die. On a 1-3, the strike does 1 damage, on a 4-6 it does 2.

You can also shoot your stream at up to 3 squares in your range. The stream automatically hits. Place an acid counter on that square.

You take no damage from acid.

PYROMANIA

Super-Power
Strike
Secret
15 × 15 Area
Special
Auto

You can spontaneously create fires. On a turn in which you do nothing else you can place flame counters on up to three squares within your range. They will last until the beginning of your next turn. If you create a flame hazard in the same square as a warrior, he must immediately roll a 5+ or take 1 Energy damage.

KUNG-FU MASTER

Skill
+Strike, Defense
Secret
Range: 0 or 1

You are a master at hand-to-hand combat. Your basic strike hits on a 2+ and you may employ diagonals for your basic strike. You may parry Hard strikes directed against you. Roll a die after the strike hits. On a 4+, the strike is parried and has no effect.

JUMP

Skill
Move
Secret

Hard (1)

You can jump long distances. When jumping, you can only move in a straight line, but you may move one extra square. You leap over any warriors or hazards (though not obstacles such as pillars) and only physically occupy the squares you jump from and land in. You may land in a square occupied by another warrior -- if so, you may attempt to land on him. The victim may attempt to dodge by rolling a die. On a 4+, you fail to land on him, but still end up in the same square. If he does not successfully dodge, you inflict 1 Hard damage on him as you land. This does not count as a strike.

ICE SLICK

Super-Power
Strike
Secret
Range: 7
15 × 15 Area
Auto

You may use a strike to place up to 3 ice patches on any square within a 15 × 15 area not occupied by an obstacle or warrior.

You may also strike to place a single ice patch in the same square as any warrior within your range. That warrior must roll 5+ or fall down.

"I AM YOUR FATHER"

Special
Strike
Secret
Mental (1-6) & Special
Range: Infinite
Auto

You reveal to one warrior in your range that you are, in fact, that warrior's father (regardless of whether or not this is actually true). That warrior is automatically stunned (place a Stunned marker on him) until the beginning of your next turn, and suffers 1-6 Mental damage. Discard this power card after use.

REVIVE

Magic
Special
Secret
15 × 15 Area
4+

When a warrior dies within your area of effect, you may immediately attempt to bring him back to life. On a roll of 4+, you succeed and may spend 1 hit to instantly revive the dead warrior. He is restored to life with all the powers he had at the time of his death, and half his starting hit points (round up). Zombies cannot be revived.

EXTRA LIFE

Bio-Mod
Special
Secret

When you lose your last hit point, you may reveal and discard this card to have all your hit points restored.

EXOPORT

Super-Power
Special
Secret
9 × 9 Area

You have the ability to teleport other people and objects. On a turn in which you do nothing else, you may attempt to teleport any warrior (including yourself) or unowned gadget within your power's area to any other square in that area. Pick what you wish to teleport, the target square you wish to teleport it to, and roll one die; on a 4+ the teleport was successful. However, this method is less precise than the regular Teleport power. Roll for random movement to determine how far from the target square the victim actually arrives. This can place something outside your normal Exoport range. If a gadget would have been teleported into an obstruction, the teleport fails and the gadget stays in place. If a warrior is teleported into a solid object, he dies and any gadgets he had remain in his original location.

SURPRISE

Special

When you assign this power to a warrior, draw another Power Card and place it on top of this one, face-up. At the end of each of your turns, you must discard the power card on top of this one and draw a new power card. Assign the new power to this warrior and turn it face-up (even if it was secret). This does not count as a strike.

JINX

Magic
Special
Secret
5 × 5 Area

You may strike to attempt to jinx those around you. All warriors within your 5 × 5 area must roll one die. Unless they roll a 6+, they are Jinxed (place a Jinxed counter on them) until the beginning of your next turn. A Jinxed warrior subtracts 1 from all his to hit and damage rolls. Anyone attempting to hit a Jinxed warrior may add 1 to their roll.

TINFOIL HAT

Gadget, Magnetic
Defense

While wearing the Tinfoil Hat, you are immune to Mental damage, Confuse, Bewilder, Mind Control, Soul Swap, and stunning attacks.

ENTROPIC FIELD

Magic
Defense
4+

A magic field surrounds you, making it difficult for other warriors to successfully strike you. If any strike that would cause you damage hits you, roll one die. On a 4+, the strike misses anyway.

TIME BUBBLE

Super-Power
Strike
Secret
Range 4
Special
4+

You can attempt to place a warrior within your range (including yourself) in a time bubble. Write down that warrior's

position on the map and then remove his counter from the board. He is now outside the space-time continuum and is unable to interact with our reality. At the beginning of your next turn, that warrior reappears in the same place on the map where he was before.

MACHINE GUN

Gadget, Magnetic
Strike
Range: 6
Sharp (1-6)
4+/5+/6+

When you strike with the machine gun, it shoots three times. The first shot hits on a 4+, the second on a 5+, and the third on a 6+. Each shot does 1-6 Sharp damage if it hits. All shots are directed at the same target.

FORCE FIELD

Super-Power
Defense
Secret
Area: 9 × 9

On a turn in which you do nothing else, you may project a force field around any warrior within your 9 × 9 area (including yourself). Place a Force Field marker on him (or just use a Statue marker). Until the beginning of your next turn, that warrior is immune to Hard, Sharp, and Energy damage. However, that warrior is also trapped inside the Force Field; he may not move and may not strike to cause Hard, Sharp, or Energy damage.

VAMPIRE

Mutation
Strike & Special
Range: 0, 1
Sharp 1
4+

You have vampire fangs that drain life force from other warriors! On a successful strike you cause 1 Sharp damage. If your target loses a hit point, you gain one hit point at the same time.

CLOAKING FIELD

Gadget, Magnetic
Defense

You have a cloaking device that obscures your exact location. Any attempt to strike you is at a 2 to the roll.

SPINES

Bio-Mod
+Strike
Range: 0, 1
Sharp 1

Your body is covered with pointy spines. Whenever you perform a basic strike or are involved in a collision with another warrior, add 1 Sharp damage to any other damage you cause.

X-RAY GLASSES

Gadget, Magnetic
Special
Range: 6

Your X-Ray Glasses allow you to see all your enemies' powers -- even secret ones! On your turn, you may look at the secret powers of any one warrior in your Range (this power is not blocked by obstacles or walls). This does not count as a strike.

VENOM

Bio-Mod
+Strike
Secret

Your strikes that cause Hard or Sharp damage except for strikes with Gadgets poison your victim. Place a Poisoned marker on him. At the end of his turn, he must roll a die; on a 1-3, he loses one hit. If the warrior has any hit points healed remove the Poisoned marker.

SOUL SWAP

Magic
Strike
Secret
Range: 3
Special
4+

You can attempt to swap your soul with that of another warrior! If you succeed, you control that warrior's body and he controls yours. His counter now represents you (and visa versa), you have his powers (including team powers) and he has yours (including this one). You have the hit points of his body and he has the hit points for yours. You each still act during your own team's turn as before. Your victim wasn't expending the swap, though -- place a confused marker on him until the beginning of your next turn.

LIGHTNING

Magic
Strike
Secret
Range: 6
Energy (1-6)
4+

You can shoot magic lightning bolts. If your target is magnetic or is holding a magnetic gadget, your roll to hit him is at +2.

MAGIC MISSILE

Magic
Strike
Secret
Range: 8
Energy 2
Auto

When you fire the magic missile, it moves up to 8 squares in any (non-diagonal) direction. It cannot go through obstacles. The first warrior whose square the magic missile enters automatically takes 2 Energy damage.

Flight Powers

The following rules and powers add a new dimension to *Strange Synergy*: the ability to fly. Power cards which allow flight are considered to be a fifth category alongside Attack, Defense, Movement, and Special powers. With these

extra powers, the following rules governing flight must also apply.

Any warrior in flight should have a Flying marker placed on him. Though the warrior remains on the board, he is, conceptually, now considered to be above it. When a character is flying he is not considered to be an obstacle, nor does he consider other warriors to be obstacles. A flying warrior is not harmed by any hazard he flies over. Movement while flying is determined by the text of the Flight power card. Power cards which affect normal movement do not apply to flying movement; while flying, any Movement powers are effectively canceled.

When targeted by a ranged power or basic strike, a flying warrior is considered to be at a range of one extra square. For example: if a flying warrior is 3 squares away from a warrior on the ground who is trying to hit him with a Flame Blast (Range: 3). Because he is flying, the first warrior is considered to be 4 squares away, and out of range. Another example: a flying warrior can only be hit by a basic strike from a warrior on the ground if they are both in the same map square. However, to a flying warrior, the ranges stay the same (a flying warrior CAN perform a basic strike from one square away, even though a warrior on the ground could not hit him back). Powers that effect an area also effect flying warriors normally. Flying warriors cannot pick gadgets up off the ground.

Any strike which normally causes knockback has a chance of knocking a flying warrior to the ground. If the flying warrior rolls a 1-2 on one die, he falls to the ground, taking 1 Hard damage on a roll of 1-3. If a flying warrior must roll for random movement, a result of "1" means that he falls to the ground. If a flying warrior is susceptible to Magnetism powers, he can be pulled directly down. If a flying warrior is Stunned or turned into a Statue, he automatically falls (roll for damage as above). A warrior who is Frozen while in flight, stays in the air. If a warrior is killed while flying, his body falls straight down.

Now for some flying powers:

- **HOVER (magic)** -- Taking off and landing each requires 1 movement. Your flying speed is only 1 square per turn.
- **BAT WINGS (bio-mod)** -- You have giant wings and can fly. Spend 1 turn's movement to take off or land. Your flying movement is 3 squares.
- **ANGEL WINGS (Mutation)** -- You have giant wings and can fly. Spend 1 turn's movement to take off or land. Your flying movement is 3 squares.
- **SUPER FLIGHT (super-power)** -- Use your strike to take off; landing is free. While flying, your movement is 6 if you move in a straight line, 2 otherwise.
- **HYPER FLIGHT (super-power)** -- Use your strike to take off. Your movement while flying is 4 squares per turn. Landing is free.
- **CAPE** -- (Gadget) You take off by moving two squares in a straight line. Flying movement is 3 squares per turn. Landing is free.
- **RING OF FLIGHT (Gadget, Magic)** -- You may take off and land for free. Your flying movement is equal to your regular movement.
- **JET PACK (Gadget, Magnetic)** -- You may use your strike to activate or deactivate the Jetpack. When activated, the warrior is Flying and moves 2 squares per turn. The only way a warrior with a Jetpack can land is if he deactivates it, or he is pulled down with Magnetic powers.
- **HELICOPTER BEANIE (Gadget)** -- Spend all your movement to take off or land. You have a Flying movement of 1 square per turn.
- **AERIAL ACROBATICS** -- You are adept at flying. While flying, any attempts to hit you with a ranged power are at -1. You may fly diagonally. At the beginning of the game, go through the undrawn Power Cards and take the first Flight power you find. If you go through the deck without finding one, take the top two cards from the deck and pick one of them to keep. You can still keep this card.
- **STRAFE** -- While flying, if you spend all your movement to go in a straight line, you may strike at any point along that line and continue moving. At the beginning of the game, go through the undrawn Power Cards and take the first Flight power you find. If you go through the deck without finding one, take the top two cards from the deck and pick one of them to keep. You can still keep this card.
- **DIVE BOMB** -- While flying you may strike by flying into the same square as another warrior. You automatically land and collide with him, doing 1 Hard damage for each square you moved in a straight line

before hitting him. He is knocked back 1 square and takes damage if he hits an obstacle. At the beginning of the game, go through the undrawn Power Cards and take the first Flight power you find. If you go through the deck without finding one, take the top two cards from the deck and pick one of them to keep. You can still keep this card.

- **HEAVENLY GRACE** -- You may employ diagonals when you move and strike, but only while flying. At the beginning of the game, go through the undrawn Power Cards and take the first Flight power you find. If you go through the deck without finding one, take the top two cards from the deck and pick one of them to keep. You can still keep this card.

Strange Synergy with Two Sets

If you and a friend both have a copy of the game, you can use these optional rules to employ them both in a large game for five to eight players (or even 12 players if you use the orange and purple teams). With this many teams, the standard map would get too crowded. If you don't wish to create your own, larger map, you simply use each map from the two sets. Rather than comprising one large board, though, the two maps each represent a separate environment (whether you consider them to be arenas, pocket dimensions, or whatever). Warriors can move between the two maps by stepping from a square at the edge of one board to the corresponding square on the other board. For example, a warrior standing on square A, 1 of one board could step into square A, 1 of the other. As an option, players can agree to impose other restrictions on cross-map movement as well, such as not allowing teams to cross until only one is left on each map, or requiring a warrior take no other action on a turn he moves between maps.

With up to six teams, each team can still have a different color. With more teams, players will either have to find a way to represent additional colors, or double up on existing ones. Having two teams with the same color can not only be confusing, but can pose an unfair advantage to teams needing to capture that color flag. An even number of players allows for games where all the colors in play are duplicated. Teams sharing the same color can either compete or cooperate, leading to negotiations and back-stabbing. Of course, the game could do away with flags in favor of a "last team standing" approach.

* * *

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The Hunter's Society

by Peter V. Dell'Orto & Bob Huss

The Hunter's Society, or "Bounty Hunter's Guild" as it is called by non-members, is a society of big-game hunters and bounty hunters alike. Members of the Hunters Society style themselves as the greatest of hunters -- seeking and taking the biggest game. In a fantasy world, this is decidedly dangerous. Some members have deemed the most dangerous game to be sentient, and hunt humans (and their kin) as readily as others hunt monsters and prized animals. As a result of this mixed bag of targets, the entire society has gained the reputation as being willing (and able) to hunt anything . . . or *anyone*.

Setting

The setting for the Hunter Society assumes a "generic" fantasy environment -- monsters, human and non-human races, and at least a small number of armed bands of freebooting adventurers. The local government is assumed to be later feudal, with free cities, guild-based governments and Byzantine politics. Keeping those assumptions in mind, it can be adapted for most worlds easily. Stats are included for *GURPS*, but the Hunter's Society concept and organization is easily portable to other games systems and worlds -- especially *d20 System* worlds full of treasure-hording monsters and adventuring parties of various alignments.

The Society

History

The Hunter's Society is a combination "big game" hunting association and bounty hunting group. The Hunter's Society dates back to an informal circle of exceptionally adventurous hunters. "The Circle" consisted originally of seven hunters of great skill. They sought only the biggest, most dangerous game, and brought them down for sport and glory. Renowned for their hunting talent, they began to attract other would-be hunters (often influential nobles) seeking them as guides, instructors, and partners. After many years of this, they were contacted by a very high ranking lord for a serious problem -- helping track down the murderer of the Heir. Although the group had never hunted a man before, the challenge (and perhaps the potential reward) was too tempting to pass up. The Circle tracked down the killer and returned him to justice. In return, they were rewarded with a Patent to form a Guild. The Hunter's Society was officially born.

Over a century later, the Hunter's Society has undergone some changes. The Hunter's Society has stayed partly true to its "big game" hunting roots, but its renown in the Case of the Heir led to more bounty contracts. At first, these were regarded as exceptional and unusual. Eventually, the Hunter's Society simply added high-value bounty contracts to its normal "hunts." Bounty contracts have become a staple of their operations, so much so that the Hunter's Society is now known about equally well by the nickname "Bounty Hunter's Guild." It is said that if anyone will hunt a given target, they will -- dangerous bandits, renegade wizards, marauding dragons . . . anything.

Operations

The Society does not act as a group. Rather, its headquarters acts as a gathering place for like-minded hunters, a place to swap information and find fellows for dangerous expeditions, a place to make your brags and show your trophies. If special weapons are needed to take down specific prey, headquarters is the place to go to locate it. If you need to know what poisons work best on young dragons, some at the headquarters might know. The main headquarters is the common base and touchstone for Hunter's Society Members between, or getting ready for, jobs.

The Society can be contracted directly, although they will find out about any locally posted contract within 24 hours at

the most. The Society pays a small reward for notice of new contracts, so local informants, street urchins, and the like quickly pass on any information they get.

Actual hunts are largely conducted by members only. Some members like to have a lot of backup, hiring local toughs, professional mercenaries, or merely bringing along their personal guards (common amongst the rich and/or noble members of the Society). Members of the Society form their own groups. The Society has a mix of loners (such as Red Markmann, below), loose-knit groupings of hunters, and a few tight-knit groups that never hunt apart.

When hunting game, the Hunters will act as would be expected of any other type of safari -- they will bring appropriate gear and weapons, pack bearers and animals to move supplies, and anything else needed to bring down (or bring *back*) their chosen prey. When hunting Bounties, members will typically move in much smaller groups.

While big game is often hunted with lethal force, Bounties are typically worth a reward only when alive. Therefore, with few exceptions, Hunter's Society members are not duelists, nor are they assassins. Typically they will approach their bounty like a hunter approaching game -- with care, stealth, and with an aim to a quick takedown. A Hunter's Society member will not barge into a room, announce the impending arrest of a dangerous Barbarian Hero, and then fight it out. Nor will he assassinate someone in their sleep. The Hunter will instead try to choose the most vulnerable moment of the Bounty and quickly eliminate any possible resistance -- whether through displays of force, sleeping agents or other non-lethal attack, or actual physical subdual. Only if a Bounty is wanted "dead or alive" will he or she warrant immediate lethal attack.

Hunter's Society members stay fairly closely within the local laws. This is done out of convenience rather than an inherent sense of honor -- if there is not actually enforcement of local laws, most members will ignore them in pursuit of their target. Members exceed those laws to a degree that varies with the individual. The influence of the Society is quite strong, and as a result Society members are given much more slack than non-members by law enforcement. In some types of campaigns, this may lead to members being given Legal Immunity or Law Enforcement Powers of some type, or even allow them to "deputize" local militia or law enforcement to help them carry out an arrest!

Membership in the Society

In order to join the Hunter's Society, one must be sponsored in by a current member. According to the charter, this is to "require a potential member to gain the trust and respect of an Esteemed Hunter." One would normally gain this trust and respect by joining a hunt as a junior member or by demonstrating a sufficient skill at hunting on one's own. In practice, this usually means a new member is a friend of a current member. Actual skill at the hunt is the only way to gain rank and to survive the dangerous hunts required to impress one's fellow members, however.

A GM running a later "decadent" or degenerated Hunter's Society can make skill at hunting secondary to skill at Politics and/or Administration . . .

Membership in the society carries a small annual fee -- \$100 per year, due annually on the anniversary of the member's successful application.

Rank and Insignia

Hunter's Society members wear distinctive crimson cloaks. These cloaks are often reversible with a darker color (hunter green and black are common) to make them useful in "the field." They also wear rank badges -- a cloak clasp is most common, although rings and amulets are not unknown -- showing the symbol (and name) of their rank:

Ranks

- 0: Goshawk
- 1: Eagle
- 2: Falcon

- 3: Hippogriff
- 4: Griffon
- 5: Royal Griffon (as Griffon, but with a silver mane)
- 6: Roc
- 7: Dragon (in silver)
- 8: Grandmaster of Dragons (in gold)

Rank in the Hunter's Society is purchased as Administrative Rank. The cost is 5 points per level for ranks 1-8. Ranks 0-6 are the membership levels; Dragon and Grandmaster of Dragons are the ranks of the highest administration of the Guild. Those without any interest in administration never rise higher than "Roc." There is only one Grandmaster of Dragons, who heads a council consisting of Six Dragons. This Council of Dragons is based in the main Headquarters of Hunter's Society. Smaller sub-headquarters in other cities are typically run by a Hunter of Roc or Royal Griffon ranking, depending on the size of the city and the guild membership there. The Council of Dragons makes all of the decisions for the direction of the guild. Normally, this means setting fees, dealing with city politics, vetting special contracts, and so on. In a conspiracy-heavy campaign, a dark cabal of secretive old men with draconic titles directing a loose-knit society of bounty hunters is a campaign plot waiting to happen.

As a Patron, the Hunter's Society is a "reasonably powerful organization (assets worth 10,000 times starting wealth)." It has great wealth and a sizeable membership of skilled hunters. The Hunter's Society also is capable of putting pressure on local law enforcement and political organization on behalf of its members. The total base value is 20 points. They are typically available *Fairly Often* (9-), although in a campaign based in the same city as their Headquarters the frequency would be more like *Quite Often* (12-). For high-ranking members (rank 6+) frequency can be as high as *Almost All of the Time* (15-) to represent their ability to call on fellow members or assets of the organization on virtually no notice at all.

Skills, Advantages, Disadvantages -- Members of the Hunter's Society will almost always have a high level (often 16+) in Tracking, Shadowing, or both. Stealth is practically required for hunting game, and is very useful for creeping up on a bounty! Members will also typically learn Survival, Area Knowledge (of their main operation area, or that of their primary quarry), and other Outdoor and Animal skills. Those that concentrate on actual game instead of bounties will also find skill 15+ in Animal Handling very useful, as it gives a bonus when fighting animals. Combat/Weapon skills, especially non-lethal weapons skills like Blackjack, Bolas, or Lasso, are very common. Unarmed combat skills are very common amongst those who mainly hunt other men.

Advantages such as Alertness and Single Minded can be very useful to a Hunter's Society member in tracking down their target. Any combat advantages -- especially Combat Reflexes -- are useful if the prey resists or tries to ambush the hunter! Disadvantages unlikely in Hunter's Society Members include Laziness, Distractible, Unfit, or other disadvantages that reduce the ability of the Hunter to track and bring down his chosen game.

Headquarters

The headquarters of the Hunter's Society is a three-story red brick building at the very end of the Street of Guilds, which ends at the beginning of High Street, the beginning of the High Quarter. Hanging on bronze chains from a bar are a pair of signs, one below the other. The top sign is on a green field, and is a pair of deer's antlers and a griffon. Underneath is a black sign with an arrow and a sword crossed over a gold coin.

The first floor of the headquarters is poshly decorated. The door is heavy oak with a brass knocker; the main floor is a few feet below street level and upon entering you need to descend down six steps to reach the "main floor." The room opens to the right on a red-carpeted area with plush chairs surrounding small round tables. The room smells heavily of smoke. To the far right is a "bar" where visitors can check in. The first floor has a large glass window array and a cloakroom. Mounted on the walls are the heads (and sometimes claws, tusks, etc.) of particularly fierce creatures -- lions, tigers, giant reptiles, tusks of elephants and giant boars, etc. Non-members are never allowed past the first floor. The second floor features a bar for members, as well as featuring a meeting room and large "board" listing all posted contracts. The third floor is the meeting area for the Dragons. Both levels are very well decorated, and are richly furnished.

Example Member

Crag "Red" Markmann is an example of a very high-ranking and skilled Hunter's Society member. He has been a member for over two decades. He specialized in hunting humans, especially wizards and dangerous warrior types. He is very skilled and dangerous. Most members are much less capable; Red makes an excellent mentor for less experienced Society members or a dangerous foe for criminal PCs.

Crag "Red" Markmann

274 points

Age 36, 5'8", 215#, Red hair, beard, and mustache. Ruddy complexion, rosy cheeked.

ST 14 [45]; **DX** 14 [45]; **IQ** 12 [20]; **HT** 12 [20].

Speed 6.5, Move 5.

Advantages: Administrative Rank 5 (Hunter's Society) [25]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Comfortable [10]; Fit [5]; Patron (Hunter's Society, 12-) [40]; Toughness DR1 [10].

Disadvantages: Light Sleeper [-5]; Obsession (Never let a bounty escape) [-5]; Sense of Duty (Hunter's Society members) [-5]. Considers himself a "fair man"; Tries to take on the toughest cases; Does not particularly care about money [- 3].

Skills: Area Knowledge (Home City)-13 [2]; Area Knowledge (Home Country)-14 [4]; Axe/Mace-15 [4]; Axe Throwing-16 [4]; Brawling-15 [2]; Broadsword-16 [8]; Knife-14 [1]; Shadowing-16 [10]; Shield-16 [4]; Stealth-15 [4]; Streetwise-12 [2]; Tactics-10 [1]; Tracking-12 [2]; Wrestling-14 [2]. Arm Lock-16 [1]; Knee Strike-15 [1]; Off-Hand Weapon Training (Axe Throwing)-15 [4]; Stamp Kick-14 [1].

Equipment: Red usually wears concealed armor of some kind -- typically Chainmail made into *Fine* Brigandine (per GURPS Low Tech, page 68) -- and boots. He carries a *Fine* quality Thrusting Broadsword with a single edge and a red leather hilt. He also carries a Large Knife and either a Hatchet or Throwing Axe (depending on his chosen target) and a Medium Shield. He usually carries some cord for binding his Bounties and a hood for blinding them (to make escape that much more difficult). If expecting combat, he will wear a Pot Helm and Gauntlets.

Red prefers to take his targets by surprise and get the drop on them. He will use Shadowing (and his Area Knowledge if in his home area) to follow his target and try to take them while sleeping -- typically using Wrestling, Arm Lock, and then tying them up. Despite his rank, Red is relatively poor. His low regard for money means he typically spends his money on improving his equipment, helping out fellow guild members, or on research and bribes in his next tough case. Red is very thorough in researching his targets, using street contacts, his fellow guild members, and his own observations while Shadowing his target.

Other Variations

As presented, the Hunter Society is for a generic fantasy setting. However, it can work equally well in a Space Opera setting. Simply swap out wizards, dragons, and magical weapons for psychics, space-creatures, and blasters. The idea of a society of big game hunters fits well in some Victorian Age settings -- Space:1889 particularly, with Venus promising especially big game.

Uses in the Games

The Hunter's Society can be used in many ways in the campaign. Here are three broad possibilities for taking the Hunter's Society and changing how PCs will interact with it.

- **The Good Guys:** In this variation, The Hunter Society are portrayed as heroic. They face dangerous monsters for the good of society. The glory and wealth is useful and desirable, to be sure, but there is a general sense that the Society members would do it even without those incentives. They also hunt down dangerous criminals that society cannot deal with on its own. They provide a useful service and are generally respected, trusted by the Powers that Be and their servants (the Watch, the Bureaucracy, the local Knights, or whatever). The PCs can either be allies, members (the Society makes a useful Patron) . . . or enemies. If the campaign is centered around criminal or renegade PCs, even a do-gooder Hunter Society can be a dangerous enemy. A "good guys" Society would be unlikely to hunt non-dangerous criminals as a matter of principle. They would be likely to hunt man-killing monsters and spend rather less time hunting purely as sport.
- **Neutrals:** As listed, the Hunter Society makes a good "neutral" party in a campaign. Its members are given no special benefit of the doubt as to their motives -- the public generally believes they do it for the glory and money, but regard it as a benefit to society much as any other soldier or adventurer's monster or criminal hunting. The Hunter Society is generally mercenary, equally hunting minor criminals and dangerous criminals, "sport" animals and dangerous man killer alike. PCs of any stripe could find themselves under the Bounty List thanks to enemies or the authorities. Regardless of guilt or innocence, the Hunter Society will be willing to track them down.
- **The Bad Guys:** In this scenario, the Hunter Society is nothing more than high-class scum. Either they are known as Bad Guys but are untouchable due to the wealth and influence of its members, or they maintain a veneer of respectability behind which they hide their more nefarious activities. Perhaps they are gathering rare animal parts to sell to shady wizards, using "bounty hunting" as a screen for hunting humans for sport or as a part of criminal (or Government) contract killings. The Hunter Society as a "front" works very well for an Assassin's Guild hiding in plain sight. A group of generally heroic PCs could oppose such a group, forced to deal with skilled but unprincipled hunters as well as the wealth and societal influence of the group. A group of evil PCs would do well with such a group as their patron.

d20 System Notes

Members of a *d20 System* Hunter's Society will tend to have levels in fighter, ranger, and rogue, as those are the classes that most closely fit the archetypal member of the Society. A few members might have levels in bard; that class's abilities could make for an effective hunter-of-men. The Society might have a few members with some spellcasting ability (and thus levels in spellcaster classes), but serious arcanists or divine spellcasters tend to be drawn to other groups. Berserkers don't make terrific bounty hunters, so barbarians aren't common in the Society, either. Monks are even scarcer, though a monk's abilities could make for a fairly effective manhunter. Paladin members are probably entirely unheard of.

Among the myriad non-core *d20 System* resources, Atlas Games' *Crime & Punishment* has perhaps the most usable information for bounty hunters; it even has a bounty hunter core class. Most of the variant ranger classes (like the wildlander from FFG's *Midnight* setting, or Monte Cook's [variant ranger](#)) are equally adaptable, as are prestige classes like the commando from Mongoose Publishing's *Quintessential Rogue*.

Important skills for members of the Society include Gather Information, Knowledge (Geography), Knowledge (local), Spot, and Survival, as well as the usual "adventuring" skills (e.g., Climb, Jump, stealth skills, etc.).

In terms of feats, track is nearly mandatory for any serious hunter, either of men or beasts. Feats like Alertness, Stealthy, Self-Sufficient, and the like can serve to increase a hunter's skills to truly impressive levels. Improved Unarmed Strike and Improved Grapple can make it much easier for a bounty hunter to bring their target in alive.

Crag "Red" Markmann: Male human male Ftr2/Rgr3/Rog3; CR 8; Medium humanoid; HD 2d10+4 plus 3d8+6 plus 3d6+6; hp 55; Init +3; Spd 30 ft.; AC 21, touch 13, flat-footed 18; Base Atk +7; Grp +10; Atk +12 melee (1d8+4/19-20, +1 longsword) or +11 ranged (1d6+3, masterwork throwing axe); Full Atk +12/+7 melee (1d8+4/19-20, +1 longsword) or +8/+3 melee (1d8+4/19-20, +1 longsword) and +6 melee (1d4+1, heavy shield); SA favored enemy (humans +2), sneak attack +2d6; SQ combat style (two-weapon combat), evasion, trapfinding, trap sense +1, wild empathy +3; AL N; SV Fort +10, Ref +10, Will +5; Str 16, Dex 16, Con 14, Int 13, Wis 14, Cha 11.

Skills and Feats: Climb +7*, Diplomacy +3, Gather Information +6, Hide +12*, Intimidate +4, Jump +7*, Knowledge (Geography) +6, Knowledge (Local) +8, Listen +11, Move Silently +12*, Ride +5, Search +8, Sense Motive +6, Spot +13, Survival +8, Use Rope +9; Alertness, Endurance (B), Improved Grapple, Improved Shield Bash, Improved Unarmed Attack, Point Blank Shot, Two-Weapon Fighting (B), Track (B), Weapon Focus (Longsword). * *Doesn't include armor check penalty, typically -2*

Possessions: The **d20 System** version should have equipment appropriate for an NPC of his level. The statistics above assume: +1 chain shirt, +1 heavy shield, +1 longsword, masterwork throwing axe, two *potions of cure moderate wounds*, a *potion of bull's strength*, a *cloak of resistance +1*, and about 2,400 gp in other useful gear.

The Great Rope Bridge

by Brian Rogers

Preparation

This adventure serves four to six adventurers looking for some extra cheese. It tastes best with a pulp setting, but can be modified to fit any game that lacks air transport into uncivilized areas.

Ingredients

The Bridge

It stretches 50 yards across a 200-foot-deep chasm, crossing a river inhabited by local predators. Just looking at it brings to mind questions about mortality and gravity, but with other passage days away in either direction, this aged wood and rope bridge is the only option. Every cinema goer knows what happens before the final reel. Every gamer's palm itches to hold the machete that sends this lynchpin of local trade plummeting to the rapids.

But not today. Today your job is to protect it. From people just like you.

The bridge is moderately secure. It is wide enough to support the largest local vehicle (up to a 1940s vintage army truck) if you keep the wheels straight -- deviation damages the ropes -- and smaller vehicles can pass safely. It supports the weight of the next-to-largest local vehicle loaded with local product, but not a full load of the largest vehicle. The moorings are secure, ropes are basically sound and only scattered planks are weak, meaning that only the truly unlucky will have all they're standing on collapse. Of course, individual planks will creak, splinter, break or slip into a long cinematic fall.

No matter how unsafe the bridge looks, the locals trust it. They must; it connects modernity on one side to the vast uncivilized jungle on the other. Without it, the jungle's resources are unobtainable to the civilized ports and cities. Without it distant missionaries and explorers would be cut off. The societal pressures on the bridge equal any physical burdens. The bridge must hold.

The Commission

This is where the player characters come in. Something important is happening soon, and the authorities need to be 100% certain that the bridge will still be there. Why?

- There are military forces massing. The troops could be needed to garrison a fort, move against a native cult or take some other one-time rapid action.
- During wartime, this bridge might be needed against the possibility of a retreat or flanking maneuver. It's not a target right now but in a month it could be critical.
- An exploratory expedition is en route, and it would be embarrassing to have their preparations undone at the first step. Cautious investors are looking to avoid that embarrassment.
- Explorers could be returning, or a mercantile caravan comes through periodically. In either case they have sent messengers ahead and have committed to the bridge route.
- An infrequent pilgrimage is due, and the church must ensure that the desired path still exists, or the faithful will be trapped (or worse, unsaved).
- No reason is given. The PCs' enigmatic employer promised high compensation with no explanation. This is guaranteed to ratchet up the paranoia.

Regardless, the heroes must make sure it is standing in one month. After that, their employers will either replace them with cheaper guards or no longer have such an overwhelming need to secure it. Getting there should be easy, but once there the PCs must wait, watching the great rope bridge sway and creak dangerously when crossed, knowing that in their hearts they really, really want hack it apart during a spunky kid sidekick crossing.

Note: these scenarios all assume that the guards camp on the civilized side of the bridge, and require some modification if they either split up or camp on the jungle side.

Cooking Tips

Translate the Recipe

Unless a PC speaks the local language they'll need an interpreter -- one local merchant will part with his middle son at an exorbitant rate (in advance) with the heroes' promise that he'll be returned unharmed. The boy is fluent in the local language and has a grasp of a civilized tongue (though perhaps a language that not all the PCs know), but has a disconcerting tendency to translate long local speeches as single sentences. The boy's trustworthiness and competence is left to the GM; if the players want genre tropes he'll become a snake-tongued betrayer or a beloved new sidekick. If not, he's a useful tool that elicits some suspicion and must be returned unbroken or the guard's profit margin is shot.

Heat Slowly

The PCs have several days of waiting, watching roughly 12 locals per day cross the bridge. Some are regulars, others cross and are never seen again. All will grudgingly fork over tolls if the players decide to make some cash (though word of this will get back to their superiors after it's over). The guards will notice looks of curiosity, resentment, fear, and suspicion, but questioning anyone reveals that the locals don't argue with armed bands: they'll be all smiles when approached. The guards should quickly realize that they aren't wanted, with increasing feelings that something is about to happen.

Despite the chilly reception, local merchants pester the guardians to buy, sell, or trade, offering up local wares, foodstuffs, alcohol, and spouses/liaisons. Players being players, they'll no doubt suspect poisons, traps, theft, assassination attempts, and con artists, but they're only partially right. First, the local alcohol is foul stuff that has a mild soporific for an extra kick, so guards will get drunk faster than expected and have hangovers that recall a Busby Berkeley dance number. Second, the most gregarious trader isn't returning for months, so he's willing to cheat the guards with cheap goods and clumsy rates of exchange, but won't risk outright theft. Finally, accepting locals as camp followers has ramifications, mentioned below.

The Spices Under the Sauce

Much as the guards might be worried about native attacks, the first sign of trouble comes from their countrymen: a group of three "civilized" people and their local guides, guards and diggers approach in the largest viable truck. The truck slows to a stop in front of the PCs and the three exit the cab.

The oldest, Professor Jenkins, starts speaking to the guards, happy to have contact with another person who speaks his language. Jenkins is an academic who'll gladly describe their expedition to a lost jungle temple, detailing the attendant advancements for scholarship. Before he reveals too much he is admonished by their driver, Smith, not to bore the guards. Smith has a square jaw, corded muscles and several weapons, and he starts corralling his companions back into the truck. Meanwhile the third occupant, Judy (obviously the Professor's daughter) has been taking photos of the bridge while fending off the advances of the expedition's greasy foreman, nicknamed "Happy."

If the guards don't warn Jenkins about the bridge's limits, Smith will declare it "too close to risk" and have Happy order the burly, shovel-wielding men to follow the truck on foot. If the players taken this opportunity to question the work crew, they'll learn "your countrymen are crazy, that they won't even make it to the temple and even if they did they'd . . ." This is when Happy shuts them up with a finger across the throat gesture. He ushers them across the bridge while

making unctuous good-byes to the guards. Within moments the workers are back in the truck and the Jenkins expedition vanishes into the jungle.

Smuggle in the Extra Sauce

Unbeknownst to the guards, the bridge is the route for a local band of drug traffickers (with the drug in question based on the campaign). The men occasionally sample their wares, and are prone irrational confidence when imbibing and to paranoia when coming down. Firmly convinced that the guards are there to catch them in the act (regardless of any evidence), they haven't moved any goods across the bridge. Now, late in their deliveries, they have conceived a desperate, cunning plan: They'll create a distraction on the civilized side of the bridge and then rush all three carts across *at the same time* before the guards notice. They'll vanish into the woods before the guards have any chance to follow them. Right.

At a perceived *great personal risk* the traffickers sneaked two of their number to the civilized side (assuming the guards even care about the locals, they might spot two shaky gentlemen crossing the bridge during the day; the men, if questioned, will complain of hangovers). However, on the other side they squabbled about the best form of distraction, and each has their own master plan.

The first hires the camp followers to distract the guards. This includes arguments, amorous advances, or anything that keeps the guards minds off the bridge. If the guards avoided attachments, the trafficker procures candidates at the closest village, alternately threatening and paying them to describe themselves as "gifts" from the gracious villagers. The traffickers have dangerous reputations, so the camp followers will stick around and try again even if thrown out.

The second lights a large fire in the jungle, hoping that the flames will distract the guards. This was the initial plan, so the bridge run starts shortly after the flames appear. The fire may burn out of control (1d6: 1-2 stays under control, 3-4 looks like it threatens bridge and camp, 5-6 actually threatens bridge and camp), but in any case it will cause camp followers to panic. The flames starts about midnight, or three hours after the camp followers start acting up.

At the sight of the flames, the traffickers try to rush way too much weight across the bridge at once. Guards on the jungle side have some chance of stopping them, but the traffickers will try to run them down. There are three carts, and once either two carts are midway across the bridge or all three are on the bridge at once, a single rope snaps. At that the horses panic and the front cart gets caught in the ropes. The next crashes into it a second later.

The GM should pull out a 20-sided die set at 20 (or some other visible method of tracking damage) and count down one number every 12 seconds of game time. Once the counter hits 0, the bridge collapses. Describe the increasing damage to the bridge as this chaotic spectacle continues. The guards have four minutes to get half the weight off of the bridge. Adding another six people or one mount speeds the countdown to one every six seconds. Adding another vehicle increases it to two every six seconds. What is needed is to either get the horses off the bridge, get the contents of the carts off the bridge, or somehow get one to one and a half carts and their cargo off the bridge. Of course, the panicked drug traffickers will both resist and flee, the fire might be approaching the bridge (if it does, it will do so in five minutes, and the horses will refuse to go in that direction) and the camp followers will be very much in the way.

Once the guards have rescued the bridge, leave the d20 out. They're barely halfway through the month, and the damage to the bridge won't heal on its own.

What to do with the Traffickers is a side question. If let go, they will flee and never be seen again. If handed over the camp followers' village, the locals will dispense justice. Still, if the guards want to hold them captive or discuss the morality of the situation, let them. The bridge remains, swaying, waiting for the next threat.

Just Add Water

Three days after drug trafficker fiasco the rain starts -- a heavy native rain shower that the locals say will likely last for four days. While the bridge can normally handle this downpour, if it has had its structure reduced to 15 or less it takes an additional one point of damage per day during the storm. The heroes can stop this damage but doing so requires

great personal risk out on the bridge in the rain. Any competent efforts will prevent damage. The locals will refuse to help and call them mad, saying no one goes out in the rains.

This means the guards should be surprised when a pair stumbles from the jungle with every intention of crossing the bridge, storm or no. This is a civilized missionary and a local, who has been poisoned and needs medicine. Of course, the planks give way underneath them, leaving the missionary dangling precariously as his companion collapses. A heroic rescue is obviously called for, which forces the heroes onto the bridge during the worst of the storm. Once across the missionary asks the use of a vehicle, but with or without further help the couple makes their way to civilization, the local wasting away before the guard's eyes.

The local's condition should be outside the range of any of the PC healers (or at least any such healers on the jungle side of the bridge). It also presages future events; he was damaged by contact with some local malevolent force that was disturbed by something. The wounded local will mumbles deliriously, which translates to something like "don't steal from the dead men."

Feeds 10,000 Damned Souls

Five days later (three days before the commission's end) the guards witness a disturbing sight: the Jenkins Expedition truck barreling out of the woods, heading straight for the bridge! Such a rapid crossing will certainly damage the bridge. Stopping the truck is as easy as getting in the way (and then backing up as the breaks fail to catch for a second).

Once they stop the truck, they find Professor Jenkins, wild eyed, at the wheel. Smith has a broken leg and arm and is being tended to by Jane. The Professor starts ranting about how they must keep moving, because the ghosts are following them. Smith issues perfectly sensible commands about crossing the bridge and cutting it down to keep them safe. Happy slips from the back of the vehicle (surprising everyone, who thought him dead in a temple trap) and grabs Jane, threatening her with a knife unless they get him away from the dead men. During this tableau, ominous drums start in the jungle.

The PC guards have several problems. Any minute an army of 200 zombies will pour out of the woods, intent on killing all of the Jenkins expedition except for Smith. They'll also kill anyone who try to stop them, which means that Smith will make himself a target and the PCs are likely to join him. The best tactical position for fighting these things is on the other side of the bridge, but that would undoubtedly destroy it. Smith is all for that; he *is* a pulp adventurer after all, and he's been dreaming about cutting the thing down since he saw it.

The zombie army appears to be an unstoppable thing, but a concerted effort from tactically minded PCs might defeat it. The Zombies are vulnerable to fire and salt, plus any faith-based powers the heroes have at their disposal. They attack in waves, with first 20, then a pause, then 40, pause, 60, pause then the final 80. The pause length is just enough time for the heroes to develop new plans and hunt for another item the zombies want -- one or two rounds in most systems. The Zombie's are magical in nature, and some will try to grab and kiss targets on the mouth, which is almost instantly fatal.

If the heroes turn their back on the Jenkins Expedition, they will try to escape across the bridge; just because the guards are willing to sacrifice themselves to save the bridge doesn't mean they have to! The Jenkins vehicle causes 2 point of damage to the bridge per six seconds, taking down ropes and tearing up planks, and take 12 seconds to cross. Once anyone but Smith reaches the bridge, the Zombies rush as a mass to reach them. This also damages the bridge, as the zombies don't subscribe to fire codes and 100 will try to cross at once. That does 1 point of damage per 6 seconds, and the zombies will take 24 seconds to cross. This gives the Jenkins people 12 seconds on the other side to cut the bridge down and send 100 zombies to their doom -- assuming the PCs don't stop them.

What the Zombie Army wants is anything stolen from the temple, and everyone but Smith has something.

- The Professor has a carved rock in his pocket that "will prove my theories about man's origins, and I'm not giving it up!" He will not hand the stone over, and it must be taken from him -- living, unconscious or dead.

Happy has a gemstone amulet under his shirt, which he'll give up if the PCs convince him it will stop the zombies. He also has a ceremonial knife in his boot which he has forgotten, but will remember when the situation looks bleak.

- Jane innocently insists that she took nothing, and in the strictest sense, she didn't. However, she has a roll of film in her bag and another half-shot roll in her camera under the passenger seat. The Zombies won't stop until they have those too.

Once the army gets what it wants, it shuffles back into the jungle to the fading sounds of drums.

Cleaning Up

Two days later is the end of the PCs' contract. Whomever they were waiting for arrives (though if it was more troops the GM might have them arrive early as a PC-saving coincidence. Likewise, if it wasn't more troops they might still turn up early as another complication if the PCs have it too easy). If the bridge is still there the guards will be rewarded, but if not they might find themselves with nothing but a chasm between them and some irate patrons . . . or worse -- on the same side!

Survivors of the Jenkins Expedition offer some thanks, but live in their own solipsistic world and spend most of their energy cursing this venture's wasted effort (or how their finds will set them up for life). They see themselves as this story's heroes, with the PCs just guards of above average competence. The Zombies naturally crumble to dust and blow away once killed, so the PCs have no evidence of the expedition's treachery, greed or stupidity to present to their employers.

Side Salad

Some players might decide to repair the bridge after the drug traffickers incident. This should be encouraged, but it's unlikely that the PCs have the tools they need. The local villagers have such tools, but they are hours away and not for sale; from the villagers' perspective, if the PCs are going to claim the bridge they should maintain it. They will follow orders to fix it, albeit with passive-aggressive loafing and incompetence.

Concerted effort by the PCs repairs one point of damage to the bridge every other day. If the PCs corral the villagers this improves to one point a day. There is only enough material to restore five points without cutting down trees and fashioning more ropes, which slows the repairs by half. The GM should ad-hoc any magical repairs, keeping them to at most +1 point per day.

Remember that the four-day storm comes just three days after the drug traffickers, and the Jenkins Expedition's return less than a week after that -- The PCs will be hard pressed to restore the bridge to pristine condition before the zombie army arrives.

Extra Spice

This is intended for a Pulp-era game with tough zombies and 1920's-30's technology.

Transporting it to a fantasy setting requires making the Jenkins vehicle a sturdy large horse drawn wagon, and Jane's camera becomes a bound sketchbook (with some loose sheet sketches in her bag). The Zombies should remain creditable threats, and not be eliminated by a few faith-based tricks or massive flame spells.

Similarly, a Victorian Exploration game requires converting the truck to a cart, but the photography equipment can remain, albeit bulkier.

In a no-magic game, the Zombies are a cult using the myth of the Zombie temple as a cover. Their strength and durability come from plentiful quantities of the same drugs the traffickers tried to move across the bridge. Their kissing attack is actually spitting out a poison to which they are inured -- it is this poison that has cursed the

missionary's friend.

If used in a Horror setting (such as Eden Studio's *All Flesh Must Be Eaten*), the victorious PCs have a new problem. the missionary's friend will have carried the zombie curse to the nearest city. How they want to deal with that is a story for another day.

Pyramid Review

Parapsychologist's Handbook (for Call of Cthulhu)

Published by [Chaosium, Inc.](#)

Written by Chris Jerome

Cover by Meghan McLean

Illustrated by Simon Monk and Jessica

110-page tape-bound b&w softcover; \$14.95

It is an unfortunate truth that Chaosium's release schedule has a rather elastic quality to it. Although there are several supplements promised for release in the relatively near future for *Call of Cthulhu*, devotees of the game have learned to be patient when waiting for the arrival of any such supplements upon the shelves at their local gaming emporium. Fortunately, Chaosium has decided to explore a new approach that plugs the long gaps between releases. This is a series of Monographs made available from the stacks of the Miskatonic University Library Association, the first being the *Parapsychologist's Handbook*, the second being the nearest to an official publication of the *End Times*, the campaign setting the dark and subtle future of mankind and the Mythos.

Each Monograph is *not* in fact an official release distributed through the normal channels. Rather, they can only be purchased directly from Chaosium themselves, and instead of being sent out as an electronic PDF document as is the current mode, each is printed out by Chaosium, tape bound, and then mailed out to the purchaser. Chaosium believes that each Monograph is worth the time and attention of *Call of Cthulhu* devotees, but as a publisher they lack the time to do anything more than read the manuscript through and check its suitability and interest. Should a Monograph prove popular, then they may actually give it a proper release. Which begs the question: If a Monograph *does* prove popular, and the publisher feels that it warrants proper publication, will the *Call of Cthulhu* fan want to buy it twice?

The other problem with this publishing method is the lack of time and attention given to the layout and style of the book. To quote the front of the *Parapsychologist's Handbook*, "Monographs published by the *Miskatonic University Library Association* are works in which the author has performed most editorial and layout functions. These are deemed by the trustees to offer significant value and entertainment to our patrons." To be blunt -- unfortunate, though necessary -- the trustees of the Miskatonic University should not have left any of the editorial and layout functions to the author. Both, in all honesty, are badly handled, and in terms of the editorial function, appallingly so! Inconsistent in terms of punctuation and grammar, that single read-through by the Chaosium staff was unquestionably enough to have spotted and highlighted all of this manuscript's herd of mistakes and inconsistencies. When you consider that this Monograph is the equivalent of a PDF document printed out and sent out by the publisher, then the *Parapsychologist's Handbook* is exceedingly pricey in comparison with the many titles currently available in that format, the majority of which possess infinitely superior production values. The book also suffers from the inclusion of some dreadful artwork, much of which feels inordinately out of place of this book.

If this Monograph suffers from slipshod production values -- with even the book's introduction appearing to begin mid-sentence -- there remains the question of the actual content. The subject matter is not an unfamiliar one to the *Call of Cthulhu* game, having been touched upon in countless magazine articles and also in a number of supplements. After all, even if the average group of investigators is prying into something as outré as the Cthulhu Mythos, they still looking into the paranormal in their own way. But the *Parapsychologist's Handbook* is the first supplement for the game that provides an in-depth treatment of the subject. This is for *all* three main eras of the game -- the 1890s, 1920s,

and *Cthulhu Now*; further, it is authored by an expert on the subject. Chris Jerome has worked as a psychic researcher, and brings his experience to the page in what is designed as a sourcebook for both the player (in creating and roleplaying an experienced parapsychologist character) and the Keeper (in creating and running adventures built around the science of parapsychology). The included material and rules is dual-stated, suitable for both [Cthulhu d20](#) and the standard *Basic Role-Play* version of *Call of Cthulhu*.

The first part of the *Parapsychologist's Handbook* covers the nature of the parapsychology campaign, actual investigations (how to approach and conduct one as well as what equipment to take), viable methods, and a number of different occupations. The equipment list is particularly well done, pleasingly illustrated in places with actual photographs. The highlight of these photographs is the one of the ghost hunter's toolkit assembled by the famous English ghost hunter, Harry Price. It also appears in the book's frontispiece at a much larger scale, which affords it some more detail; however, a much bigger reproduction, marked with the kit's contents, would have been even better. Both the advice on investigating psychic phenomena and using psychics in such an investigation turn out to be common sense, and is in some cases obvious if you think about it, but the inclusion is welcome nonetheless.

The various parapsychology occupations are a mixture of old and new templates. The Psychical Researcher is suitable for use during the 1890s and 1920s, whilst the Parapsychologist reflects a more modern approach. Both occupations employ the *same* template. The Ghost-Hunter is for investigators that are less inclined towards laboratory work, while the Parapsychologist -- Spontaneous Case Specialist is another take on the modern Psychical Researcher who works in the field. The other related occupations are the UFOlogist (useful also for a *Delta Green* campaign), the New Age Seeker or Wiccan, the Stage Magician, the Professional Fake Medium, plus the Psychologist and the Professor, which, along with the Ghost-Hunter, are taken from the *Investigator's Handbook, Vol. 2*. Not one of these occupations involves the use of psychic abilities or powers; their like is covered elsewhere in the book.

Chapters in turn are devoted to Ghosts and Hauntings, Investigating Poltergeists, and Spiritualism and Mediumship. How each is regarded and investigated during the three eras is covered, as well as the various types of phenomena that might be encountered, along with a timeline that runs right up to the modern day. These chapters can be read by the players and the Keeper, providing for the players enough information to role-play a parapsychologist investigator in a knowledgeable way, while also giving the Keeper an indication of the skills an investigator will require, and a fair degree of background material.

Particularly interesting is the chapter on Spiritualism and Mediumship, the movements for which will be popular and prevalent in campaigns set in the 1890s and 1920s. Besides looking at both types of Mediumship -- physical (table-turning, ouija board, ectoplasm and spirit photography) and mental (psychic surgery, automatism or automatic writing), it also gives several Spirit Guides for the art of Trance Mediumship. These are to be roleplayed as NPCs and are very colorful characters that play up to the archetypal clichés you would expect to encounter at a séance.

Psychical research need not be unorganized nor an amateur affair, and several investigative organizations are detailed to that end. Most notable of these is the SPR, or The Society for Psychical Research, founded in 1882, and its American counterpart, the ASPR (The American Society for Psychical Research), founded two years later. The means of joining the SPR and the ASPR are listed for all three eras, along with how to get published in the SPR's quarterly magazine, the *Journal of the SPR*. Further, Appendix B (and *not* Appendix C as it should be in the *Parapsychologist's Handbook*, but since there are actually two Appendix A's . . .) provides a list of many of the more interesting issues of both the Proceedings and the Journals of the SPR. Available on the Internet to SPR members, these might make more-than-plausible player handouts, but are here summarized and given possible skill increases should an investigator read them.

The use of the SPR should be roleplaying grist to the Keeper's mill, as should the many descriptions -- though not their game stats -- of some very interesting NPCs, ranging from the expected Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Harry Houdini to the lesser known, such as Harry Price, Ghost Hunter, and the Physical Medium Eusapia Palladino. In particular, the investigators can become involved in the psychical politics of between the wars, when a schism in the ASPR led to the foundation of the Boston Society for Psychical Research. This split ties into the rules for differing worldviews or Paradigms of how the unexplained can be explained.

There are three such Paradigms discussed, the first being the Spirit Paradigm, a belief in the existence of the astral plane, of spirits that survive beyond death and that spirits can also be of a non-human origin -- spirits, faeries, demons, gods and the like. Opposing this viewpoint and denying the existence of spirits, is the Psi Paradigm, which argues that the paranormal cannot yet be explained by science. It should be pointed out that the magic of the Mythos falls under this Paradigm. In game terms, an investigator's Power attribute would reflect the strength of their spirit under the Spirit Paradigm, but under the Psi Paradigm it would be their latent psychic potential. The third paradigm is the Sceptic, which holds that all paranormal events are in fact delusions and its adherents actually investigate why people believe that they have seen something out of the ordinary. Even more radical is the Skeptic Paradigm, which simply states that any paranormal happening is impossible! Both Lovecraft and Houdini are Skeptics.

These three Paradigms predominate at different times, with the differences between the Spiritual and Psi Paradigms being the cause of the schism that struck the ASPR. Their use is of course, optional for the Keeper, but they can be used as a method of modeling the "reality" of their campaign. Even if the Keeper chooses not to use any of the three (or four), they can still be employed as a useful guide to how an NPC or investigator interprets the paranormal. Examples from a couple of Chaosium's campaign help illustrate how these Paradigms could work.

The latter half of the *Parapsychologist's Handbook* is for the Keeper's eyes-only. Besides guidance on creating and running parapsychological campaigns (including having the Keeper help out the paranormal investigator character with suggestions and ideas that an *actual* investigator would have), this is where the rules themselves are given. Essentially these are organized as counterpoints to chapters given in the earlier player's section. Thus in the chapter on "Parapsychology in the Lab," the rules detail how to simulate Zener Card tests, Drawing Tests, RNG (Random Number Generator) Tests and so on. The Paradigms are also applied to some of the phenomena, such as explaining poltergeist activity under both the Spirit and Psi Paradigms. Under either, the poltergeist would be modeled by using the statistics for the Ghost, and giving it a special power or two, such as telekinesis or pyrokinesis, or the *Levitate* spell. Alternatively, they might be modeled using statistics for Demons or Fairies (statistics are given for the Pixie for both game systems). Hoaxes and mistakes are also discussed, as well as how paranormal phenomena can be explained by the activities of Mythos entities -- the Lloigor and telekinesis, Fire Vampires and pyrokinesis and so on.

The Spirit Paradigm explanation for poltergeist activity is relatively easy to explain, whereas the currently accepted Psi Paradigm explanation -- RSPK or Recurrent Spontaneous Psychokinesis -- requires more work upon the part of the Keeper. RSPK explains poltergeist activity as an expression of PKE, or PsychoKinetic Energy, by a human mind that is having a nervous breakdown outside of its head. The Keeper will need to create and build a reason for this, developing a credible cast of characters with whom the investigators will need to interact with in order to get to the cause of the outbreak.

The *Parapsychologist's Handbook* also provides one more approach to the creation of psychic characters. Not as an occupation to be represented as a template, but rather as abilities beyond whatever job or training a character might possess. Like much of the rules given in the rest of this supplement, these are a very low-key affair and in many cases open to interpretation. The idea here is that these abilities are uncertain in their effect, and in some cases, might well leave the psychic open to influence or attack from Mythos entities. And of course, if R'yleh should rise or the frigid winds of Ithaqua gust around the psychic while they are in the Arctic North, then their sanity is likely to suffer . . . While how Mythos magic interacts with the paranormal is described, along with a number of new Psychic feats for *Cthulhu d20* (including Divination, Aura Reading, Psychic Self-Defense, Psychic Attack, and Astral Projection), there are no rules given for the use of psycho-kinesis nor telekinesis. These new *d20 System* feats are slotted into an appendix of their own, while the other appendices give a description of the many papers and journals published by the SPR, and a set of badly pixellated Zener Cards. More useful is the appendix of Sinister Seeds, seven decent adventure ideas ready for the Keeper to flesh out.

The *Parapsychologist's Handbook* is an excellent supplement, but one that is very much waiting to happen. True, it is full of fascinating information and ideas that could only have come from someone with experience in the subject matter. Yet it is seriously compromised by production standards so woeful that they might be seen as the grammatical equivalent of a mugging. There is nothing inherently wrong in publishing a book that has had such skills as punctuation, layout, and editing left up to the author, but this should never have happened in the case of *this* book. Chaosium may not have brought an editorial hand to bear upon the *Parapsychologist's Handbook*, but they at least

have read it through to verify the quality of its ideas and content. However, if the problems in presentation are so obvious, the equally obvious question has to be "Why did Chaosium deem the *Parapsychologist's Handbook* fit to publish in its current state?"

And further, given that state, how is the book expected to prove itself popular enough to warrant proper publication and distribution by Chaosium? And should it ever do so, why should the fans of the game have to buy it again in order to get the proper version they were expecting when they made their purchase? Of course, costs could have been reduced had this book been made available in an electronic format, rather than having only available on a print-to-order basis direct from the publisher's website. Thus, the purchaser would have able to buy the book on its own, and also negated the need for them to pay the printing, binding and cost of post and packaging.

Despite the relatively high cost of this supplement and its low production standards, the *Parapsychologist's Handbook* has the potential to be an excellent sourcebook for *Call of Cthulhu* -- for both the *d20 System* and the *Basic Roleplay* system. Of course, it needs an index, and several bibliographies would also help. Suggested subjects for these would include further reading upon the subject of parapsychology, the appearance of the paranormal in Lovecraft's writings, as well as its appearances in articles and supplements for *Call of Cthulhu*. Once done, the *Parapsychologist's Handbook* will be an excellent treatment of its subject, worth the time and interest of any gamer looking to add a credible dose of the paranormal to their campaign . . . not just for *Call of Cthulhu*, but any modern-day RPG.

--Matthew Pook

GURPS Fourth Edition Rules Leak #1

Here follows the first official leak of *GURPS Fourth Edition* rules text. It's an optional rule from Chapter 4, "Skills." More rules leaks will follow over the coming weeks.

Disclaimer: It is still possible, although unlikely, that this text could change between now and August.

Optional Rule: Wildcard Skills

The professor who has studied every science, the swordsman who can fight with any blade . . . cinematic fiction is full of heroes who know a little bit about everything in one broad area. The time required to list every last skill such a hero might need, and the difficulty of figuring out which skills to take (and which to use), might discourage many gamers from playing cinematic experts. Such broad expertise doesn't exist in real life, but it is all part of the fun of cinematic games!

A solution to this problem is "wildcard skills" or "bang skills": skills that cover extremely broad categories of ability. The names of these skills end in an exclamation point in order to distinguish them from normal skills; e.g., "Science!" is the skill of "all science." Wildcard skills include and replace all specific skills within their area. For instance, a hero could attempt a Science! roll whenever the adventure calls for a roll against Chemistry, Physics, or another science skill.

Wildcard skills that cover mainly intellectual pursuits are IQ-based, while those that pertain chiefly to physical actions are DX-based. Such skills have no default; to use them, you must spend points on them. Buy wildcard skills as Very Hard skills, but at triple the usual point cost. For instance, it would normally cost 8 points to buy an IQ/Very Hard skill at IQ level, so Science! skill at IQ level would cost 24 points.

The GM might choose to limit wildcard skills to those with a suitable Unusual Background -- perhaps "Cinematic Hero." This Unusual Background should never be available to sidekicks and random thugs! To give each hero a well-defined dramatic niche, the GM might wish to limit PCs to one or two wildcard skills apiece (preferably those that emerge naturally from their character stories).

Some examples:

- *Detective!* (IQ). Replaces Criminology, Detect Lies, Electronics Operation (Security and Surveillance), Forensics, Interrogation, Law, Observation, Research, Savoir-Faire (Police), Search, Shadowing, Streetwise, etc.
- *Gun!* (DX). Replaces all specialties of Beam Weapons, Gunner, Guns, and Liquid Projector, as well as all related Fast-Draw skills. Make an IQ-based roll for Armoury pertaining to these weapons.
- *Science!* (IQ). Replaces Astronomy, Bioengineering, Biology, Chemistry, Engineer, Geology, Mathematics, Metallurgy, Meteorology, Naturalist, Paleontology, Physics, Psychology, etc.
- *Sword!* (DX). Replaces Broadsword, Force Sword, Jitte/Sai, Knife, Main-Gauche, Rapier, Saber, Shortsword, Smallsword, and Two-Handed Sword, as well as related Fast-Draw skills. Use in place of such skills as Acrobatics and Jumping for physical stunts while fighting.

Pyramid Review

[Heroes Incorporated](#)

Published by [Quest Machine](#)

Designed by Sam Clifford

Graphic Design by [Creative Madhouse](#)

Art and Graphics by Carl Critchlow, Brandon McKinney, Anitra Nottingham, David Muro, Ric Kayanan, Jeffrey Jones, & John Bell

Full-color boxed set with 50 Research Cards, 12 hero cards, 12 hero markers, 12 Combat Tokens, 25 Action Markers, four Player Cards, six Gadget tokens, seven Crime Pawns, scoreboard, Crime Die, eight hero stands, four score pawns, eight combat dice, 25 block tiles, and b&w rules; \$39.99

With great power comes great responsibility. Every schmo with laser-beam eyes and the power of flight wants to rob the bank, usually over your broken body. Being a superhero is a tough business, and the *Heroes Incorporated* board game from Quest Machine emphasizes the "business" end of things.

The city of Megalopolis can only afford to hire one group as their official superhero team, so the test is to conquer the most crime the fastest. Whoever scores 36 Hero Points first, or has the most points when the Research deck runs out, wins.

Megalopolis is made up of blocks, tiles laid in a five-by-five square with the disreputable Crimeland at the center. Each of these has a Block Number from two to five, with clothing and furniture shops on the low end (not much percentage for crooks in knocking over a pet store) and city hall and research labs at the upper end.

Each player gets a pair of superhero cards and color-coded dice, Action Markers, and character stands (for holding the accompanying playing piece) so you can tell which heroes are teamed up together. The characters and a set of crime counters labeled A through G are placed on the tiles. The crime counters move one tile each according to the eight-sided Crime Die (if they leave Megalopolis, they'll return to Crimeland), and the heroes chase after them.

Each player gets four action tokens. Starting with whoever is first in Hero Points, you spend a token to draw a Research card, play a card, move a space, or attack a crime. Among other things, the cards allow you to improve your character, better your score, or get super-gear.

Movement for heroes is orthogonal (except for those who fly -- they can go diagonal). Once you're on a block, you can get into combat with the crime counter there. A hero rolls a six-sided die and, if he equals or beats the Block Number, he defeats the criminals. His die is placed on that block -- if it's still there when everyone is finished taking actions for the round, he gets the Block Number in Hero Points on the Hero Points Scoreboard. If another hero attacks the crime counter and beats the previous roll, his die supplants the old die. If it's a tie, they split the points.

One type of Research card is the Super Villain. Playing these cards doesn't cost an Action Marker, but they must be played when someone announces an attack, before dice are rolled. The Super Villains are tougher to beat than the rank-and-file criminals the heroes usually fight, and may have combat numbers of six to eight. This is when having

some character improvements or special gear comes in handy. Failure to beat the villain may entail something more than a spent token -- like the loss of a bit of equipment . . . and if the foe is tougher than anyone who already beat a criminal on that block, that hapless hero also loses his Hero Point award at the end of the round.

The superheroes come with superpowers, which change the tactics used to fight the crimes. Blasts, for example, allow a hero to attack into an adjacent block, while Magic lets you take the better of two rolls. Each hero has his own combination of abilities, and different pairings change a player's strategy. Character cards also have spaces for Power Ups or Gadgets gathered by the superhero during play. A hero's origin -- a broad classification covered by Tech, Mutant, or Chosen -- has various bonus and penalty effects in game play. Mutants have a harder time beating the villainous Evolver, for example, but they get a permanent combat increase if they stop a crime at Genicon.

Each player gets a Player Card; these have Action Marker spaces, and they reference all the powers in the game. There are also spots for bonus Action Markers. Some characters get to use more than the standard markers as part of their repertoire. Stampede has a bonus action from his Super Speed, and Shadowboxer's Detective ability lets him draw an extra Research card (others can only draw one per turn).

The box art is more like a fantasy painting with some drab gray background than a comic-book cover. The pieces in the rules are clearly comic-book material. The artwork on the cards looks a lot stiffer, but it's still (four-) colorful and conveys some of the steel-jawed moxie of superheroes. The equipment treads dangerously close to European standards, with wooden Action Markers and an oversized score track, but you get what you pay for (or vice versa).

Game play is smooth and the rules run just like you'd think. There aren't any outstanding concerns in the rules, and they're easy and clear enough that you won't need to reference them much at all after only a few rounds of play. For a game meant to give the look and feel of comic book adventures, *Heroes Incorporated* does feel a little by-the-numbers in some respects. Super Villains amount to little more than higher numbers on a flavorless card, the super battles are just a die roll, and the powers and abilities are fairly coarse in their definition.

But the game is first and foremost a strategy game, and while these shortcomings will infuriate the purists and nag at the fans, *Heroes Incorporated* is still a lively game with enough depth and strategy to keep folks coming back for more. With supplements in the works and plenty of room for tweaks and house rules, it's a family-friendly work that starts strong and can only get better.

--Andy Vetromile

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Window Dressing

A couple of weeks ago my computer wasn't working right, and so I decided to try fixing it. Actually, it hasn't been working right for a couple of years . . . but the system instabilities had escalated to the point that it had begun crashing at times I found unreasonable, such as when I'd move the mouse, turn the computer on, or use the word "computer" in a conversation in another room.

So, after an extended weekend, I finally got the computer up and running. (I cannot stress the amount of hand-waving involved in the previous sentence. It's just shy of, "Germany thought about the possibilities of expansion in the 1930s, but was talked out of it a few years later." The actual process involved five trips to CompUSA, taking the computer utterly apart twice, digging up six-year-old testing equipment, reinstalling the OS four times, and three hours of phone support with SJ Games' über-ally Devin Ganger, who was convinced -- correctly -- that the fact my computer had managed to draw my blood *twice* was a sure sign that we would be successful.)

Now, I'm the kind of guy who has many loves, most of which are of the illegal, immoral, or fattening variety. But I confess a special place in my heart for a newly born (or reborn) computer. While my computers usually end up a morass of forgotten programs, ancient drivers, and random folders of incomprehensible data from long-forgotten projects, a new computer has none of those albatrosses. It is a blank slate, waiting for me to do whatever I want with it.

Anyway, this time around I found myself wanting a new interface. I didn't know *what* I wanted, but I just wanted something different. After poking around, I found a snazzy Windows program called [Talisman Desktop](#), which lets you completely change how the desktop looks, works, and acts. So, after some experimentation and reprogramming, I have a desktop that's to my liking, complete with snazzy panels, hidden "pop-up" buttons, useful accessible information and controls, and an Alex Ross-drawn Wonder Woman wallpaper. I also downloaded a theme that makes it look and work almost exactly like OSX's "Aqua" desktop, so the next time my Mac friends need to come over and use my computer, I'll get to freak them out.

(I suppose I should include my standard disclaimer about how this is all going to tie into gaming. Welllll . . . trust me. It will. I hope.)

Since I'm a contemplative kind of guy, I found myself wondering *why* having a different interface was so important. And I think I finally figured out the reason. I didn't want to go to all the trouble of fixing my computer just to have the same-old, same-old interface. *But* I also didn't want to be so exotic that I would consider installing, say, Linux onto my system. No, I wanted something that would spark my interest and give me new sparklies to look at and figure out, while remaining the same computer I've grown accustomed to under the hood.

And I realized how close this idea was to gaming for me.

Although the World of Darkness is ending . . . umm . . . today, I still remember when White Wolf released the first edition of *Mage*. I had just started working at my Friendly Local Game Shop, and it was the first new White Wolf game in a year. I was already familiar with *Vampire* and *Werewolf*, so I did what I almost always do with a new RPG: I flipped to the character sheet.

And there were many familiar elements of the typical White Wolf character sheet, complete with the usual skill and attribute lists, spots for background elements, and so on. But at the bottom, instead of the usual 10-pip linear sequence of empty boxes where the usual "Downward Spiral/My Life Sucks" information was supposed to be recorded, there were 20 empty boxes arranged in a *circle*, and the top half was labeled "Quintessence" while the bottom was labeled "Paradox."

In short, this character sheet (and the attached game) was giving me *exactly* the same sensations I got from my recent computer manipulation: It provided a sense of familiar while at the same time giving something new to "figure out."

At some point, many long-running games run into the problem of keeping the game fresh. Once the players know the rules, game world, and adventure styles inside and out, coming up with some new avenue to surprise or intrigue the group can be difficult. Many times, there can be a tendency or temptation to do something drastic, such as [blow up the world](#), [translate game systems](#), or switch to decaf. But often it's possible to add the "spark" back to a game with something fairly trivial.

For example, say the long-running game has just hit some kind of [milestone](#). What if the players each received a Duo-Tang folder or [bound booklet](#)? It could contain a summary of "what's gone before," perhaps an in-game listing of some loose threads that may (or may not) be picked up again, and a few pages of news clippings or rumors the players will have encountered.

Or maybe the heroes become the recipient of a mysterious sealed envelope . . . which contains week-long passes for a luxury liner (all prepared as a set of [props](#)). Perhaps one of the tickets has a personalized (but unsigned) message to one of the PCs, while the other one -- in an obviously different handwriting -- has a mysterious sequence of numbers that has nothing to do with the ticket. Regardless, even if the players have been on mysterious trips before . . . heck, even if they've been on a mysterious ocean cruise before . . . the odds are fair that they'll be more intrigued because this one has a prop. (And that sequence of numbers will probably be *much* more interesting to the players than if you'd just told them that they found it.)

Or perhaps between adventures you send the *players* a URL to a website, saying that someone sends that same URL to the characters. New information, clues, or foreshadowing of the next adventure or other subplots could be on there. Regardless, giving the players something to chew on in the middle of the week is a good way to keep them intrigued . . . even if it's the same information they'd get at the beginning of the next game.

Or you might tell the players that the next game session will take place in real time . . . and they need to let you know ahead of time what their characters would normally do on a Friday evening at 7 o'clock (or whatever time the players normally meet).

Or adding spice could be as simple as redesigning the campaign's character sheet, perhaps emphasizing a new game mechanic or angle. ("Why is there a 'Favors and Obligations' box on here now?!?")

In all of these cases, the GM has given the players something new and interesting to mull over, all the while keeping them within the "safe" confines of a game they already enjoy. Long-running games *become* long-running games because they're doing something right. As such, any radical changes should probably be avoided (unless everyone is sufficiently unhappy). But that doesn't mean it's not possible to provide the *trappings* of a new experience, while keeping the underlying game and experience the players enjoy.

And it can all be accomplished with a minimal amount of bloodshed on anyone's part.

--Steven Marsh

The Seven Bees

A Greed-Driven Organization for *GURPS Horror* and *Cabal* Campaigns

by Michele Armellini

Shadows Of The Past

The first hazy references to the Seven Bees hark back to Orphic Mysteries. Then, they remained unmentioned for centuries, but they were active under other names and cover groups, which is their standard *modus operandi*. The symbol of the Seven Bees is first described in connection with a palace that was razed down by crusaders in Constantinople in 1204. The symbol consisted then in six stylized golden bees on a white background, arrayed in three lines forming a wedge: the lower line with three bees, the middle with two, the upper with just one. The total is six, yet the building was known as "the Palace of the Seven Bees."

This apparent contradiction might be explained by an obscure reference Aleister Crowley reportedly made in 1905, stating that "The bees you see bring their golden gift, but the seventh bee, the one you don't see, brings the sting." This was just a casual comment, reported by an acquaintance; Crowley never put anything in writing about the bees.

A lucky researcher might unearth a letter mentioning "the bees, one of them an important Italian merchant" as providers of rare alchemical ingredients for Paracelsus in 1540. Also, a French diarist reports that Jacques Thibault, a discussed scientist, was about to publish a booklet about "*L'Ordre des Sept Abeilles*" in 1792, but he lost the manuscript, together with all his belongings, in a fire.

There are other oblique references scattered throughout history, and there's a pattern. They emerge as an unwanted consequence of some accident; and they quickly become dead ends -- often literally. Coincidentally (or not), Paracelsus was murdered within a year from penning that letter, and Thibault was ruined, discredited and interned.

What's Going On

Magic exists. Monsters exist. Apparently, a monsters' secret organization, called the Cabal, also exists. This might be an all-powerful far-reaching global conspiracy, or just a beleaguered mutual-aid society among freaks. The individual monster's main objective is probably just survival, which is understandable (but no less scary if the guy lives on human blood). What is known about their Cabal seems to imply that the organization is primarily interested in knowledge and power, but also in utter secrecy . . . which may be a limiting factor to the other two concerns. In a way, that's good for the ordinary humans. Indeed, we humans may believe in the history of the world as we know it only because those wizards have hunted knowledge for knowledge's sake and largely coveted it without using it too much. Similarly, those elder vampires mostly use their fearsome power among themselves. So, we can carry on with our short, petty lives (as long as we aren't unlucky enough to become snacks).

But there are beings that don't think that knowledge is power. To them, knowledge is *wealth*. It is a commodity, and the world is their market. They are the beings of the Seven Bees.

This incredibly ancient, self-serving, ruthless organization never wasted time in theoretical pursuits, nor played power games. They were out to make a profit, and they did it.

Just like the most powerful Cabalists, the top-ranking members of the Seven Bees realized long ago that immortality was the highest prize. They also saw that this kind of quest would be incredibly expensive. So wealth became their requisite tool; and the wealthier they became, the more they understood that their riches meant nothing if they couldn't enjoy them -- forever. So wealth was soon both a means and a motive.

Some of those beings have now achieved something closely resembling immortality; unbelievable longevity, or, in some cases, undeath. But the research for the real thing continues.

Diversification

Long ago, the secret masters of the Seven Bees established that occult knowledge could be applied to very mundane business, yielding a significant edge over those who were in the dark. This approach is nothing dramatic, and it can stoop as low as wizards or psychokinetics using their arts to cheat casinos; something a lofty Cabalist would hardly consider. Yet, this is probably the most profitable business line, providing steady, safe, and huge incomes day in, day out.

At the other end of the range, the Seven Bees will tackle an elder demon or challenge a vampire lord for their customers . . . if the price is right. There are six known business lines. Each is traditionally entrusted to one of the Six Hives (see below for more details).

Secrecy

A key tenet of the Cabal is secrecy. The less humans know about the occult, the better. Cabalists actively promote our ignorance. This is why we believe that ghosts are the stuff of tales.

The Seven Bees, however, are a commercial enterprise, and as such, they need publicity. The customers must be informed about their services and products! So, the Seven Bees routinely break the rule of silence. They don't do this foolishly; since their prices are outrageous, only a very limited circle can afford them, so there would be no reason to advertise the existence of vampires during prime time. Yet, they do let a few chosen ordinary humans know much too much.

So They Can't Be Cabalists

At least they cannot be *faithful* Cabalists, not being interested in maintaining the secret at all costs. It is perfectly possible that Cabalists, even high-ranking ones, are members of the Seven Bees, too. Having infiltrated the Cabal upper ranks would prove invaluable, and the Seven Bees probably have done just that.

So, this organization divulges the Cabal's most important secrets for gain, and, maybe, it has also infiltrated the Cabal itself. These are reasons for the Cabalists to become deadly enemies of the Seven Bees, if they are ever discovered. The Bees are well aware of the danger, therefore they enforce secrecy, but about themselves, not about the occult. Indeed, the organization works only through a labyrinthine network of fronts, cover companies, puppets and cut-outs. To this day, most Cabalists have never heard about the Seven Bees.

Of course, during the centuries, the Cabal happened to discover there were individuals, or small groups, bent on disclosing too much . . . and they dealt with these threats, swiftly and covertly. But they just struck the Seven Bees' outer layer.

Outer Structure

The organization layout resembles a cross between the typical "onion" of cults, and the cell-like structure used by spooks. The skin of the onion is made of "blind contacts." These are individuals, companies, or organizations that serve as conduits to the customers. All but the most experienced and gifted contacts *don't know* who they are working for. Their task is to canvass potential customers and to accept inquiries; if the customer is wealthy and his problem has anything to do, even remotely, with the occult, they will refer to their "controllers." They'll do that by means of complex, secure procedures whose purpose is to prevent the contacts from getting to know too much, thus becoming able to betray their controllers. Once a business gets going, the contact will know nothing more about it; he will pocket

his hefty commission and never ask questions. The contacts often have no occult knowledge whatsoever; many of them are encouraged to think they are just part of a fraud.

The next layer is made by many independent "fronts": companies, societies, or lodges that apparently do business on their own. They can range from an import-export company with offices all over the world, to a small three-person private-eye firm, to some sort of blandly occultist lodge. The fronts are better informed than the contacts. At the very least, their personnel know that some very weird things may happen in their business line; often, the owners or managers (the contacts' controllers) have a basic awareness of occult things. While the contacts only evaluate the potential customer's wealth, the fronts' first task is a rough estimate of the customer's requirements; they prepare a preliminary investigation, a feasibility study, and a tentative budget. Many relatively mundane transactions are entirely carried out by fronts. In other cases, the business at hand may be managed as separate tasks. If a customer needs dragon's blood, for instance, the front will take care of the commercial end and of a safe delivery; but the actual procurement will be entrusted to the next layer. A front's manager will have a safe way of contacting his supervisor.

The middle layer of the onion is made by surprisingly small "operative teams." They step in when the going gets tough. Each team is made by hand-picked, experienced, and/or very gifted individuals; most teams have one or two specializations. The team members do know that vampires exist. Indeed, a few of them *are* vampires. While still having a lot to learn about the occult, they are players to be reckoned with. They get utterly secret, sensitive, but relatively non-dangerous jobs, and after a while they consider them as routine; and they often get terribly dangerous, albeit very profitable, missions.

Each member also serves as supervisor for several fronts. They are paid very handsomely, but they also run terrible risks (death often being the preferable outcome when things go bad), and they spend a lot of time training.

At this level, references to the bees reappear, even though nobody ever says "the Seven Bees." For instance, "bringing home the nectar" means accomplishing the mission. Most importantly, each team's inner-level contact is called "the queen bee." Some teams have a closer relationship with their queen bee than what would be best for security. On the other hand, the queen bee isn't just a boss for the team members; she's a mentor, teacher, trainer and confidant. Wise queen bees, however, always keep their real identity a well-guarded secret.

Inner Structure

The inner structure is made up of the "families," or "hives." They all have a network of queen bees, apparently each one controlling no more than a couple of operative teams. Most queen bees are female beings; the organization believes that they are usually more pragmatic than males, who more often tend to wander off the profit-making and into worthless speculations or dreams of absolute power.

However, the exact structure of the hives beyond the queen bees is a secret. Possibly, there is another inner circle, the real owners of the hive; or maybe the queen bees are actually the ultimate leaders. Another possibility is that each Hive is a law unto itself. For instance, the Paoli Hive is said to have a Leader of Leaders, while the Hans seem to be run by a family board.

It is rumored that apart from the Six Hives listed below, there is a Seventh Hive -- the unseen one. It is probably tasked with troubleshooting, and it may be something of an "internal affairs department." Maybe it also takes care of the overall secrecy of the organization, and of settling inter-hive disputes. Nobody within the organization seems happy to speak about the Seventh Hive.

The Six Known Hives

Each of the Six Hives has its specializations and peculiarities.

Han Hive

HQ in Tokyo, major offices in Hong Kong, Taipei, New York, London

The Hans specialize in "applied thaumatology." This actually means practical uses of the occult, like the cheat-the-casino jig mentioned above, which made the Hans the richest family. Every day, relatively simple forecasts about the stock markets' fluctuations earn the Han Hive incredible amounts of money; some nice earnings also go to those savvy customers who chose their front companies as brokers. Insider trading, development plans, scientific research, political campaigning, every mundane endeavor can greatly benefit from foreknowledge, a little probability juggling, basic alchemy, supernatural influencing and so on. Also, customers availing themselves of *expert* consultants won't build tourist resorts on inter-dimensional fault lines.

The Hans' unofficial motto is "less nonsense, more business"; they solve problems by buyouts. They are maybe the least secretive of the Hives, and indeed more details are known about them than about all other families . . . unless it isn't all disinformation. For instance, it is known that they are indeed a "family" vaunting a common Chinese ancestral origin, and that they are mostly human mages, but willing to "adopt" gifted beings.

Mabrouk Hive

HQ in Dikarpas (Northern Cyprus), major offices in Beirut, Cairo, Istanbul, London

The Mabrouk family deals with "collectors' items." They are the traders of the organization, and they own a network of import-export, shipping, and wholesale front companies. They will buy and sell anything that's very valuable, from mundane diamonds, uranium, narcotics, arms, and priceless artworks, to occult objects such as alchemic ingredients, a copy of the *Necronomicon*, or actual magical items. The Mabrouks are great collectors themselves, and known for their artistic whims. Apparently the core of the Hive is made not by one, but by a few very ancient dynasties . . . including vampire lineages and werewolf clans. There seems to be much infighting within the Hive. Some priceless artworks that disappeared throughout history are sure to be found in the Mabrouks' vaults.

One of the families is rumored to be British, and to have infiltrated the Cabal's secret library within the British Library, in London. When encountering difficulties, they prefer the indirect approach: finding the subject's weak spot, or secret desire, distracting him with diversionary tactics, or confusing him by decoys.

Barrett Hive

HQ in Los Angeles. Major offices in Chicago, Washington, Paris

The Barretts' bread and butter is "pest control." They can sanitize haunted houses, cauterize infestations from the Abyss, and close demonic gates. They are the ones to call if one really needs anti-vampire bodyguards or anti-werewolf foresters. Of course, in certain jobs the best defense is the offense; so the Barrett Hive are considered as dangerous competitors by the Paolis, below.

The Barretts are somewhat looked down upon as the newcomers, and indeed most of them are less than 150 years old. They make up with efficiency and flexibility for what they lack in traditional clout; one can never know what to expect from a Barrett. They are very meritocratic, too, at every level.

Paoli Hive

HQ location unknown, but with fortress bases in Sicily, Corsica, Algeria; it has major offices in New York, Moscow, Shanghai

They take care of "active measures" (centuries ago, the term used was "scourge"). Ordinary killers sometimes aren't enough, especially if your enemy is supernaturally endowed. For the proper consideration, the Paolis will enter assassination contracts for anyone. "Search and destroy" missions are also a mainstay. But this Hive makes its greatest profit out of kidnapping; and their underground shelters have facilities for detaining terribly powerful entities.

The Paolis are notoriously paranoid, and they believe that any problem can be solved with a secret murder (or more);

their trademark is a seemingly accidental death. Therefore, very little is known about them. Certainly they seem to focus on exceptionally gifted humans; very few undead and monsters made it into their clique. They may be less refined than other Hives, but they are considered the most dangerous one . . . not counting the Seventh, of course.

Hood Hive

HQ in London, offices in all continents

The Hood Hive supports "free enterprise." They specialize in grand, long-term projects, contracted by filthy rich but mundane customers. If an incredibly wealthy eccentric lacking occult knowledge of his own wants the Holy Grail, his best bet is to fund the Hoods (as of now, they are carrying out exactly that quest, for three separate customers; they have been, it must be said, for more than three centuries). Building a Place of Power, locating and exploiting a Ley Line, creating magical items -- the Hoods have done all of this. It is rumored that in special cases they are not above keeping the final results for themselves, instead of delivering them to the paying customer.

The Hoods are eccentric snobs and somewhat less pragmatic than the other Hives. They seem to have an inner structure that replicates the outer one, with further layers, their queen bees being little more than team leaders. Most of them have little or nothing in common with mankind, which makes them the natural opponents of the Paolis. Their modus operandi is trickery and deception, but they aren't averse to elegant, deadly set-ups. Silvery, hooded capes are their trademark clothing, and when push come to shove, a foe will often find there's nothing under the cape.

Silva Hive

A split HQ between Mexico City and Rio de Janeiro, with offices everywhere

This hive provides "health services." Needless to say, their ultimate objective is immortality. But meanwhile, lots of rich old men would pay a lot for just a few years more, and they are the ideal customers: the Silva can milk them for as long as they can keep them alive. They have a multi-disciplinary approach, using mundane medicine, advanced transplanting, genetic meddling, clonation experiments, magic, alternate-dimension storage, memory banks, and, as a last resort, vampirism. The Silva charity clinics throughout South America provide plenty of nameless organ, blood, gene and body donors.

This Hive seems to be the less structured, possibly being just a loose federation of groups (maybe directly led by the queen bees); their scope is very limited, but they assume it's the most important venture within the organization. They come through as really self-confident and they know that what they can offer is interesting for almost anybody. Sometimes, enemies of this hive discover they have a rare disease that only the Silva can cure . . .

Inter-Hive Relationships

The Mabrouks often say that the other Hives are the best customers, and the worst. Indeed, security and secrecy aren't such an issue when offering your services to another Hive; but they will expect favorable prices, and won't be easily fooled.

So it is mostly tough but ongoing business. Everybody will tend to offer their specialty. It wouldn't be uncommon for a Hood project to be bankrolled by a Han-controlled bank and protected by a Barrett-sponsored security firm, possibly under supervision by a Barrett team. Of course both the Hans and the Barretts might want not just money, but also a share of the outcome. Fringe products and fringe areas will bear competition. For instance, a paramilitary task might be carried out both by the Paolis and the Barretts, and they are more likely to vie for such a contract if it is to take place, say, in Chile, where they both lack local offices.

Competition may sometimes turn nasty. Each Hive will usually play the game in its own ways, and, initially, the ones to lose will probably be the pawns of both sides: contacts and fronts, and no queen bee will cry for them. If the conflict escalates, an arbitrator will usually be needed; in some cases this may be a panel jointly appointed by the interested Hives, or by all Six; but in similar cases, the Seventh Hive is rumored to have barged in, too. In the past, queen bees

who went overboard in a inter-Hive dispute happened to disappear.

Patrons, Duties And Enemies

A Hive is an extremely powerful Patron, with unusual powers and reach. Its basic value is 40 points. It might provide equipment (+5/+10 points, see p. B24). For anybody below the level of operative teams, a Hive would be a Secret Patron (p. CI28, -5 points), taking great care to cover its traces, and it would only appear rarely (roll of 6 or less on three six-sided dice, halved cost). Note that a Secret Patron may well not really care for the characters, and this is only too true of the attitude of a Hive towards lowly contacts and fronts.

Queen bees and operative agents may also see, rarely, the intervention of their Hive in a Patron role, but it's not a secret for them. A controller or supervisor, a queen bee, or a faction within a Hive can also be Patrons (point value ranging from 10 to 25).

In any case, it would be perfectly possible that *no* Hive or queen bee ever acts as a Patron. They all tend to be coldly calculating bosses, ready to sacrifice their pawns.

The Seven Bees taken together can't be a Patron. The agendas of the various Hives are almost always conflicting, and seldom if ever they would unanimously help anybody.

Anyone working for the Seven Bees, either directly or indirectly, may well have a Duty (p. B39), also in the Extremely Hazardous form (p. CI78); the latter would especially apply to the operative agents.

A Hive can be an Enemy, worth -30 points. The Seven Bees as a whole are worth -40 points. They will appear rarely (halved value), unless somebody has something they really want. They will usually be Unknown Enemies (-5, p. CI77) for anybody not in the know about them, i.e., almost anyone. The Seventh Hive can also become a fearsome Enemy, always Unknown (basic value -45 points).

The Seven Bees And The Characters

PCs can serve the Seven Bees as unwary pawns, i.e. as contacts, for a low-power, high-paranoia campaign. They'll soon understand weird things are going on, but also that it would be safer not to ask too many questions; then they'll learn -- at their own cost -- that their employers have mighty enemies. They may soon find themselves on the run from powers they can barely conceive.

If the characters are mid-powered, they may start as operative agents; the party is one of the operative teams, the queen bee is the GM's mouthpiece. Better yet, the adventurers might start in one of the fronts: a private-eye firm, an occultist lodge. In this case, they know more than the iceberg's tip the average mundane citizen can see. They'll be gradually entrusted with more responsibility by their faceless supervisor, until they might be offered to become a team, or join one. The Hive they belong to may be chosen by the GM, taking into account the players' preferences; inter-Hive joint ventures can be used for a change.

For high-power campaigns, the characters are queen bees in the same Hive. There are their own teams to command (this probably rates as a group of Allies), and Hive agendas, backstabbing and politics to look after. They'll need to watch their backs against the Cabal, mundane busybodies, competitors from other Hives, and the dreaded Seventh Bee.

Of course, the Seven Bees may be used in a purely adversarial role, if the adventurers are Cabalists or mundane law-enforcement agents, or simply unwary researchers.

For the true maze-of-mirrors feel, the characters can be members of *both* the Cabal and the Seven Bees . . . but who are they double-crossing?

Adventure Seeds

Today

- *Curiosity killed the cat (Supers, Horror, Cops)*. The characters are well-known adventurers who get a lot of exposure to unusual, weird situations. A mysterious "middleman" contacts them. He offers nice commissions if, when encountering "seemingly supernatural occurrences requiring intervention" they'll just step back and call him in (they'd be recruited as contacts, see above). The adventurers being their usual nosy selves, they might well snoop around the middleman . . . a dangerous choice. Or they might accept, but then they'll be devoured by curiosity. Will they go back to the potential customer they reported, and start asking questions?
- *An offer we can't refuse (Horror)*. "Hi, Jack, it's me, got news from our Mister Smith. This time we're in it, big time. Yes, he'll employ us full-time, . . . wait till you see the cash he already gave me! Yeah, there's a catch, we can't go empty-handed . . . the Scepter of you-know-whom. OK, I know, you think it's jinxed, but don't forget Mister Smith is almost our only client by now, and he knows all of our little dirty secrets, too . . ."
- *First day on the job (Horror)*. The characters aren't beginners with the occult, but they aren't members of the Seven Bees, either . . . until now. A queen bee will lure them. She has had her team wiped out by the opposition, and she needs to react *now*. If the newbies are similarly defeated, not to worry: they knew nothing and were expendable, at least they'll have distracted the enemy. If they survive . . . well, they'll have proved they can be worth the effort of training them as a new team.
- *We're not alone (Cabal)*. The characters are up-and-coming young Cabalists, and they are tasked with investigating on a company named "Spirit Busters." If it's not a fraud, the party should make sure they don't divulge serious secrets. It seems they do. So the party will take care of them. But they'll also uncover intriguing clues. The company was just a front. Who's out there, not in the Cabal, and knowing so much about spirits? And why a senior Cabalist is suddenly so interested in their investigation? And who booby-trapped their car?

Yesterday

- *Ancient vaults (Swashbucklers, Age of Napoleon, Horror, Cabal)*. 1798. The French eagles are going to Egypt, and Napoleon will take the best French scientists and archaeologists with him! A Mabrouk search-and-retrieve team must infiltrate that scientific elite and see what they can plunder from the pharaohs' tombs. The Cabal is also present among those archaeologists. The Hood Hive is understandably interested in the pyramids. The local occult powers (the Djinn?) won't be friendly to all these invaders. Scimitars, muskets and illnesses provide more mundane dangers. And who knows what still guards those vaults?
- *Pushing the envelope (Steampunk, Horror, Cabal, Victorian Age)*. 1899. It's a great age for anthropology, ethnology, and other less reputable research fields, and London is the heart of it all. Lord Ramsey, a hard-nosed British administrator, comes back from his colonial post, bringing with him a group of beings that, he claims, will "widen the concept of humanity." His claims immediately become the target of a racist campaign. He'll present his "findings" at a Royal Society meeting, in a week. If they survive; yesterday, Lord Ramsey's country manor was burnt down. But is he alone in this, or is there a shadowy sponsor? What are those beings, who are their enemies? And can the Seven Bees make a profit either way (or both)?
- *Genetics is the key, is it? (Cliffhangers, Horror)*. 1934. Germany and the Soviet Unions are in friendly terms, formally. A German scientific expedition is leaving Tiflis for the highest Elbrus ranges, escorted by local guides, an advisor (a Communist Party official) and a military outfit for protection (the commander is a NKVD agent). The German scientists actually belong to the SS *Ahnenerbe* (ancestral heritage) department, tracking down the origins of the Aryan elite. But among them, there is a Silva team, interested in one aspect of the local genetic pool: longevity. There's a chieftain who still leads his men from horseback, and he's allegedly 92! Is this natural longevity, or . . . well, the other kind? The Silva researchers will need to keep their secret from both the Nazis and the Soviets; not that the warlike natives are particularly friendly with the Communists. The environment is forbidding, too. And what if there is another, competing expedition around?
- *Ending the embargo (WWII, Supers, Alternate Earths, Time Travel)*. October, 1941. Luckily the Secret Service heeded the anonymous tip and kept the President elsewhere yesterday, while two bullet-proof winged beings attacked the White House. This is a job for the Barrett Hive, though the Secret Service won't be happy about sharing the responsibility, and the FBI must not get wind of the new bodyguards' special abilities. Were the attackers Japanese supers? The Cabal is said to be in cahoots with isolationist, conservative cliques, and those things might have been gargoyle-like golems. What if the attackers were from a Paoli operation? Of course

they might come from anywhere -- or *anywhen!* Is there anybody who already knows what's going to happen in a couple of months? Is it true that the VP favors easing the oil embargo against the Japanese? Is the Han Hive siding with Japan?

Playable PC Enchanters for GURPS: The Crossbow Method

by William J. Keith

One of the most difficult types of wizard to play in *GURPS* is the Enchanter, a specialist in creating magical items. The time and energy required for enchanting most items make useful creations on the time scale of the typical adventure virtually impossible. Multiple sets of alternate rules are available on *Pyramid* to spur this process, but a wizard working under the standard *GURPS* system can be at a severe loss.

The easiest answer is one or more huge Powerstones, and a few friends to help. Unfortunately, "huge" gets expensive, beyond the means of most PCs, and hirelings (or hired Powerstones) are not necessarily available, especially in the wilderness. Still, a mage with a size 20 or 30 Powerstone, within the reach of various Wealth Advantages or a few points in starting equipment, can do a surprising amount of worthwhile work for his friends; the bulk of this article is taken up with a different method, but these low-energy applications are emphasized in the options list below.

A route to fast enchantment does exist in standard *GURPS*, but it can be obscure, difficult to master, and risky. The basic necessity addressed is a great deal of energy available on short notice for Quick and Dirty enchantment. Beyond this, helpful skills and materials can ease the process. The amount of energy the method generates could quickly become abusable even for non-enchanters, so suggestions are offered for GM controls.

The Crossbow Method

The core of the method is two spells from *Grimoire*: Draw Power/TL (any) at reasonable skill and Manastone at a minimum level of 17. The mage requires an energy source large enough to cast Manastone for the duration of the process. He also requires a stone of quality suitable for the Manastone spell, big enough to store the desired energy. The Repair spell is essentially a necessity; without it, hundreds of such stones are likely to be required, putting the process beyond the reach of all but the wealthiest enchanters in most game worlds.

Once these requirements are met, the method is simple. The mage casts Draw Power on the source, then casts Manastone repeatedly upon his chosen stone once per turn until it reaches the desired size. If a critical failure occurs and the stone is destroyed, he deals with any other consequences of the critical failure, casts Repair upon the shattered pieces of the stone, and begins again from scratch (since Repair does not restore the stored magical energies). A manastone of the desired size having been created, the mage uses the Quick and Dirty enchantment rules. Unlike using a Powerstone, several hundred Fatigue can be available to one caster and the process may be repeated in hours or days rather than months.

The name refers to the concept of storing energy and releasing it rapidly: "the capacitor trick," "the crossbow method," "the coiled spring," or "the geyser" are all possible names to distinguish this process from regular Quick and Dirty enchantment.

The Fine Print

Like everything in life, if it were that easy, everyone would do it. Most mages would enjoy hundreds of Fatigue to fling about, and enchanters that could do in a day what took another a year would quickly crowd out the previous market. The method entails several difficulties for which a wise enchanter will prepare and which GMs may use as controls.

- The process is *hard*. Enchant, Draw Power, and Manastone are all VH spells, and Draw Power in particular has numerous prerequisites. The course of study for the crossbow method is thus quite long.
- In the modern day, access to 2.16 megawatts may require industrial-strength power connections (or, in a world

where magic is nearly unknown, a willingness to commit an almost untraceable theft). Sufficient power may be within the budget of a private person at higher TLs. However, the lower-tech solution may be more palatable even at high TLs: a large waterfall, a windy day, a forest fire, or a volcano are all mentioned in Draw Power as suitable energy sources for lower Tech Levels, and probably will not have their energy legally claimed.

- A gem of sufficient size must be acquired. If the GM allows the use of flawless rock crystal or other semiprecious stones as manastones, stones of several hundred carats can be acquired at minimal expense. If precious stones are required, this rapidly gets expensive due more to rarity than weight: in the modern day, opals of several hundred carats, if for sale at all, go for hundreds of thousands of dollars, and diamonds even close to 100 carats are usually national treasures! The Wealth necessary to purchase these is far too point-costly for most games, though a Patron may provide such an opal (the "provides unusual equipment" trait) under strict conditions.

If a simpler solution is desired, magical methods of acquiring stones may affect their prices: the basic economic assumptions on the value of gemstones do not include methods of synthetic gemstone creation. If spells like Duplicate can create huge gems, any jeweler worth his loupe will check a large stone for magical creation. Such artificial stones may be considered effectively worthless as luxuries, and instead will be valued as magical objects based on the work and any raw materials it took to make them. Seek Earth spells may also aid mages of high skill to search for large stones suitable for manastones (and possibly too flawed for jewelry usage). The costs for basic Powerstones then assume that gem-quality natural jewels are used, and technical solutions may lower the raw material prices considerably. GMs interested in further research may wish to examine modern day news about technological syntheses of high-quality gems and their effect on gem prices, and decide how such stones may be suited for magic.

- The method will require time. Several hundred flawless castings of Manastone, of course, would require only a few minutes; the problem is that critical failures require the process to restart. Long runs will require good luck, in its guise as patience. Time for larger stones grows exponentially, and time saved over Slow and Sure shrinks.
- Critical successes are assumed to affect the job very little, but critical failures, using the standard table on p. B147, can cause damage, stun, cripple, or even summon demons. With high enough skill, stunning and crippling can be absorbed into average predicted times. Damage and demons are much more serious problems. A mage will expect to take an average of 1 damage in 7 critical failures. For large jobs, he will either need to find healing or pause work to heal. Demons will be summoned on 1 in every 216 critical failures; eight hours of relentless work will average this twice a day! The demon will likely cause a substantially longer delay than a mere explosion. Nearby friends or guards will help out here, unless the mage can dispatch a demon on his own at low risk to himself (hint: most heroes can't, and this mage will have spent quite a few of his points in learning the crossbow method, rather than fighting).

Assuming Manastone cast once per second and some rest time during the day, eight hours of work suffers 448 critfails, leading to 64 damage and 2 demons a day. This table lists the expected values of time spent, damage suffered, and demons summoned in making one stone of a given size:

Energy	Crit. Fails	Time	Damage	Demons	Comments
50	<1	2.25 min	1 in 7 tries	1 in 216 tries	Enough to make small items
100	6	5.75 min	about 1 hit	1 in 33 tries	
150	16	14 min	about 2	1 in 13 tries	
200	42	37 min	6	1 in 5 tries	
250	107	1hr 35min	15	1 in 2 tries	Moderately powerful items; even odds of a demon; most mages will have to rest or heal.

300	272	4hrs	39	1.25 per try	Demon more likely than not
350	693	1day 4hrs	99	3.2	About 64 damage and 2 demons a day from here up
400	1766	4 days	252	8.2	
450	4498	10 days	643	21	Slower than Slow and Sure if the mage must heal mundanely at 1pt/day
500	11454	25 days	1636	53	
550	29163	60 days	4166	135	
600	74256	150 days	10608	343	
650	189073	422 days	27010	875	

A 687-point stone would average 691 days of work, pointless for most enchanters when Slow and Sure works. Mages who do not relish the prospect of demon attacks and magical healing being a regular necessity in their profession will probably stick to creating manastones of 250 points at most.

Costs for pre-made "capacitors" are up to the GM. Keep in mind that for big jobs you're not only paying the enchanter for risky work, you're also paying his doctors (likely mages themselves) and several guards. Even an enchanter who sticks to 50-point stones will still have to deal with a demon every now and then.

GM Control Levers

Not many spells outside of the Enchantment College can use hundreds of Fatigue. Many can be maintained, though; having a battery of 100-300 energy can be handy when one needs to maintain a powerful spell for a long time without a Circle. One College which can use this much Fatigue to wonderful effect is the Weather College, wherein a single mage with 250 points of Fatigue can summon a storm to envelop a city (or a fleet) and lash it for hours. Other outlets exist. If such stones are available to your mage players, rest assured, they will find creative uses.

This sounds great for players, but can be wildly unbalancing for the game. The GM has several controls he can institute on the crossbow method, without changing any game rules.

1. **Availability of gems.** No 300-carat gems in the game world, no 300-point manastones. This implies that only *natural* gem-quality stones can be made into Powerstones and manastones. Smaller gems of 50-100 carats may still exist, and can still aid in several tasks an enchanter may find of game worth.
2. **The spells Draw Power or Manastone do not exist or are not widely known.** The interconvertibility of various kinds of natural energy, as in Draw Power, was a leap in physics theory which may not have happened in a fantasy world. Also, both of these are Grimoire spells, so they may not be well-known; the crossbow method may be a closely-guarded secret of a small circle of mages.
3. **Critical failures utterly destroy the stones.** The *Basic Set* does not describe just how a stone is destroyed. Perhaps a critical failure on Manastone or Powerstone turns the stone to vapor or energies that cannot be subjected to Repair. About the only way to get around this limit is by obtaining hundreds of stones at great cost. Still, manastones will be cheaper than powerstones of equivalent size, and an enchanter should be able to make a size 30 or 50 stone in a few tries. Happily, this much Fatigue can enable an interesting array of tasks for an enchanter.
4. **Demons get the hint.** An adventure-oriented plot twist: If a mage summons too many demons in a short time via critical failures, have new demons attack the caster hesitantly, or in subtle ways, with temptation and offers of service; or take one look at the caster and run away! Word about the enchanter has apparently gotten around

whatever realm demons come from, or he has somehow colored the energies from which demons are created; use any suitable theory of demon arrivals. This should disturb any "decent" PC mage, who would hopefully respond by limiting his creation of large batteries to important situations. Even if it doesn't, demons that run away and attack innocents nearby will disturb all but the most jaded folk, and probably give the caster a reputation (somewhat true) of being a demon summoner . . .

The Juicy Bits

So you've seen the theory and liked it, you've found the risks acceptable, your GM has pronounced the practice allowable, and your enchanter has sweated the training and taken all appropriate cautions (or just paid the money), and gotten his grubby little hands on a mouthwatering 250-point Manastone. What to do now?

One answer is, "make enchanted items." But which? There are enough options that an enchanter will still probably have to choose an area on which to concentrate; such a concentration results in a secondary area of ability where the enchanter can contribute to the party with normal casting. Spell Stones for these spells are one of the cheapest and most adaptable enchanted items an enchanter can make; carefully chosen spells given to one's friends can dramatically increase the party's versatility. Their single-use nature requires the mage to plan carefully to maintain the party's stock, but many take barely an hour to make with the crossbow method.

One last note: Even with a setting not suited for the crossbow method, the lowest-cost items allow a mage with a large Powerstone to enchant items of use to an adventuring group. (Thirty character points would buy a size 30 Powerstone in a medieval campaign, as would Filthy Rich.) Instead, a starting enchanter mage may want to quest for a Powerstone of sufficient size, truly coming into his profession when he obtains one.) With such a system, each large Powerstone would allow one 40-point item to be created each month, and a 1-Fatigue Spell Stone each 10 days. In civilized regions he may be able to "rent" the power from someone else's Powerstone: 30 points from a 30-point stone would cost \$1,200, as per the sidebar on p. B152.

Below are lists of services an enchanter mage can provide. The first list gives those services within reach of 40 Fatigue, such as a mage with a 30-point Powerstone and 10 Fatigue of his own. The second expands the first list and gives some selected tasks within reach of a 250-point Manastone. The first list is exhaustive, while the second is not; many moderately powerful spells can be enchanted into items with 250 Fatigue.

Smaller Jobs

- Scroll. Requires no particular energy. Scrolls take several days to write but are not particularly expensive; 1 character point or \$500 (assuming a 20-day work month for an enchanter making \$25/day) will buy 20 base Fatigue's worth of scrolls. An enchanter personally can use these as one-time sources of spells he does not know but might find useful; a few days' work in a lull during an adventure will allow him to lend spells he knows to other mages in the party. Even non-enchanters can do this, but an enchanter might do it as a regular moneymaker.
- Suspend Enchantment. Not a real item, but occasionally handy and an appropriate spell for an enchanter, which can make good use of a size 15-25 Fatigue stone.
- Hideaway for one-half pound and one cubic foot of space, with the item's weight still counting. A GM may insist that one pound is the minimum increment, however.
- Accuracy and Puissance to +1 on a missile, one missile at a time.
- Fortify and Deflect to +1 on armor, if the piece rules are used. Even such small missile and armor enchantments can perceptibly enhance the efficacy of fighters in the group over time.
- Penetrating Blade can be cast to +1 on a missile.
- Staff. Useful and a reliable moneymaker. Also makes a nice gift.
- Powerstone, one level at a time. (One-College Powerstones as well.) Useful for small magical items. With luck, maybe you can better your own property!
- Manastone. Useful even without the crossbow method.
- Seek Water. Possibly handy in dry regions.

- Inscribe.
- Knots, on a 2-foot string.
- Mystic Mark (permanent mark).
- Pentagram (to protect up to 4 hexes).
- Curse, to -1 on an item.
- Dull Nose, to -1 as a cursed item.
- Undo, immunity amulet version. Nice if magical thieves roam the streets.
- Tangle Growth, permanent effect.
- Voices (only 2 words, and no Link at this level. Could get irritating . . .).
- Talisman, to +1 protection (+2 if the caster can shell out 5 Body Hits in life force). Might make the difference, especially with a villain who likes to cast subtle spells.
- Spell Stone. With a 30-point Powerstone or Manastone and 10 points of his own Fatigue, an enchanter can create Spell Stones of spells with a 2-Fatigue casting cost or 1-Fatigue casting and maintenance cost. A wide selection of spells can then be used by non-mages in the party; appealing choices may include healing spells, protection spells, and many others.

Bigger Jobs

An exhaustive list of Enchant College spells is included, as well as some selected other spells. Note that Power requires 500 energy, but may reasonably be assumed fairly well-known among enchanters, allowing the PC and a hireling with 250-point stones to work together for a day to make much more useful "always on" items with 1 or 2 points of Power.

- Fortify, to DR +3 on armor by the piece (doing the front and back of the torso separately, assuming the back can be enchanted at 30% cost or less).
- Deflect, to PD +2 on armor by the piece.
- Lighten, at 25%.
- Accuracy and Puissance may be cast to +1 to any weapon and +2 to missiles with a Manastone. Bane may increase these.
- Cornucopia, for ammunition of up to \$5 in value.
- Bane
- Name, with name written
- Password, with password written
- Limit
- Link
- Remove Enchantment (like Suspend Enchantment, not an item enchantment itself, but an appropriate skill for an enchanter; can remove enchantments up to 2500 energy)
- Lesser Wish (!)
- Wish (!!)
- Clay Golem
- Hideaway (with Manastone, up to 2.5 pounds/5 cubic feet of extra capacity, or double this if weighed)
- Talisman (to the full +4)
- Amulet (greatly boosting the party's magical defenses in specific areas)
- Malefice
- Ensorcel (though only for a 1-Fatigue spell)
- Leak
- Dancing Shield (for a 1-lb. shield; unlikely)
- Penetrating Blade (to +1 on a non-missile weapon, or +3 on a missile)
- Ghost Weapon (on a 1-lb weapon)
- Quick-Aim (to +2, and +3 with a second casting)
- Graceful Weapon (on a 1-lb. weapon, unlikely to need it)
- Weapon Spirit (with very low IQ and no Voices)

Some other spells that can be enchanted with 250 Fatigue (many others work):

- Sense Foes (popular moneymaker in distrustful society)
- Hide Emotion (another popular one, in certain circles)
- Spark Cloud
- Fire Cloud
- Create Water (a handy traveling item)
- Create Food (pot version; another for travelers)
- Preserve Food (salable, and/or useful to adventurers)
- Illusion Shell on a small object
- The Light & Darkness College is particularly heavy with low-cost items.
- Blur (great for defense)
- Sunlight
- Continual Sunlight (permanent effect)
- Wall of Light
- Animate Object (permanent effect, up to 10 lbs)
- Link
- Spell Wall
- Keen Eyes, to +1
- Keen Ears, to +1
- Stop Healing (missiles)
- Conceal
- Force Wall, one hex at a time
- Hush (good for sneaking about)
- Silver Tongue (staff version)
- Create Fuel (container, to 2 pounds per day)
- Propel (enchanted device, at 12.5 tons or less)
- Magnetic Vision

Sample Enchanter PC

Carrick Stonecutter

100 points

Carrick apprenticed under a stiff Guild enchanter in his hometown and graduated to a decent living. He lived a settled life, picking up a few Earth spells to help the business but nothing like a footloose adventurer would have. Then the crossbow method was invented, and enchanters suddenly had the career of an adventurer opened to them. Carrick examined his life and found it wanting: excitement, luxury, and companionship. He spent a few years studying the method as well as some militant spells, to the dismay of his old teacher, and fell in with the first young adventuring group he found. He's rapidly learning that some fighting and woodlands skills were expected, and is doing his best to shake off a dangerous hesitation that grips him when violence threatens. Thank goodness the group hasn't journeyed by sea yet; Carrick is miserable when he doesn't have solid ground under his feet.

When starting out on a wilderness mission, he often brings a clay golem. He happily provides Spell Stones for Minor Healing and Stone Missile to his friends, and is considering expanding his repertoire of Earth spells and enchantments.

If creating a manastone away from his group, Carrick will summon an Earth elemental as an anti-demon guard, bargaining for services with Essential Earth. He'll use Minor Healing if badly damaged. Carrick's manastone is a magic-made 300-carat duplicate of an emerald from the monarch's crown with distinctive flaws added. Jewelers value it at \$7500 for magical labor; local laws forbid its resale and tax its possession at four days of work for the Crown each year.

Carrick is a 100-point starting character. Somewhat richer and older, with some of his ambitions for spells realized, he could be the Golem Master: a Patron to young mages, or a villain who emerges from seclusion with hundreds of

soldiers to terrorize a region, then vanishes into the earth to flee if confronted.

Age 40; 5'7"; 150 lbs.; dusty brown close-cut hair; brown eyes; an angular middle-aged man with a mercurial face.

ST 9 [-10] **DX** 9 [-10] **IQ** 13 [30], **HT** 10 [0]

Basic Speed 5, Move 5

Dodge 5, Parry 3 (mace), Block 4

Advantages: Literacy [10], Magery 3 [35].

Disadvantages: Impulsive [-10], Combat Paralysis [-15], Motion Sickness [-10].

Quirks: Wants to learn the fabled Earthquake spell; seeks a Wish enchanter to learn more about wishes; hopes to regain the respect of his former master; looking for a wife as well as a fortune; occasionally talks to rocks fondly. [-5]

Skills: Sculpting-9 [2], Mace-7 [1/2], Shield-8 [1/2], Geology/TL3-11 [1], Survival (Woodlands)-11 [1/2], Merchant (enchanted items)-11/17 [1].

Languages: Common (native)-13 [0].

Spells: Enchant-17 [12], Seek Power/TL3-14 [1], Conduct Power/TL3-13 [1], Steal Power/TL3-13 [1], Draw Power/TL3-13 [1], Manastone-17 [12], Find Weakness-14 [1], Weaken-14 [1], Restore-14 [1], Rejoin-14 [1], Repair-14 [1], Delay-14 [1], Spell Stone-14 [1], Detect Magic-14 [1], Identify Spell-14 [1], Analyze Magic-14 [1], Golem (Clay)-15 [4], Puissance-15 [2], Seek Earth-14 [1], Shape Earth-14 [1], Shape Stone-14 [1], Walk Through Earth-14 [1], Earth to Stone-14 [1], Create Earth-14 [1], Earth to Air-14 [1], Stone Missile-15 [2], Essential Earth-14 [1], Summon Earth Elemental-14 [1], Ward-14 [1], Sense Foes-14 [1], Sense Emotion-14 [1], Ignite Fire-14 [1], Extinguish Fire-14 [1], Sound-14 [1], Silence-14 [1], Hush-14 [1], Create Air-14 [1], Purify Air-14 [1], Death Vision-14 [1], Summon Spirit-14 [1], Animation-13 [1], Lend Strength-14 [1], Lend Health-14 [1], Minor Healing-15 [2]

Equipment: Standard traveling equipment, mace, small shield, large manastone (weight 2 oz, value \$7,500, details above) [7.5].

Adventure Seeds

- **The Diamond Eye of the Hurricane:** A national treasure (one of the few usable gems in this setting) is stolen by a circle of mages who threaten to wreak havoc on the countryside using devastating weather spells if their demands are not met. PCs may be tasked with recovering the stone, capturing the mages, protecting the populace, or many other roles.
- **The Golem Master:** A recluse emerges from years of isolation with a golem battalion of hundreds and revenge on his mind. The army will deal with the golems while you find and kill him so the threat will cease . . . but how did he do it? Many mysterious figures would like to know, or already seem to know and seem to want to keep the PCs out of it. Will the players learn the secret of his power? Will learning it empower their mage, or make him a target?
- **Environmentalists:** Down with demons! Down with explosions! Down with exploding demons! One too many horrors has been loosed onto an unsuspecting town, and a political movement is underway to make the crossbow method illegal due to its polluting side effects. Which side will the characters take? What will a crossbow-method enchanter do if his profession is criminalized? Consider using "[Playing to the Crowd](#)" to roleplay a referendum on the matter for some non-combat gaming.

Let There Be Magic

Non-Metamagic Feats for Spellcasters in the *D20 System*

by Owen K.C. Stephens

With a few exceptions, characters in the *d20 System* wishing to use feats to augment their spellcasting abilities must take metamagic feats. Since these feats change a spell's effective level, they are often perceived as knowing how to cast additional spells, rather than knowing how to do something different and interesting with spell abilities. This article provides numerous stylistic feats designed to allow a spellcaster to have the same breadth of style options as weapon combatants.

One way to use these feats is to have them restricted to certain kinds of spellcaster. For example, only sorcerers (who gain less benefit from metamagic feats) might be allowed access to them, or only arcane spellcasters. A GM could also restrict them to certain regions (the art of Spell Finesse might only be known in the far east) or certain groups (only members of the Guild of Blue Mages may take Spell Specialization with compulsion spells).

A GM can also use these as benefits for prestige classes he designs for his game. Since each feat is balanced against normal feats this allows him to easily grant a prestige class a few unique powers without unbalancing them. A class might even only grant access to the feats (such as a fighter gaining access to Weapon Specialization), without giving the feats out for free (allowing it to grant full use of spells per level and even special abilities such as wild shape, turning undead, or familiar advancement without being unbalanced).

Several of these feats list a minimum spell ability as a prerequisite. This is the ability score the character uses for spellcasting (Wis for clerics and druids, Int for wizards, Cha for bards and sorcerers). Although none of these feats are metamagic feats, a GM should seriously consider allowing characters that gain bonus metamagic feats to choose one of these feats instead.

Feats	Prerequisites
Blowthrough	Spellcasting ability 19+, Power Casting
Disarm Casting	Spellcasting ability 17+, caster level 7+
Exclusionary Targeting	Spellcasting ability 17+, caster level 9+, Spell Expertise
Far Magic	None
Favored Target	Spell ability 15+
Greater Disarm Casting	Spellcasting ability 21+, caster level 10+, Disarm Casting
Greater Ram Casting	Spellcasting ability 21+, caster level 10+, Ram Casting
Greater Trip Casting	Spellcasting ability 21+, caster level 10+, Trip Casting
Held Casting	Spell ability 15+, caster level 9+
Improved Far Magic	Spell ability 15+, Far Magic
Improved Lasting Magic	Spell ability 15+, Lasting Magic
Improved Two-Spell Casting	Spell ability 17+, caster level 10+, Two-Spell Casting
Item Casting	Spellcasting ability 15+, Craft Staves or Craft Wands
Lasting Magic	None
Mounted Casting	Ride 1+ rank, Mounted Combat
Point-Blank Casting	None
Power Casting	Spellcasting ability 15+
Ram Casting	Spellcasting ability 17+, caster level 7+
Spell Expertise	Spell ability 13+, Dex 13+
Spell Finesse	None
Spell Specialization	Spell ability 13+, caster level 1+
Spirit Casting	Spellcasting ability 15+, Eschew Materials

Sneak Magic
Trip Casting
Two-Spell Casting

Spellcasting ability 17+, Spell Finesse
Spellcasting ability 17+, caster level 7+
Spell ability 15+, caster level 9+

Feat Descriptions

Blowthrough

You have learned to focus damaging spells through one foe and into another.

Prerequisites: Spellcasting ability 19+, Power Casting

Benefits: This feat allows you to alter the power of spells with defined targets, if those spells deal hp damage (such as *magic missile*). Once each round, if you do enough damage to a target of such a spell to drop him, any unused damage (ie damage in excess of what was required to drop the target) may be applied to a second target as long as the second target is both within 30 feet of the dropped foe and within the original spell's range. The second target is treated exactly as if he were the original target (and thus must be hit or is allowed a save, depending on how the spell works).

For example, a 6th-level sorcerer casts a *scorching ray* at an orc, hitting it and dealing 20 hp of damage. The orc has only 12 hp, meaning there are 8 excess hp of damage left in the ray. The sorcerer may target any foe that is both within 30 feet of the dropped orc (the maximum range of Blowthrough) and within 35 feet of himself (the maximum range of his *scorching ray*). He must make a ranged touch attack against the second target, since that is how the spell targets foes.

Disarm Casting

You have learned to disarm targets with spells.

Prerequisites: Spellcasting ability 17+, caster level 7+

Benefits: When you hit a target with a spell that deal hp damage, you may attempt to disarm him. Only one target of each spell may be disarmed, even if an area spell catches multiple targets. You choose an amount of damage dealt to the target which he does not take, up to a maximum of your caster level (and no more than 1 less than the damage dealt). Your disarm roll is 1d20 + damage not dealt opposed by the target's attack roll with the item to be disarmed. On a successful check, your target drops the item at his feet. The target cannot make a disarm check to disarm you, even if he wins the opposed check.

For example, an 8th-level bard casts a *sound burst* at a goblin and a kobold. He deals 8 points of damage, and chooses to attempt to disarm the goblin. The bard reduces the damage dealt to the goblin by 7 (his maximum, as the spell must deal at least 1 point), and then makes an opposed check of 1d20+7 against the goblin's attack roll. If the bard wins the check, the goblin is disarmed. Either way, the goblin takes 1 hit point and must save or be deafened (as normal for *sound burst*), and the kobold is affected normally.

Exclusionary Targeting

Your area spells can wrap around one target.

Prerequisites: Spellcasting ability 17+, caster level 9+, Spell Expertise

Benefits: When casting a spell with a defined area, you may exclude a single target caught within the area. If two or more targets are grappling, you cannot exclude any of them. An excluded target is not affected by the spell in any way.

Special: You may take this feat more than once. Each time you take it, it increases the number of targets you may exclude by one. If you can exclude all the targets in a grapple, you may do so, but you cannot exclude only some targets in a grapple.

Far Magic

Your spells have greater than usual range.

Benefits: When determining a spell's maximum range, your caster level is treated as being two higher.

Favored Target

Your magic has greater than usual potency against creatures of a specific type.

Prerequisites: Spell ability 15+

Benefits: Choose a creature type from the table below. (If you choose humanoids or outsiders as a favored enemy, you must also choose an associated subtype, as indicated on the table.) Your spell's save DCs are 2 higher against creatures of this type.

Special: This feat may be selected more than once. Each time it is taken, a different favored target must be selected. If a specific creature falls into more than one category of favored target, the bonuses do not stack.

Table 1: Favored Target Enemies

Type (Subtype)

- Aberration
- Animal
- Construct
- Dragon
- Elemental
- Fey
- Giant
- Humanoid (aquatic)
- Humanoid (dwarf)
- Humanoid (elf)
- Humanoid (goblinoid)
- Humanoid (gnoll)
- Humanoid (gnome)
- Humanoid (halfling)
- Humanoid (human)
- Humanoid (orc)
- Humanoid (reptilian)
- Magical beast
- Monstrous humanoid
- Ooze
- Outsider (air)
- Outsider (chaotic)
- Outsider (earth)
- Outsider (evil)
- Outsider (fire)
- Outsider (good)
- Outsider (lawful)
- Outsider (native)
- Outsider (water)
- Plant
- Undead
- Vermin

Greater Disarm Casting

You have improved your ability to disarm targets with spells.

Prerequisites: Spellcasting ability 21+, caster level 10+, Disarm Casting

Benefits: When using Disarm Casting, you gain a +4 bonus to your opposed check to disarm a foe. Additionally, you

may attempt to disarm two foes with a single spell, as long as they are both in the area.

Greater Ram Casting

You have improved your ability to bull rush targets with spells.

Prerequisites: Spellcasting ability 21+, caster level 10+, Ram Casting

Benefits: When using Ram Casting, you gain a +4 bonus to your opposed check to bull rush a foe. Additionally, you may attempt to bull rush two foes with a single spell, as long as they are both in the area.

Greater Trip Casting

You have improved your ability to trip targets with spells.

Prerequisites: Spellcasting ability 21+, caster level 10+, Trip Casting

Benefits: When using Trip Casting, you gain a +4 bonus to your opposed check to trip a foe. Additionally, you may attempt to trip two foes with a single spell, as long as they are both in the area.

Held Casting

You can complete all but the last element of a spell casting, holding the almost-finished spell for use later.

Prerequisites: Spell ability 15+, caster level 9+

Benefits: Once you have successfully cast a spell (met all its components and casting time, made any needed Concentration checks, survived any attack of opportunity for casting), you may opt to hold on to the spell rather than cast it. You may only hold one spell at a time, and may not cast any other spells while you hold one. Although having a held spell does not provoke an attack of opportunity, any event that would require a caster to make a Concentration check to cast a spell (such as taking damage or violent motion) forces you to make one at the same DC or lose the held spell. A held spell is obvious, and observers may make Spellcraft checks to identify it just as if they observed the spell being cast.

Releasing a held spell is a free action which normally must be taken on the caster's turn. However, a character with a held spell threatens his normal reach with it, and may cast it as an attack of opportunity against any foe that provokes one from him. This requires a touch attack. If successful, the target becomes the target of a targeted spell, or the center of an area spell.

Improved Far Magic

Your spells have much greater than usual range.

Prerequisites: Spell ability 15+, Far Magic

Benefits: When determining a spell's maximum range, your caster level is treated as being four higher. This benefit replaces (does not stack with) the bonus from Far Casting.

Improved Lasting Magic

Your spells have much greater than usual duration.

Prerequisites: Spell ability 15+, Lasting Magic

Benefits: When determining a spell's duration, your caster level is treated as being four higher. This benefit replaces (does not stack with) the bonus from Lasting Magic.

Improved Two-Spell Casting

You can easily cast two spells in rapid succession.

Prerequisites: Spell ability 17+, caster level 10+, Two-Spell Casting

Benefits: When casting two spells with Two-Spell Casting, your caster level penalties are reduced to -2 caster levels

for the first spell and -4 caster levels for the second spell.

Item Casting

You can replace an item's charges with your personal spell power.

Prerequisites: Spellcasting ability 15+, Craft Staves* or Craft Wands*.

Benefits: When activating a wand or staff, you may use a spell use instead of burning a charge. You must expend a spell of at least the same level as the ability to be activated from the staff or wand, and doing so provokes an attack of opportunity. You must be able to use the wand or staff, and must be able to fulfill all the requirements of the spell you power it with.

*From the *PHB*.

Lasting Magic

Your spells have greater than usual duration.

Benefits: When determining a spell's duration, your caster level is treated as being two higher.

Mounted Casting

You are adept at casting while riding.

Prerequisites: Ride 1+ rank, Mounted Combat

Benefits: When riding a mount, you never need to make a Concentration check to overcome vigorous or violent motion. Additionally, you gain a +2 bonus to any Concentration check you are required to make while riding.

Point-Blank Casting

Your magic is particularly potent at short range.

Benefits: When casting a medium or long range spell at a range of 30 feet or less, or any spell with a range greater than touch at a range of 5 feet or less, the spell's save DC is increased by 1.

Power Casting

You have learned to focus the power of certain spells.

Prerequisites: Spellcasting ability 15+

Benefits: This feat allows you to alter the power of spells with an area that deal hp damage and have a Reflex save for half (such as *fireball*). When casting a spell of this type, you may focus its power into a few motes, which deal more damage but are easier to avoid. You may boost the caster level of the spell when determining its damage by any value up to +5. This same value is deducted from the spell's save DC.

If you cast more than one spell in the same round (using *Quickened Spell*, *Two-Spell Casting*, or any other method), the other spells also have their DCs lowered, though they gain no benefit to caster level.

Thus a 3rd-level wizard with an 18 Int casting *burning hands* could boost the caster level to 5th when determining damage (doing the spell's maximum of 5d4), at the same time lowering the Reflex save by -2 DC to 13.

Ram Casting

You have learned to bull rush targets with spells.

Prerequisites: Spellcasting ability 17+, caster level 7+

Benefits: When you hit a target with a spell that deal hp damage, you may attempt to bull rush him. Only one target of each spell may be bull rushed, even if an area spell catches multiple targets. The target to be bull rushed takes half

damage (after any save). You make an opposed check of 1d20 + the spell's level versus the target's Str check. On a successful check, your target is pushed back a number of feet equal to what your roll beat his (with a minimum of 5 feet). The target is moved directly away from you.

For example, a 7th-level wizard casts a *call lightning* at a brigand. He deals 21 points of damage, but the brigand makes his Reflex save reducing it to 10 points. The wizard decides to attempt a bull rush, so the brigand takes only 6 points of damage. The wizard rolls 1d20 +3 (the level of the spell) opposed by the brigand's Str check. The wizard gets a total of 22, while the brigand manages only a 12. The brigand is moved 10 feet directly away from the wizard.

Spell Expertise

You have learned to rein in the area of your spells.

Prerequisites: Spell ability 13+, Dex 13+

Benefits: When casting a spell with an area defined in feet, you may reduce the area by any number of 5-foot increments (to a minimum of 5-feet) The type of area (burst, cylinder, spread, etc.) is not changed. For example, when casting a *fireball* you may reduce its area to a 15-foot spread, a 10-foot spread, or a 5-foot spread.

Spell Finesse

You have learned to cast spells using a different style than most of your spellcasting tradition.

Benefit: Choose one of the following ability scores Intelligence, Wisdom or Charisma. All your spellcasting calculations are now based on this ability, including maximum level of spell you can cast, spell save DCs, and bonus spells per day.

Spell Specialization

You are particularly adept with a particular kind of spell.

Prerequisites: Spell ability 13+, caster level 1+

Benefits: Choose a subschool of spell (calling, creation, healing, summoning, teleportation, scrying, charm, compulsion, figment, glamor, pattern, phantasm, or shadow). When casting a spell of the selected subschool your caster level is treated as being two higher.

Alternatively you may selector a descriptor type (acid, air, chaotic, cold, darkness, death, earth, electricity, evil, fear, fire, force, good, language-dependent, lawful, light, mind-affecting, sonic, or water). When casting a spell of the selected descriptor your caster level is treated as being one higher.

Special: This feat may be selected more than once. Each time, a different subschool or descriptor must be selected. The effects of this feat do not stack. A caster with both Spell Specialization (charm) and Spell Specialization (mind-affecting) gains only a +2 caster level (the better of the two bonuses) when casting a *charm person*, not a +3 caster level.

Spirit Casting

You can replace personal power for expensive material components.

Prerequisites: Spellcasting ability 15+, Eschew Materials*

Benefits: When casting a spell with a material component that costs money, you may ignore the component and instead spend experience. You must expend one experience per 5 gp of material component ignored. You cannot bypass foci with this feat.

*From the *PHB*.

Sneak Magic

You have learned to take advantage of surprised or unbalanced targets.

Prerequisites: Spellcasting ability 17+, Spell Finesse

Benefits: This feat allows you to alter the power of spells that deal hp damage (such as *burning hands*). When the target of such a spell is flat-footed or denied his dex bonus to AC, you deal an additional die of damage (of the same type the spell normally deals). Thus a target caught flat-footed by a Sneak Magic *burning hands* takes an additional 1d4 points of damage, while a target caught by a *ray of frost* would take an additional 1d3.

Trip Casting

You have learned to trip targets with spells.

Prerequisites: Spellcasting ability 17+, caster level 7+

Benefits: When you hit a target with a spell that deal hp damage, you may attempt to trip him. Only one target of each spell may be tripped, even if an area spell catches multiple targets. The target to be tripped takes half damage (after any save). You make an opposed check of 1d20 + the spell's level versus the target's Str or Dex check, whichever is better. On a successful check, your target is tripped. The target cannot make a trip check to against you, even if he wins the opposed check.

For example, a 9th-level druid casts a *call lightning* at an ogre. He deals 12 points of damage, and the ogre fails his Reflex save. The druid decides to attempt a trip, so the ogre takes only 6 points of damage. The druid rolls 1d20 +3 (the level of the spell) opposed by the ogre's Str check (+4 for the ogre's large size). If the druid happens to win the check, the ogre is tripped. Even though the *call lightning* spell lasts another number of rounds, the druid cannot make another trip attempt with it (though his future bolts from the spell deal full damage).

Two-Spell Casting

You can cast two spells in rapid succession.

Prerequisites: Spell ability 15+, caster level 9+

Benefits: You can cast two spells with casting times of 1 standard action as a full-round action. Your caster level for the first spell is treated as being 4 levels lower than usual, and your caster level for the second spell is treated as being eight levels lower than usual.

Pyramid Review

This Is Not Happening (for *When Darkness Comes*)

Published by [Twilight Creations, Inc.](#)

Concept, design by David Carl & Todd A. Breitenstein

Art by Dave Aikins

Developed by Kerry Breitenstein & Steve Donohue

Layout by Todd A. Breitenstein

Written by Todd A. Breitenstein, David Carl, Les Simpson, Robert Defendi, Heath Scheiman, & Jim Pross

Two full-color tiles, 24 full-color encounter disks, 64-page b&w rulebook; \$9.95

The steps Twilight Creations takes as it expands its Variable Tile System are tentative ones. With [The Most Dangerous Game](#), the company opened the door to espionage, joining forces with AEG and its *Spycraft RPG*. *This Is Not Happening* takes another baby step outside the comfortable cocoon, placing players in abstract settings like dream worlds and computerized virtual realities.

When playing these scenarios, Victory Points are replaced by Focus Points. These represent your ability to concentrate in weird, fluid environments, and may even allow you to manipulate reality. Players in a *This Is Not Happening* scenario start with a certain number of Focus Points, more if they have the Focused Mind skill. They can gain still more for each mission objective they achieve, and for opponents they overcome. Damage in the other worlds is suffered as Focus Point damage first, but that's not the primary use of those points. True, most of the Focus skills, based on Intelligence and Defense/Health, are aimed at causing damage to others or defending against and avoiding damage, but Focus also fuels Focus Abilities.

Focus Abilities are strange powers characters can use in the altered worlds; these are available to everyone. Some have effects outside the game tiles. Fate and Fortune powers change die rolls, and Blasts let you switch statistics like Intelligence and Strength in combat. Most are in-game fudges. If heroes want to pull off stunts a la *The Matrix*, they can jump across buildings, run fast, or avoid having to turn over potentially damaging encounter disks by running along the wall past them, all by spending a few FPs. There are also weirder abilities better suited to a dreamscape. You can flood the room with ectoplasmic goo, raise tendrils to ensnare opponents, and create or hide doors. There is also a selection of "standard" psychic powers, like telepathy, teleportation, and telekinesis.

And what better place to trash in your pseudo-*Matrix* than a high-security office building? The two new tiles match up, with elevators, stairwells, and even the parking lot all overlapping at the right places. Quarters are tight, so the Focus Abilities will be of great use. The rules and some accompanying scenarios recommend or use other tiles from other games, usually dropped in at random, to simulate that dreamlike, nonfigurative state. The game requires the use of the *When Darkness Comes* core game, and repeatedly suggests (but does not require) *The Most Dangerous Game*.

There are 24 new Encounter Disks to help establish the mood. Many of these are supposed to be only for use with

cyber settings and/or the dream worlds. Adversaries are accurately described: "The shimmery blue cyber-monster" is logic that's hard to argue, and the evil clown shows that someone in the design department is on the ball. Your Allies are crazy guys on street corners or Zen masters, and your tools boost your psychic abilities. Many scenarios use the portals (doors called up when the objective is met), and traps like cyber-hounds, clockwork cubes, and guardian systems (another nod to *The Matrix*, among other insular references) are some of the surprises waiting on the disks.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The adventures -- six of them, including one meant to be run as a roleplaying experience complete with GM -- are almost unrelentingly bleak stories of people trying to evade one faceless bureaucracy or another. The first has scientists discovering portals to another plane -- if they can reach them, they'll be safe from their Big Brother-like sponsors. In the next, something must be stopped from killing off one skilled VR hacker after another. A group finds itself pulled into a box straight out of *Hellraiser*, while another tries to stop the release of a devastating computer virus. A serum has started turning people into mindless, identical slaves of the computer (yet another nod to *The Matrix*), and in the blowout GM adventure, government agents are ordered to track down their own computer contacts in a bid to find who is twisting the system to much grander purposes than simple data thefts and information worms.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

The editing continues to improve, though the text seems to be much larger than usual. The stories are decent introductions, if a bit old hat. There is no miniature included with this set, but the components included are still nice. It would be great if Dave Aikins could, just once, blow the art assignment so there'd be something new to say about his quality drawings, but buyers are stuck with his superior results.

This Is Not Happening comes in cheaper without the figurines, and given the inclusion of the zippy Focus rules, which represent a welcome and significant change in the available guidelines, this supplement is worth the price of admission. Only this time, you don't just watch, you get to play.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Chi-Chian the Roleplaying Game

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

Written by Chris Adams, David Fooden, & Voltaire

Illustrated by Voltaire with Chris Adams & David Fooden

144-page b&w softcover; \$29.95

If you have been wondering what Aetherco have been doing since releasing [Further Information: A Gamemaster's Treasury of Time](#), a supplement for their acclaimed time-travel RPG, [Continuum: Roleplaying in The Yet](#), then look no further than the *Chi-Chian the Roleplaying Game*. Based upon, and set after the events of the *Chi-Chian* comic book and the animated web series broadcast on the [Sci-Fi Channel website](#), the RPG allows players to enter the strange creation of the artist, musician, and animator, Voltaire -- that of New York in the year 3049. Manhattan is a prefecture of the Japanese Empire, administered under Imperial command by Mimitsu Lines, Inc. It was bought for \$27 to protect Japanese interests in the wake of the New York/New Jersey War of 3000 that was the Republic of Americas' attempt to prevent the secession of the island. In the 50 years since, parts of Manhattan have been rebuilt in the classic Japanese style, and -- under the guidance of the company's leading scientist, Soma Mitsui -- also undergone several major changes. Giant worms core the big apple, providing clean and safe urban mass transport. X-Y Relax technology that gives women sole control of organic devices. But his biggest project was the installation of K-Seg, or "Kind Segregation," a system of social engineering that divides the city into four planes: Alpha, Beta, Gamma, and, Delta (which is below ground). Each is reserved for a different kind of person based upon their degree of spiritual development, rather than their creed, race, or wealth. The more emotionally developed they are, the higher the plane of their dwelling. The planes are separated by a barrier known as Smart Mist, which is impenetrable to those who are not enlightened enough. Of course, there is a way to sidestep this problem. The K-Seg Buffer is a device able to store and play the memories of a "nicer" person, allowing its owner to both ascend to the higher planes and to enjoy the memories.

Despite these changes, New York is far from being a paradise. Mimitsu Lines' security still has to keep the city safe from New Jersey, and it also wants to find the remaining secrets of the late Soma Mitsui. One of these, his last experiment, a giant robot with four arms ending in dragon heads, caused havoc and destruction among the populace with its appearance two years ago. Below the city a renegade order of monks, the Patahn Pahr, enslaved by a race of giant intelligent caterpillar moths that nest in their brains, seek to overthrow the matriarchy of Mimitsui Lines. Fortunately, the heroine of the comic book and daughter of Soma, Chizuru "Chi-Chian" Mitsui, still resides in the city where she works as a worm train handler. Though she keeps out of corporate politics, this has not stopped her from saving the city on several occasions, usually with the help of her friends and allies. They include Nahm, the wanted pirate broadcaster known as Siren; the robot sex toy/Tentacle Unit fusion, Sayoko-7; Sebastian, the Bach-loving, waltzing leader of the giant intelligent cockroaches that also live below New York; and Dr. Yoshimoto, the three-foot-tall pink teddy bear super toy scientist.

Players can choose to take any one of these characters, or create one of their own. The samples given for the ready-to-play scenario at the book's end include rich kids, cockroaches (who all speak with a Russian accent and are never effected by K-Seg), psychics, robotic sex toys, and even an Arab taximech driver (New York is served by these four-story tall humanoid shaped robots with the pilot and passenger compartments in their head). The process is simple; players having 120 Chi points to spend on eight stats, plus capabilities that range from special abilities and skills to unique items, status, and wealth with which to buy other equipment. All characters must have at least two tragic flaws

as well as a pair of memories for use when traveling through the Smart Barrier. Packages are given for playing both cockroaches and robots, but most characters will be humans, many of them from the Taino race. This is a general species that mankind blended into during the first few centuries of the third millennium, through a mixture of crossbreeding and genetic manipulation. Only with the return of descendants from the Solar System's various colonies did humanity rediscover their diversity, and for the last 150 years, they have been attempting to overturn the many years of the Taino period. After character generation is complete, any remaining Chi points are put aside in the character's Chi Pool. These are spent as luck or hero points to re-roll dice rolls during a game, and also used to improve the character. The GM or Sensei has final character approval.

The game system is simpler than the character creation process, which involves flipping back and forth selecting various options. Everything in the game has a value, whether it is a core statistic, ability, or a piece of equipment, and this is matched against a Difficulty Number on the Success Chart to give a minimum target number. 2d10 are rolled to match this target or get higher, with doubles re-rolled and added. Higher dice rolls will yield a greater number of successes. The system is light and fast, with combat working along the same lines.

But the bulk of *Chi-Chian the Roleplaying Game* -- some 50 pages -- is given over to an encyclopaedia description of the setting and its events. Together with the opening chapter's synopsis of the events portrayed in the comic and the on-line web comic, the book certainly lives up to its back cover description as being the ". . . official bible of the Chi-Chian universe." Indeed, there is a lot more to the setting than has been given here. For the sensei, there is a further explanation of the setting's secrets, write-ups of the comic's most notable characters and villains, and a short ready-to-play scenario that should not last more than two sessions. There is only limited advice on running a game, so this is not really a game for the neophyte referee.

Despite being only a 144-page book, it is very heavy. This is due to the heavy, glossy paper stock. The layout is very stark, being white text on black page. It is heavily illustrated with a wide selection of artwork taken from both the on-line and off-line comic. The standard of the on-line comic is better, but the singular look of the off-line art does grow on you. Overall, the effect works to give a very particular look to what is very different setting, one that is a fusion of the Goth and Manga art styles.

Chi-Chian the Roleplaying Game joins a small range of games, such as the recently published *a/state* and the older *SLA Industries*, where the cityscape of the setting figures as a character all of its very own. It also serves as an excellent resource for fans of the comic series, but there is so much information given in its pages that you do not really need to have read the comic to get into the setting. The light comic-book-style system also makes it suitable for use by new players, who, of course, could be fans of the comic. But the experienced GM and player looking for something a little more different, a melange of the Gothic, the Manga, and a dash of mecha, could look no further than the dark, weird world of the *Chi-Chian the Roleplaying Game*.

--Matthew Pook

Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



A Suppressed Primer

"So, first comes the house of man, and its construction, then the human body, its build and deformities; then justice, music, the church; war, harvest, geometry; the mountain, nomadic life and secluded life, astronomy, toil, and rest; the horse and the snake; the hammer and the urn which -- turned over and struck -- makes a bell; trees, rivers, roads; and finally destiny and God: This is what the alphabet signifies."

-- Victor Hugo, *France et Belgique, Alpes et Pyrenees, Voyages et Excursions* (1910)

This bit of experimental silliness has no real reason for existing, except that it's always kind of fun to play with narrative conventions. I especially like watching the poetic primer form bulge with fictive botulism, as the lines begin to quarrel among themselves and jockey for power over the poem. (To be perfectly honest, I also like the fact that I can write this kind of thing rather faster than the normal run of columns, as *GURPS Infinite Worlds* is not getting any less infinite.) I'm not exactly sure what anyone could use this for in a game, but then I didn't get to write [my traditional doggerel](#) on April Fool's Day, so Steven owes me one.

*"Einstein, disguised as Robin Hood
With his memories in a trunk
Passed this way an hour ago
With his friend, a jealous monk
He looked so immaculately frightful
As he bummed a cigarette
Then he went off sniffing drainpipes
And reciting the alphabet."*

-- Bob Dylan, "Desolation Row"

A is [Atlantis](#), which sinks at the start,

Built from [Bisociative](#) logic as art.

C is for [Crop Circles](#) -- cereal surrealism,

Dee is for Britain and [occult imperialism](#).

E is for Emerald, [Prester John's](#) concave treasure,

Fallen in [Footnotes](#) to Sir James George Frazer.

Growing in Graves, both [Glozelian](#) and Robert,

(**H**e was Haunted by [Hecate](#), whose dismal job it

Is ruling the waste lands, like [Irem](#) in Oman.)

Joined by those that yawned to warn [Julius](#) the Roman.

K is for Knighthoods, [Templar](#) or Hospitaller,

Led by Little [Green Men](#) (the Grey ones are Littler).

Mastered by [Madoc](#), their Maps, used by Dee

Named [Norumbega](#), the land of the free
Over the Ocean, just south of [Oak Island](#)
Planting Prieuré [grails](#) from line five to stop violent
Quakes by Qlipthoth that subduct hollow history,
Right under [Roswell](#), that mutable mystery,
Spawning the [Saucers](#) that probe and demean us,
Transporting Tesla, with [death-rays](#) from Venus.
Unless line three's [Uranus](#) Unleashes his will,
Ve all will be conquered with [Veapons](#) uff Vril!
While Wotan calls [Werewolves](#) from graves to the West,
X is for [Xulthtan](#), which [COUPLET SUPPRESSED]
You hardly need [Yeats](#) to find this ending barbarous:
Z[schaetzch](#) finds Atlantis, and we get ouroborous.

Can the Friends Justify the Fiends?

This past week I finished editing a secret project (which, no matter how many bamboo shoots are stabbed under my fingernails, I shall *not* reveal to be [D6 Fantasy](#)).

Anyway, in the course of editing this book, I ran across the following segment, dealing with priestly Miracles, all of which draw from one of three special skills: *divination* (telling the future), *favor* (helping people), or *strife* (hurting people):

What happens when a cleric wants to include skills dealt with by more than one skill? The gamemaster and player need to decide what the intent of the invocation is. For instance, a miracle that creates an undead helper endowed with the ability to lift objects and look for small items falls under *favor*, while one that resurrects someone in order to wreak havoc -- even if that means giving the undead the *lifting* skill to carry off objects or people or the *tracking* or *search* skill to look for them -- comes under *strife*.

Now, if you've just read the preceding, I'm afraid I must ask you to gouge out your eyes. Non-Disclosure Agreement and all that . . . you understand.

But that's beside the point. That paragraph immediately evoked an image that gave me the giggles for hours afterwards:

Todd the Happy Necromancer.

Oh, sure, most necromancers raise their undead legions to wreak havoc on the living, spread evil, and destroy all that is good. But not Todd! Todd uses *his* powers for good! Todd's animated corpses mow the lawn, give backrubs, and babysit youngsters. And you haven't lived until you've been part of a mostly-zombie game of Freeze Tag!

Anyway, the point is, that paragraph reminded me that perceptions are fairly arbitrary, especially when it comes to ends justifying the means.

Once you can mentally separate ends and means, a whole new world of possible motivations and plots opens up.

Of course, other games and stories already make use of this dynamic. For example, the idea of "Vampire/Demon/Other-Creature-of-Evil Who Struggles to Do the Right Thing" is a common trope. But the idea can extend to just about *any* motivation and outcome.

As an extreme example, in a Supers campaign you could have two characters who each have the ultimate goal of getting rid of crime. One works tirelessly to remove what he perceives to be the root causes of crime -- unemployment, lack of opportunity, social injustice, and so on. The other straps on assorted slug-throwing weapons and prowls the streets, mowing down those who are actively committing crimes.

While both people consider themselves working toward the same goals, each would probably view the other with suspicion and even antagonism, believing the other to be part of the problem. And they might *both* react with revulsion at another murderer who shoots those he *believes* are prone to crime. (And if the latter claims powers of precognition and tells the others he "knows" those he shoots are about to commit crimes, this could create another layer of ends-versus-means complications for them.)

From a player's point of view, this means that new and interesting character concepts can be conceived by looking at the ends *or* means. To tackle things from the "means" aspect, think about what PCs traditionally try to accomplish, and then think about alternate means of achieving that goal (or an alternate perception of the goal). For example, quite

possibly the best idea I ever heard in this regard was in the *Pyramid* chat room one time, for an *In Nomine* game.

This'll require a bit of background, but I'll try to keep it brief.

Anyway, *In Nomine* is about the battle between angels and demons on Earth, who often conflict to influence mortals' souls. One aspect of this struggle revolves around angels convincing humans to achieve their "destinies" -- or the best possible thing they can do with their lives -- versus demons leading mortals to their "fates," or the worst possible thing they can do with their lives.

One type of angel is the Elohim, supremely logical and emotionless beings who can calculate and determine the outcome of future actions because of their connection to the world. While it would be logical and, indeed, common for an Elohite to serve the cause of Destiny, this character concept instead revolved around the idea of an Elohite of Fate. The logic is: Are there some -- admittedly rare -- circumstances where the greater good can best be served by helping someone along toward their worst future? (For a classic example, the guy who shot Batman's parents was obviously fulfilling his fate, but the world has benefited a thousand times over from Batman using those shootings to fulfill his destiny.)

As a result, he was actively working for the demonic side, with both sides believing they were fulfilling their goals (and, of course, only the GM knowing for sure). Being supremely rational and emotionless, it was trivial to justify his actions; logically, the greater good *was* being served by his deeds, and there were incredible roleplaying possibilities from having a character whose ends were accomplished through *very* unorthodox means.

As other examples, a *Call of Cthulhu* investigator might accomplish a common goal -- "protect humanity from the forces of darkness" -- in an unorthodox way . . . perhaps by using fame to spread word of the peril, or magic to try to take the fight to the monsters directly, or science to create a fortified "bunker" where a small selected few can hide from the danger.

Interesting results can also be achieved from looking at traditional "means," and adjusting the "ends." For example, the comic book series *Thunderbolts* revolved around a super-team that did good and stopped criminals in the way that other super-groups did . . . but they were doing so because they were actually super-villains, and were gaining the world's trust so that they could turn against the world and conquer it at a crucial time.

(I should assure you now that the cornucopia of comic book references this week are pure coincidence, and *not* an effort to justify tax write-offs of outlandish comic shop expenditures for another year.)

Translating this idea to a traditional fantasy game, what if an adventurer is doing the traditional dungeon crawl thing -- not out of a desire to do good or protect the countryside, but because he is an ancient insanely powerful dragon, cursed to assume a puny human form until he can undo the curse? He may well think that an adventuring life is the best means of encountering a cure . . . after all, adventurers stumble across interesting artifacts and sources of power all the time. Ironically, in an ongoing campaign, even if the rest of the PCs found out, they might not *care*:

"Well, if we ever help put him in a situation where he can undo the curse, the world is doomed."

"Yeah, but what're the odds of *that*? Besides, he's been honorable so far, *and* he's incredible in a fight!"

Likewise, an adventurer might place himself in an adventuring life not because of any altruistic desire to save the world, but because he believes that dying in an adventuring life is a sure way to a paradisiacal afterlife. Or an adventurer might choose the life of a *Call of Cthulhu* investigator because he is a mediocre horror writer, and he believes that placing himself in frightening situations will improve his craft.

The GM can also use ends/means possibilities to provide alternate means and motivations in a campaign. Besides shaking up the players perceptions about various characters motivations and methods, it can also be used to provide plots. For example, what if the heroes are led to help a mysterious old man "save the world's children" . . . only to learn, well into the adventure, that his idea of "saving" them means "removing them from this world"? Or what if the PCs are forced to choose sides in a conflict of ends versus means, such as the one above about "how to rid the world of evil"?

Now, most unorthodox ends/means concepts require careful thought, consideration, and, in the case of PC concepts, almost certainly GM approval. Since they are so outré, they have the ability to disrupt a campaign and make things complicated. This is especially true if a concept requires on a certain worldview of the campaign; for example, the ***In Nomine*** example above is so noncanonical that no doubt even now Elizabeth McCoy, the game's line editor, is sending legions of zombies my way in an effort to deal with me.

Now, whether said zombies want to rend me limb from limb, or merely play a game of Freeze Tag <ahem> remains to be seen.

* * *

For those of you reading this on Friday:

If you're looking for the inside scoop on the upcoming ***GURPS Fourth Edition***, you should stop by the [Pyramid Chat Room](#) tomorrow at 7 P.M. CST, where Sean Punch will serve as the ringleader for a little discussion called "Skills and Techniques."

For those of you reading this on Saturday or later:

Wow! What an incredible discussion. Too bad you missed it; you should have heard the things we said about *you* . . .

--*Steven Marsh*

The Last Steampunk Adventure: The Hidden Valley of Science!

by James L. Cambias

Editor's Note: The "Last _____ Adventure" series is designed to provide GMs with scenarios suitable for concluding a genre, transitioning a genre to a new premise, or providing an exciting "setting sun" one-shot.

*Despite the overarching title, genres represented by the "Last _____ Adventure" **may** continue having adventures published in **Pyramid**.*

We will be publishing adventures in this series throughout the month of May. If the series proves popular, it may continue beyond as an irregular feature. As ever, we invite your comments by either the [discussion groups](#) or by writing us at pyramid@sjgames.com

The Great War -- so long dreaded and hoped for -- has finally engulfed Europe. All the great infallible plans have failed to bring quick victory for either side. The giant Babbage engines planning strategy are continually stalemated by equally huge machines on the other side. Every superweapon has met a countermeasure. The machinery of warfare is becoming more brutally functional: the great dirigible cruisers with their gilded scrollwork and broadside cannon can no longer survive in the skies against lean monoplanes; the towering steam-titans and land ironclads succumbed to minefields, mud, and heavy artillery.

Society is showing the strain. Clockwork automata failed to turn the tide of battle -- too fragile and expensive -- but they are filling the factories with tireless workers, freeing up young men (and soon perhaps even young women!) to be cannon fodder on the front. Aerial bombardment and intercontinental shelling by super-cannons are forcing the people of Europe underground into dimly-lit "shelter housing" and factory bunkers. Some thinkers have begun to wonder if humans will become a subterranean race.

The Mission

The heroes are being assigned to a secret, risky mission which may break the stalemate and bring an end to the war before European civilization collapses.

Six weeks earlier, a British cruiser sank a German U-boat off the coast of South Africa. The submarine was destroyed, but the cruiser's boats picked up two survivors. One of them has been identified as the well-known German Arctic explorer Ernst Kreisler. The other is Herr Doctor Professor Karl Pfundt, of the Munich Technical Institute.

Kreisler has so far refused to say anything, but Pfundt was badly burned before rescue and has babbled while dosed with pain-killing drugs. Based on his ramblings, the notes Kreisler was carrying, and some hints from cable intercepts and agents in Europe, British Intelligence has determined what they believe the sub's mission was.

According to Pfundt (and corroborated by some other sources), there is an organization of scientists and idealists, called the Brotherhood of Science, devoted to promoting discovery and building a rational society. It was founded

Background Assumptions

This scenario assumes a relatively orthodox steampunk setting, with a technology base of TL (5+1) -- all the impractical steam-powered dreams of the Victorian Era were realized. Where "superscience" exists, it doesn't directly violate physical laws, but does allow unrealistically good performance.

Increasingly, however, the nifty

in Switzerland in 1849, shifted to London in 1863, then Paris in 1872, and finally in 1890 the members relocated to a base beyond the reach of any government: Antarctica. The Brotherhood is very wealthy from patent royalties, and apparently has pursued a policy of keeping its most potent discoveries out of the hands of those who might misuse them -- which at present describes both sides in the World War.

Kreisler's notes indicate the existence of a hidden rift valley in Antarctica, kept warm by thermal vents and sheltered by high mountains. A member of the Brotherhood discovered it in 1866, and in 1891 the organization began construction of a Citadel of Science there. The U-boat's mission was to either make peaceful contact with the Brotherhood of Science and secure them as allies for the Central Powers, or else seize the Brotherhood's headquarters and return its super-scientific marvels to Germany.

It seems likely the Germans will try again, so the British have recruited a group of seasoned explorers, intelligence agents, and scientific minds (i.e. player characters) to fly down to Antarctica as quickly as possible. Their mission: to strike an alliance between the British Government and the Brotherhood of Science, or (failing that) to prevent the Germans from accomplishing their mission.

Upper-class ladies and gentlemen are expected to volunteer out of a sense of noblesse oblige, and naturally anyone in uniform will go where ordered. Middle and lower-class civilians will be paid a stipend of £1000 each for undertaking the mission.

Transportation to Antarctica is aboard the Royal Navy aerial cruiser *Vigilant*. (PCs with their own intercontinental transport can use that instead.) The skies over Europe have become too dangerous for an airship like *Vigilant*, but she is still useful for long-distance ocean patrols -- and polar expeditions. If any of the player-characters is a military officer above the rank of Lieutenant (i.e. Military Rank 3 or better) he will be put in command; otherwise the *Vigilant's* captain is Lieutenant Louis Buckhollow.

HMS Vigilant

The *Vigilant* was built in the years before the war began, when it was still imagined that aerial cruisers would fight naval-style engagements in the sky. Originally she mounted a 240-cf turret below the body, holding a 105-mm naval gun. That has since been replaced by an internal bomb bay holding 1600 lbs. of bombs. For this mission the bomb bay is available for cargo to supply the expedition.

Vigilant is designed using TL(5+1) technology: in other words her systems are TL6, but are described as advanced versions of TL5 equipment. The "high-efficiency steam turbine" engines are actually TL6 turbocharged gasoline engines, the "incombustible hydrogen" lifting gas is helium, and so on. *HMS Vigilant* burns 144 gallons per hour of petroleum fuel.

Subassemblies: Body with Very Good streamlining +11 (2.28 mcf), three limited-rotation turrets [Body: LR and B] +2.
Powertrain: 3200-kW TL (5+1) high efficiency steam turbine with two propellers and 12,960-gallon self-sealing ultralight fuel tank.

Occ: crew of 15, space for 5 passengers
Cargo: 320 cf, 1 ton
Body

Armor	F	RL	B	T	U
Body	1NR	1NR	1NR	1NR	1NR
Turrets	2	2	2	2	2

TL (5+1) gadgetry is fighting a losing battle against less romantic but more efficient TL 6 gear. In effect, the steampunk world is getting brutally reality-checked.

Magic, psychic powers, and the supernatural either don't exist or are the preserve of a hidden elite and don't overtly affect events in the world or in this adventure. Historically, the Great War saw a tremendous upsurge in occult beliefs, and this can be mirrored in the campaign, even if the magic doesn't really work.

Weaponry

1 37mm Rotary Cannon [Tur: R] (335 rounds)
1 37mm Rotary Cannon [Tur: L] (335 rounds)
1 37mm Rotary Cannon [Tur: B] (330 rounds)
4 400-lb. Bombs [Body: U]

Equipment

Body: bomb bay, cargo space, 7 crewstations, electric signal lamp, fuel, foghorn, 20 hammocks, lifting gas (2,275,200 cf), TL5 precision navigation instruments, rotation space, steam turbine. Turrets: universal mounts, rotary cannon, 1 crewstation each.

Statistics

Size: 90' diameter, 540' long *Payload:* 42 tons *Lwt:* 0/142,000
Volume: 2.28 million cf *Maint:* 8 hr. *Price:* \$6,300,000

HT: 12 HPs: Body 15,000, Turrets 75

aSpeed: 60 mph *aAccel:* 1a *aDecel:* 0.5 *aMR:* 0.125 *aSR:* 4 Stall Speed 0.

The Voyage

The *Vigilant* proceeds south over Allied-controlled territory: Great Britain to southern France, across the Mediterranean, then south over Africa to Cape Town. The route is planned to avoid enemy air patrols, but the Germans or Austrians might have long-range machines ready to intercept the PCs over the Sahara.

At the final refueling stop in Cape Town, the party gets a cable from London: "BELIEVE GERMAN EXPEDITION EN ROUTE. NO DETAILS AVAILABLE." The Germans are in fact traveling aboard another U-Boat, proceeding along the coast of neutral South America to avoid Allied patrols. They have a slight head start on the British expedition.

From Cape Town the dirigible heads south. As the expedition approaches Antarctica, the weather gets steadily worse. The entire second day in flight is bad weather, requiring double normal control rolls for the pilot. The ocean below is dotted with pack ice and large icebergs, bobbing in the huge waves which sweep endlessly around the southern continent.

The Hidden Valley

The secret valley ruled by the Brotherhood of Science is located south of the Wohlthat Mountains in Antarctica, inland from the Princess Astrid Coast. It is a rift valley, trending generally east-west, 20 miles long, and about 4 miles across at its widest point. The valley is walled off on either side by tall mountains, rising to at least 5,000 feet; only the ends are open. The western end rises gradually to the ice sheet leading to the Ritscher Upland, but the eastern end opens onto a sheet of level ice leading to the coast.

The floor of the valley is well below the level of the surrounding ice sheet -- in fact, it's below sea level, protected from flooding only by the huge glacial dam which blocks the eastern end. Volcanic heat from dozens of geysers and thermal vents keep the valley warm; the average temperature is roughly comparable with that of Scotland or Quebec. During the months of June and July the valley is completely dark, all sight of the Sun blocked by the mountains.

From above, the valley is a startling contrast to the lifeless ice and wind-scoured rock of Antarctica. A layer of mist hangs at about 1,000 feet, and below that the explorers can make out green forests, grassland, and a steaming river.

The valley is not unprotected. To drive away unwelcome aerial visitors, the Brotherhood have emplaced a giant wind vortex cannon at the eastern approaches. Any aircraft not flying the Brotherhood's flag (dark blue with a stylized thunderbolt) will be fired upon. The vortex generator can fire indefinitely (RoF = 1), buffeting the craft with blast after blast of powerful winds. No airship can survive them very long.

The vortex cannon has a range of 14,400 yards; any vehicle hit by a wind blast must immediately make a control roll and a vehicle HT roll. Loss of control is resolved normally; a failed HT roll results in the loss of 10d body hit points, ignoring armor.

Either the *Vigilant* puts down on the ice sheet east of the valley, or she gets broken up by wind blasts. Either way, the PCs have to proceed on foot.

Creatures and Features

The hidden valley is a treasure-trove of species left over from previous eons. It does not have any dinosaurs, sadly (the volcanic activity is too recent for that), but it does boast saber-toothed tigers, carnivorous flightless birds, and giant ground sloths. The Brotherhood members have built an electrified barrier across the southern end of the valley to keep the more dangerous creatures away from the Citadel of Science.

A large party traveling in the valley will probably not be bothered by animals, but anyone who is walking alone should worry about being preyed on by sabertooths or dinornises.

The valley also contains ruins of vast stone buildings. The ruins have similarities to Egyptian, Mayan, and Tibetan architecture, and are all overgrown with vines and trees. Archaeologists from the Brotherhood have carefully inspected the ruins and removed any important artifacts; they are here just for "local color." Gamemasters wanting a longer adventure storyline can always assume the Brotherhood never quite got around to exploring the ruins, and stock them with monsters, traps, treasure, and ten-foot-wide passages. The ruins are also an excellent place for the German party to ambush the heroes.

The Citadel of Science

On a rise overlooking the lake in the center of the valley is the Citadel of Science. It is an impressive building shaped like a sphere with a pyramidal base, about 10 stories high. The base section is local stone, but the sphere is constructed of polished sheets of steel, flown in and assembled by the Brotherhood with the help of brain-augmented gorillas. The walls of the Citadel's sphere section have DR 50, the stone pyramid base is DR 100.

Power for the entire complex comes from geothermal energy, tapping geysers to drive steam turbines. The builders put in considerably more generating capacity than the Brotherhood currently needs, so assume the Citadel can provide unlimited amounts of electricity to power superscience death rays, force shields, or projects to alter the Earth's axis of rotation.

The Citadel is defended against aerial attack by a battery of solid-fuel rockets in a pop turret atop the sphere. However, the designers never imagined any force could reach Antarctica and traverse the valley. Other than its location and DR 20 steel doors, the Citadel has no defense against ground attack.

The Brotherhood of Science

If the heroes manage to reach the Citadel, they are met by a welcoming

Creatures

The hidden valley contains several potentially dangerous species which can enliven a journey on foot.

- **Dinornis:** Descendants of ancient flightless carnivores, these birds are fast and aggressive, attacking with sharp beaks and claws. **ST 15, DX 15, IQ 3, HT 14.** Speed 9. Weight 250 lbs. Bites for 1d cutting damage.
- **Giant Sloth:** The largest creature in the valley, the giant sloths are not aggressive unless provoked or attacked. In

committee led by the touchy genius known only as "Doctor X." X is suspicious of the new arrivals, and wants to simply take them prisoner. If any of the player-characters are scientists, inventors, or explorers, however, Doctor X is overruled by his colleague, the rather more jovial Professor Fogliano. "After all," he points out, "they have come a very long way, and it would scarcely be polite of us to simply lock them up without at least sitting down for a chat first." (If the PCs are inclined to put up a fight or otherwise make trouble, Dr. X has his electric pistol, Fogliano carries a more conventional Mauser automatic, and they have four brain-augmented gorillas as backup.)

Fogliano invites the new arrivals to remain as guests within the Citadel, and promises them the chance to speak to the Brotherhood. He gives them a brief tour of the Citadel of Science, obviously pleased with the opportunity to show off all the Brotherhood's technological marvels.

Within the Citadel

The Citadel has ten levels aboveground, plus extensive tunnels and basements cut into the basalt cliff on which it stands. The basements and lower levels are devoted to power production, storage, and fabrication shops. The members of the Brotherhood can produce just about any TL5 or TL(5+1) item in their workshops, subject to limits of size and available materials.

Above the workshops are laboratories, fully equipped for all branches of natural science. The current occupants of the Citadel are most interested in electrical devices, cutting-edge biology, radium power, and communication with the dead. Fogliano introduces the visitors to the scientists and nobody makes much effort to conceal what they're working on. Sufficiently smooth-talking characters with good memories could take home several revolutionary discoveries just by chatting up the researchers and listening to what they say.

The upper floors of the Citadel are used as living space, with comfortable accommodations for 32 people (single-occupancy; for a larger staff the Brotherhood can double up and fit 64). The ninth floor holds a library and the dining hall, while the top floor is the domed meeting-chamber for the leadership of the Brotherhood (it also doubles as a lecture hall).

There are a total of 30 members of the Brotherhood currently in residence at the Citadel. Of those, age, infirmity, or sincere pacifist beliefs leave only about a dozen capable of fighting in the event of conflict. Brotherhood members typically arm themselves with ordinary pistols (broomhandle Mausers are a favorite), but the Gamemaster can throw in any or all steampunk small arms he feels appropriate -- air-guns, electric guns, flame guns, gas guns, heat rays, prototype submachineguns, tangles, stunners, or whatever.

For extra muscle, the Brotherhood can command two dozen brain-augmented gorillas. The gorillas can't use any kind of guns or firearms (their hands are simply too big to hold them properly), and they are hypnotically conditioned to never use lethal force against a human. They can punch or wrestle intruders, or act as living shields for their masters in the Brotherhood. And of course the invading Germans don't know about the hypnotic conditioning, so a clever bluff using the gorillas might persuade the enemy to surrender without a fight.

Note that the Citadel is not self-sufficient. In particular, all food is flown in by the Brotherhood's stealthy supply airship, which comes once a month. Unless radio communications exist in the campaign, the Brotherhood members are starved for news (even if radio is in use, they will still be eager to get back issues of newspapers and scientific

a fight they use their massive claws. **ST** 40, **DX** 10, **IQ** 4, **HT** 14/40. Speed 5. Hide has PD 1, DR 2. Weight 2,000 lbs. Claws for 2d-2 cutting damage.

- **Sabertooth Tigers:** The other top predator in the valley, they use pack tactics while hunting, with one animal trying to drive prey toward a pair waiting in ambush. **ST** 30, **DX** 13, **IQ** 4, **HT** 15/20. Speed 10. Hide has PD 1, DR 1. Weight 600 lbs., size 2 hexes. Claws do 2d-2 cutting damage, teeth do 1d+2 impaling.
- **Berserk Gorillas:** Some of Professor Tuquier's experiments on brain augmentation didn't work as well as he hoped, and the result was a group of insane gorillas. Tuquier didn't want to kill the animals, so he released them into the jungle to see if they might recover. So far they haven't -- the berserk gorillas will attack anyone or anything they come across. Use the stats for the brain-augmented gorillas, below, but give them the Berserk and Bad Temper disadvantages.

journals).

Another Visitor

The PCs are not the only outsiders currently visiting the Citadel of Science. A German officer, Captain Augustus Von Macht, arrived on foot the day before. The Brotherhood won't put up with any violence between him and the Allied party.

Captain Von Macht is the advance scout for the German force of stormtroopers traveling south through the valley. He hasn't told the Brotherhood that, of course. Instead, he presents himself as another envoy like the British group, trying to persuade the Brotherhood to join his side in the war. (And Von Macht will make a sincere effort to win over the leaders of the Brotherhood by argument and persuasion -- at least until the stormtroops arrive.)

The Great Debate

The day after their arrival, the foreign visitors are invited to present their pleas to the Brotherhood's leaders, and observe their debates on the subject. (It may seem odd for outsiders to be allowed to watch such a crucial proceeding, but the simple fact is that the Brotherhood are an organization of mad scientists and have had nobody to rant at but each other for years now.)

It becomes obvious that there are several factions within the Brotherhood, with differing attitudes concerning the Great War and the best course for the scientists to follow.

The Interventionist faction wants to choose a side in the Great War and turn loose the organization's superscientific weapons to bring victory and peace. The Interventionists are subdivided into a pro-Allied camp (led by Philippe Tuquier, creator of the brain-augmented gorillas) and a pro-German camp (led by Count Fohn, inventor of the wind vortex cannon). The Interventionists spend as much time bickering among themselves, but can at least agree that the Brotherhood needs to get involved in the war soon.

The Reconstruction faction proposes to wait until the two sides have fought to exhaustion, then rebuild a better world. The leader of the Reconstructionists is Professor Fogliano. Usually he can command the support of whichever group of Interventionists thinks their side is currently winning the war.

The Revolution faction led by Doctor X wants to unleash the Brotherhood's weapons against both sides and topple the corrupt order which has created the slaughter. This group has some internal divisions about what form the new world order is to take -- the American members mostly want to see a kind of United States of the World, while the British supporters tend to be Socialists, and the Europeans are Anarchists.

Finally, the largest single group is the Nonintervention faction, which simply wants to remain uninvolved. Whatever fate the world brings upon itself, they don't want to be responsible.

The player-characters can affect the results of the Brotherhood's debate. Lobbying the leaders of the various factions, using Diplomacy skill or other means of persuasion might put together a coalition willing to support the Allies. Of course, Captain Von Macht is doing the same thing. Violence by the visitors is likely to sway support toward the Noninterventionists, so the heroes must be on their best behavior.

The outcome of the debate depends on how successful the outsiders have been at lining up support. If both the British and German representatives have failed to persuade any members, then the Noninterventionists prevail.

Brain-Augmented Gorillas

The gorillas are the creation of the brilliant neurosurgeon Philippe Tuquier. Each appears to be a large male lowland gorilla wearing a strange steel helmet. The helmet replaces the gorilla's normal skull, making room for brain tissue grafts giving it near-human intelligence.

ST 20, DX 12, IQ 9, HT 14/16. Speed 7. Hide has PD 1, DR 1; head has PD 2, DR 2. Weight 500 lbs. Punches for 2d-1 damage. The gorillas cannot speak, but can understand Esperanto, and have Gesture-10.

A New Problem

Just after the Brotherhood have made their decision, an alarm sounds. One of the brain-augmented gorillas has spotted the German storm troops approaching the Citadel.

There is a 40-man platoon of elite German storm troops (if the Gamemaster needs to reduce their strength, assume the Germans have lost some men along the way from animal attacks). They are led by Captain Springer. His orders are simple: capture the Citadel intact if possible, otherwise destroy it to keep the Allies from learning anything. Springer's men are all armed with Mauser 8mm bolt-action rifles, and have brought along a Maxim gun and 20 belts of ammunition. To blast into the Citadel they have 20 sticks of dynamite and a detonator. Captain Von Macht will immediately try to slip away and hide out inside the Citadel, sabotaging defenses and disrupting the Brotherhood as much as he can (assuming they haven't decided to join the Central Powers and open the doors to the soldiers without a fight). If the troops are defeated, Von Macht will try to destroy the Citadel by sabotaging the steam-pressure regulators on the geothermal tap system, setting off a huge steam explosion.

Depending on the outcome of the fight and the debate, the Brotherhood leaders may change their minds. If the Noninterventionists won the debate, then the attack will only confirm them in their suspicions of outsiders. British characters who helped defend the Citadel can use Diplomacy to persuade the Noninterventionists to change their minds. Certainly personal heroism in the battle will give the PCs positive modifiers on their Diplomacy skill rolls.

Getting Home

If the *Vigilant* was damaged, the Brotherhood members can lend their considerable resources to assist in repairing it. If it was destroyed, the adventurers and any surviving crew can return to South America aboard the Brotherhood's monthly supply airship.

German victory in the battle for the Citadel can mean the heroes must escape their captors and sneak through the dangerous valley to rendezvous with the *Vigilant* -- or somehow get across the mountains and then navigate through pack ice and the stormy seas around Antarctica to reach civilization. Merciful GMs can provide a British rescue expedition searching for the party.

The Postwar World

The shape of the postwar world depends on which faction prevails at the Brotherhood of Science and what kind of campaign the GM wants to run afterward.

If the Germans take the Brotherhood's headquarters or the pro-German Interventionists prevail, the armies of the Central Powers can use the BOS superweapons to conquer Europe or devastate all the Allied lands in a campaign of extermination. This can lead to an interesting postapocalypse campaign in the vein of H.G. Wells's *Things to Come*, or a game of resistance fighting in Europe under the iron heel of Monarchy.

The Brotherhood's Superweapons

The exact nature of the superscientific weaponry devised by the geniuses of the Brotherhood of Science is deliberately left vague, so that GMs can choose devices most appropriate to their campaign worlds. Some possibilities based on period fiction:

- **Antigravity:** A great choice if the GM wants to keep the steampunk feel for a postwar campaign, this allows real flying dreadnoughts and interplanetary travel. The Allies can levitate their battleships all the way to Berlin (or vice versa) and at last break the stalemate.
- **Atomic Energy:** "Radium Bombs" could end the war Hiroshima-style, or could create an irradiated postapocalyptic landscape complete with glowing craters and atomic mutants. But the mighty power of the Atom could also open up the Solar System (or the Galaxy) to rivet-studded spaceships and all kinds of Lensman-style adventure.
- **Death Rays:** Either an invisible beam of deadly radiation or a Martian-derived heat projector, this can penetrate any armor, blast defensive earthworks, and shoot any aircraft out of the sky. Although killing the enemy fast enough hasn't been a problem so far in the Great War, this

The pro-Allied faction will create an outcome more or less resembling real history: the Allies victorious but exhausted, Germany impoverished and seething with resentment. This sets the stage for a fairly orthodox Cliffhangers campaign, albeit one with much more superscience gadgetry.

The Reconstruction faction will build a world resembling the Utopian dreams of H.G. Wells -- armies abolished, peace maintained by an elite corps of aeronauts, and all the idiocies of the past swept away. This can either be the setting for heroic air adventures of the Brotherhood's Air Patrol, or a dystopian nightmare of superscientific tyranny.

Doctor X and the Revolution faction propose a much more radical restructuring of the world, along the lines followed by Lenin in Russia. Again, this can set the stage for an Orwellian campaign of heroic underground resistance, or Cold War espionage half a century early as a relatively intact America grapples with the Brotherhood's new order.

Finally, there is the possibility that the entire mission will fail, and the Brotherhood of Science will remain aloof from the world or get blown to smithereens. That can lead to several follow-up campaigns. Victory for one side or the other can set the stage for an orthodox Cliffhangers or European Resistance campaign as outlined above. Perpetual stalemate can produce a postapocalyptic setting. And if the giant Babbage machines and their clockwork minions finally decide to eliminate the human element altogether, the heroes can move right into a retro-Deco Reign of Steel campaign.

Variants

This scenario assumes the heroes are British, or at least are sympathetic to the British cause in the Great War. But in a gritty steampunk game, Great Britain may well be an oppressive oligarchy, ruled either by reactionary aristocrats or greedy tycoons. The PCs could well be fighting for freedom on the side of Germany! For a pro-German adventure, simply replace the Teutonic villains with English ones, and give the party a Zeppelin to fly south in. Refueling must be in neutral South America instead of British South Africa, but otherwise the expedition proceeds as normal.

A more interesting situation arises if the heroes are from neutral America, or simply don't support either side in the Great War. Their mission to contact the Brotherhood of Science could come from the peace-loving American Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan (acting on his own, without informing President Wilson), or from a band of American millionaires and inventors who want to make common cause with the Brotherhood.

Finally, the adventurers may be mercenaries, taking advantage of the unsettled world at war to make big profits. The British and Germans may both offer them large sums to locate the Brotherhood. The heroes can pick a side, try to get the two empires into a bidding war, or take both offers!

would certainly let the Reconstruction faction dictate terms to an exhausted Europe.

- **Force Fields:** Impenetrable barriers of invisible force can defend cities from aerial attack, shield troops, and stop the endless slaughter on the Western Front. A good choice for idealists hoping to bring peace. If the Brotherhood has force field technology, the Citadel is defended by a powerful one, but only against aerial attack.
- **Planetary Inverter:** The ultimate threat. Using their knowledge of physics and magnetism, the Brotherhood can shift the Earth's axis of rotation. Unless appeased they can bury all Europe under a new Arctic icecap. This is best if the Gamemaster plans a postapocalyptic campaign afterwards, since such a cool weapon simply has to be used.
- **Robotics:** If the campaign setting doesn't include automata, then the Brotherhood's Big Stick could be an invincible army of steel men, possibly armed with death rays or powered by atomic energy. This would be a great way to set the stage for a tyrannical world. If the robots turn against their mere mortal creators, then jump right into a pulp-style Reign of Steel campaign.
- **Space Travel:** A standard science fiction metaphor for transcendence,

spaceflight can lead into a Lensman-style game of pulp space opera, or just allow standard Cliffhanger-style characters to adventure on other worlds.

- **Stun Fields:** Another good choice for peacemongers, these would simply knock out everyone in a large area. Perfect both for stopping battlefield slaughter and for neutralizing an enemy government long enough for the People to rise against it.
- **Synthetic Men:** The Secret of Life Itself could allow one side to manufacture legions of unstoppable synthetic soldiers, or give the Brotherhood of Science an instant army to impose order. It could also allow the creation of a better race of humans, or a "Master Race" to exterminate their creators.

Non-Player Characters

Captain Augustus Von Macht

124 points

Captain Von Macht is a young German officer and a skilled mountain-climber and explorer. He is serving as pathfinder and advance scout for the German force sent to capture the Citadel. Von Macht is lightly equipped, with only a small pack for rations, a pair of binoculars, a Luger pistol and a Winchester repeating rifle.

ST 11 [10]; **DX** 12 [20]; **IQ** 12 [20]; **HT** 12 [20].

Advantages: Combat Reflexes [15], Fit [5], High Pain Threshold [10], Military Rank 4 [20].

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (gentleman's) [-10], Extremely Hazardous Duty [-20], Overconfidence [-10].

Quirks: Loves being in wilderness, Practical joker.

Skills: Armoury (small arms)-11, Camouflage-12, Climbing-12, Demolition-11, Engineer (combat)-10, Fencing-14,

First Aid-11, Gunner (Machine Gun)-12, Guns (Pistol)-14*, Guns (Rifle)-14*, Hiking-11, Jumping-11, Knife-12, NBC warfare-11, Orienteering-12, Riding-12, Scrounging-12, Stealth-11, Survival (forest)-12, Swimming-12, Tactics-14, Throwing-10, Traps-11.

Languages: English-12, French-12, German (native)-12.

*includes +2 bonus from IQ.

Doctor X

150 points

Doctor X (his real name is unknown) is one of the Brotherhood's most outspoken and radical leaders. He is noteworthy for his passionate ideas about reforming the world and his metal hand. Disgusted by the folly and corruption of the world's governments, he advocates strong measures -- the Brotherhood must work to sweep away the old order and replace it with a new, scientific regime. In any combat situation he will lead the Brotherhood's forces. Doctor X is usually armed with an electric pistol of his own invention (use the standard TL9 electrolaser stats). With a lower DX and some appropriate physical disadvantages, this can represent other members of the Brotherhood.

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 12 [20]; **IQ** 14 [45]; **HT** 10 [0].

Advantages: Charisma +1 [5], Combat Reflexes [15], Gadgeteer [25], Patron (Brotherhood of Science, Fairly Often) [15], Reputation +2 (among scientists) [5], Wealth (comfortable) [10].

Disadvantages: Bad Temper [-10], Curious [-10], One Hand (Mitigated by clockwork prosthesis: -60%) [-9], Stubbornness [-5], Workaholic [-5].

Quirks: Admits to no native country, Makes speeches in conversation, Prefers to speak Esperanto.

Skills: Astronomy-14, Armoury-14, Beam Weapons (electric gun)-15*, Brawling-13, Chemistry-14, Engineer (electrical)-14, English-14, Esperanto-14, Fencing-12, First Aid-14, French-14, German-14, Guns (pistol)-15*, Latin-14, Mechanic (small gadgets)-12, Navigation-13, Physics-14, Pilot (dirigible)-12, Research-14, Russian-14, Science!-14, Spanish-14, Stealth-12, Weird Science-13.

*includes +2 bonus from IQ.

German Storm Troops

80 points

These are well-trained veteran soldiers, transferred to the Antarctica mission from their special assault battalions. They are among the cream of the Imperial German army. They are wearing coal-scuttle helmets and gas masks, and carry light field gear. All skills are TL6 unless otherwise noted.

ST 11 [10]; **DX** 12 [20]; **IQ** 11 [10]; **HT** 12 [20].

Advantages: Combat Reflexes [15], Fit [5], High Pain Threshold [10].

Disadvantages: Chummy [-5], Extremely Hazardous Duty [-20], Honesty [-10], Poverty (struggling) [-10], Sense of Duty (comrades) [-5].

Skills: Armoury (small arms)-10, Bicycling-12, Brawling-14, Camouflage-11, Climbing-11, Demolition-10, Engineer (combat)-9, First Aid-10, Gunner (Machine Gun)-11, Guns (Rifle)-14, Hiking-11, Jumping-11, Knife-12, NBC warfare-10, Orienteering-10, Riding-12, Scrounging-12, Spear-12, Stealth-11, Survival (forest)-10, Swimming-12, Tactics-13, Throwing-10, Traps-10.

Designer's Notes: GURPS WWII: Motor Pool

By Hans-Christian Vortisch

I have been a certified vehicle design geek ever since my little brother first brought [Car Wars](#) to our home. Almost 20 years later, I have "built" hundreds of vehicles, from bicycles to the *Millennium Falcon*, employing -- not necessarily in this order -- Lego, plastic model kits, and [GURPS Vehicles](#).

In 2001, Gene Seabolt, the former line editor of [GURPS WWII](#), approached me after having read some of my articles in *Pyramid*, and had me design most of the weapons of the Modular Vehicle Design System (MVDS). I also counseled him on other hardware aspects. Gene noticed my passion for detail, and while he often found my approach a bit *too* detailed and *too* complicated for the basic book, he apparently figured exactly this attitude would serve me well for the book on "Non-Standard Equipment," as it was then still called. We quickly established that only vehicles and the necessary new MVDS modules would go into it, requiring a new title: [GURPS WWII: Motor Pool](#).

I fiddled over a year with the outline, selecting the vehicles I needed or wanted to include. Due to discussion with Gene and the other authors in the line, I knew which vehicles would go into the other books, often leaving me with the less famous or less important designs, which nevertheless allowed me to delve into a lot of obscure detail. I also wanted to include many "odd" designs: one-offs, design freaks, obsolete vehicles, failed experiments. Finally, I wanted to cover a few generic things like a horse cart or a fishing boat, vehicles that are always handy to have and often overlooked. So the outline slowly evolved. I added, discarded, and added vehicle after vehicle. Many had to be dropped as I realized just how much space a decent write-up with variants and notes required, and others had to be cut down to half page-size. In the end, I managed to cram in almost as many write-ups as the book has pages . . .

During writing, I was struck by minor and major disasters including a half-year move to Brussels, Belgium (away from my personal library and the excellent public ones in Berlin), and a burglary and the fiendish theft of my laptop and latest backups with the manuscript and many notes and spreadsheets. Using older backups, handwritten notes, and bits and pieces I had sent around to friends for comments, I was able to reassemble most of the lost stuff, but not all; the whole affair cost me several months.

However, Brussels turned out to help me quite a bit in the end, as my day-job office was only a five minute stroll away from the Royal Belgian Army Museum with its excellent library (and a number of interesting displays). Field trips to Berlin's Luftwaffe Museum, the German Defense Technology Collection in Koblenz, London's Imperial War Museum, and the Royal Dutch Army Museum in Delft further unearthed invaluable information.

I am indebted to several people who volunteered to submit vehicle designs, despite knowing that I am difficult to satisfy and would end up meddling with their designs (being "anal-retentive," to quote Gene, and a "bullhead," to quote a playtester). These hardy souls included Michele Armellini, Enrico Negro, Kenneth Peters, and especially the untiring Brandon Cope. *Vehicles* guru Onno Meyer provided invaluable construction advice.

Time and again during writing, I would rely on the *Hellions* (an international and eclectic group of *GURPS* grognards) for comments, language or style edits, counsel, retrieval of lost files, or plain shoulders to lean on in times of problems. Thanks guys, I couldn't have done it without you.

The *Pyramid* playtest helped to plug some holes and lots of faulty calculations, and I have to thank veteran lead playtester John Freiler, who made sure everything went smoothly during the test.

Finally, I owe a lot to my editor and the man responsible for this whole show: Gene "I think you're suffering from too much information" Seabolt. The sheer breadth of his knowledge of the topic and his down-to-earth approach to both historical and game-specific issues is remarkable. And despite minor arguments over details (which accompanied our relationship from day one, and led to playful fights of sorts . . .), his input and guidance was invaluable. Together, we pulled it through.

But now for the goodies. In the spirit of "non-standard," I present you a couple of *real* oddballs:

DL 43 Nahuel

While externally resembling the M-4 Sherman (p. W102) and obviously being inspired by it, the Argentine medium tank DL 43 *Nahuel* (tiger in Araucano, a native Argentine language) was actually quite different. Entirely made in Argentina, it was designed by the Dirección General de Fabricaciones Militare starting in 1943.

Its designation DL 43 stems from U.S. derisions that Argentina was a "lion without teeth." When ten tanks made their first appearance in a parade in July 1944, planes dropped leaflets stating that these were Argentina's *Dientes de León* (lion teeth). The DL 43 entered service in the summer of 1944. However, only 16 were built as the U.S. eventually delivered M-4s to Argentina. They never saw combat in WWII, but might have in an alternate history -- perhaps with Argentina joining the Axis (as per p. W:WW15)?

The DL 43's engine is a modified Argentine copy of a French Lorraine-Dietrich aircraft engine. The main gun was originally planned to be a Swedish 75mm Bofors Mod 35, but there were not enough of these available, so the tank received a modified German 75mm Krupp Mod 09 field gun (compare p. W:GL30). A .50-caliber Colt-Browning Mod 38 machine gun (M-2HB, p. W97) is mounted coaxially. Two linked Danish 7.65mm DRRS-Madsen Mod 27 machine guns (RoF 8) with 32-round magazines are mounted fixed in the hull, fired by the driver, and another one installed in a flexible mount is fired by the hull gunner.

It burns 16.8 gallons of gasoline per hour at routine usage. Fuel and ammo cost \$955.

Tanque DL 43 Nahuel

Subassemblies: Large Tank chassis with Mild slope +4; full-rotation Medium AFV turret with Mild slope [Body:T] +2; tracks +3.

Powertrain: 373-kW turbocharged gas engine with 373-kW tracked transmission and 175-gallon standard tanks; 16,000-kWs batteries.

Occ: 2 CS Body, 3 CS Tur **Cargo:** 1.8 Body, 0.9 Tur

Armor	F	RL	B	T	U
Body:	5/300	4/150	4/150	4/60	4/95
Tracks:	4/45	4/45	4/45	4/45	4/45
Tur:	5/300	4/150	4/150	4/60	--

Weaponry

Ground LMG/Mod 27 [Body:F] (1,920 rounds).

2×Ground LMG/Mod 27 [Body:F] (1,920 rounds each).*

75mm Short Tank Gun/Mod 09 [Tur:F] (80 rounds).**

Very Long Ground HMG/Mod 38 [Tur:F] (600 rounds).**

* Linked.

** Linked.

Equipment

Body: Fire extinguisher.

Statistics

Size: 20'×8'×10' *Payload:* 2 tons *Lwt:* 38.5 tons
Volume: 132 *Maint.:* 42 hours *Cost:* \$23,225

HT: 10. *HP:* 1,800 Body, 600 each Track, 200 Tur.

gSpeed: 25 *gAccel:* 2 *gDecel:* 20 *gMR:* 0.25 *gSR:* 6

Ground Pressure Moderate. 1/2 Off-road Speed.

Design Notes

Designed with 174-gallon tanks and 6,000×7.65mm rounds. Gunner and loader are half in turret, half in body. Lwt was increased by 25%, *gSpeed* was reduced by 20% to the historical figures.

K+W C-3603

Switzerland remained strictly neutral during WWII. In order to protect this neutrality, it maintained a comparatively large and fairly well-equipped military. Its air force was busy during the war, intercepting and escorting Allied and German bombers and other aircraft that had lost their way into Swiss air space to the ground. This was a fairly common occurrence.

The Swiss air force had five main combat aircraft available for these operations: the K+W C-35 fighter (a Fokker copy), the K+W D-3800 fighter (a license-made version of the Morane-Saulnier MS.406-C1, p. W:RH42), the Messerschmitt Bf 109E-3 and G-6 fighters (p. W111), and the locally designed K+W C-3603. The latter differed from the four other patterns in being a multi-purpose aircraft optimized for reconnaissance and ground attack, but it was nevertheless used for many of the same tasks as the air superiority fighters.

The C-3606 had been designed by the Eidgenössische Konstruktionswerkstätte (K+W) at Thun from 1936, and finally entered service in 1942. It was the first aircraft entirely developed in Switzerland, earlier patterns generally having been foreign designs. Over 150 were built. They saw service until 1952.

The pilot fires the 20mm W+F-Furrer FM-K 38 autocannon (RoF 7) in the motor hub and the 7.5mm W+F-Furrer FIMg 29 machine guns (RoF 21) in the wings. He also releases any bombs carried. The gunner/observer fires the flexible twin FIMg 29 machine guns in the back. For ground attack, the C-3606 typically carried either 2×440-lb. bombs, 8×110-lb. bombs, or a mix of 16×26.4-lb. bombs and 40×6.6-lb. bombs. Alternatively, 2×62-gallon auxiliary tanks could be carried.

The C-3606 burns 33.6 gallons of aviation gas per hour at routine usage. Fuel and ammo (without bombs) cost \$75.

Mehrzweckflugzeug K+W C-3603

Subassemblies: Medium Fighter chassis +3; Light Fighter-Bomber wings +3; 3×retractable wheels +0.

Powertrain: 746-kW aerial turbocharged gas engine with 746-kW props [Body] and 135-gallon standard tanks [Wings]; 2,000-kWs batteries.

Occ: 2 CS Body **Cargo:** 2.2 Wings

Armor	F	RL	B	T	U
<i>Body:</i>	2/3	2/3	2/3	2/3	2/3
<i>Wings:</i>	2/3	2/3	2/3	2/3	2/3

Weaponry

20mm Long Aircraft AC/FM-K 38 [Body:F] (118 rounds).*

2×Aircraft LMG/FIMg 29 [Body:B] (480 rounds each).**

2×Aircraft LMG/FIMg 29 [Wings:F] (480 rounds each).*

* Linked.

** Linked.

Equipment

Body: Autopilot; 265-lb. hardpoint [Body:U]; navigation instruments; medium radio receiver and transmitter. *Wings:* 440-lb. hardpoint each [Wings:U].

Statistics

Size: 34'×45'×11' *Payload:* 1.3 tons *Lwt:* 3.8 tons

Volume: 200 *Maint.:* 51 hours *Cost:* \$15,465

HT: 8. *HP:* 120 Body, 120 each Wing, 12 each Wheel.

aSpeed: 295 *aAccel:* 6 *aDecel:* 22 *aMR:* 5.5 *aSR:* 2

Stall Speed 68. -3 aSpeed per loaded hardpoint.

gSpeed: 204 *gAccel:* 10 *gDecel:* 10 *gMR:* 0.5 *gSR:* 2

Ground Pressure Very High. 1/8 Off-road Speed.

Design Notes

Designed with 135×20mm and 2,000×7.5mm rounds. The historical 309-sf wing area was used for performance calculations. aSpeed was increased by 10% to the historical figure.

Pyramid Review

One False Step for Mankind

Published by [Cheapass Games](#)

Designed by James Ernest

Art by Phil Foglio & James Ernest

Full-color game with eight board sections, 33 City cards, 18 Rocket System cards, three Know-how cards, & six "Days of the Week" cards; \$7.50

Required but not included: 100 poker chips in four colors (red, yellow, green, gray), 40 counters per player, two six-sided dice, one button (or distinct token), & three paper clips (or one large clip) per player.

James Ernest has made a name for Cheapass Games by not providing more than the bare essentials for his works. Making a customer pay for dice every time he buys a game, Ernest has said, is a little like bundling a can opener with every tin of beans. In a game like *One False Step for Mankind*, however, you end up starving for components.

The best way to become, and stay, mayor in the Old West is to give the people a real show. The fad sweeping the countryside right now is the space program. Never mind that the whole enterprise hasn't a snowball's chance of working; people flock to see these crazy coots try to launch rockets into the stratosphere. Winning popular support gives you Influence, and the first politician to rack up 30 points worth of this valuable commodity wins the game.

The three resources are Influence, Food, and Gold. Influence comes from getting your rockets to work -- or at least, getting parts of them to work -- and from controlling towns throughout the West. Towns provide only static Influence, giving you a set number of points of the stuff so long as you continue to feed the people. On the other hand, they provide an avenue to getting Food and Gold from the Farms and Mines in the surrounding countryside, though they must also be used as a line of supply to those locations. Lose all your connecting towns, and opponents can jump your claims without a fight. Towns also attract new folks to town.

Without sufficient Food, you can't support your towns and you may lose them, their Influence, and their support for your claims. You also need Food for the parties you'll throw to entice crowds to come watch your space shots. Once you have an audience, you'll roll two six-sided dice three times, once for each system on your rocket. A rocket has Power Source, Guidance, and Life Support. At level one, you'll need to roll a 12 on a system, but if you do you get one Influence. You can spend Gold to research better systems; improving a system one level gets increasingly more expensive, but the roll required for it gets easier to make. If you have the best version of that component, you get a two-point Influence bonus; you also receive a Gold every time another player makes an improvement on that system.

If you don't have the Mines and Farms you need to finance your activities -- and the board can fill up quickly -- you're going to have to jump a claim. People come to towns and turn into tokens you place on your claims. Putting multiple tokens on a single location affords it better protection, though those tokens may instead descend upon a claim and outnumber it. Both players roll a six-sided die and add the result to the number of tokens in the fight to determine who keeps the claim.

This all gets pretty costly, so you have to maintain a close eye on all the interrelated resources. The map is made up of geomorphic panels that can be arranged in nearly endless combinations.

There's a lot to keep track of in this game, and so many things depend on how well you do other things. This isn't a

bad thing -- part of the appeal of the game is resource management and keeping all the balls in the air at once. The big issue is with the components. For once, James Ernest has shot himself in the foot with his policy of bargain-basement fun. The population tokens crowd the board everywhere but in the cities (each gold mine is about the size of a nickel, and farms about the size of a quarter), and bits of marked paper would be a nightmare for any playgroup with a head cold. Trying to find 40 different tokens per player is tough.

Poker chips are required. Yellow and green may be a common-sense match for Gold and Food, but how many people have yellow, green, red, and gray chips lying around? And gray is meant to represent several of *any* other color. This is a more visible way to mark one's resources (other players should always know how much Influence you have), but fumbling with the chips every time you have to spend Gold or make change is a royal pain, and in a game that already takes three hours it's merciless. You could use whatever alternate hues are sitting in your game stash, but then you have to agree on which colors will replace what, and write them down so you don't forget.

The Rocket System cards measure how advanced your equipment is, but having to attach a paper clip to these strips and slide or reattach them to keep up with your changing status puts an awful lot of strain on the pieces. Overall, it's best to simply keep track of everything on a scrap of paper; less visually appealing, but it's straightforward and saves folks from counting and recounting three stacks of chips.

The game is actually in full color, the first Cheapass game with full-color boards and cards. It's nice to see the company can do this while maintaining their low costs, and the game is a great exercise in strategy. It takes a long time, but that's as it should be in a game that allows for such long-term planning. To truly be effective, however, some rules clarifications on placing and moving population tokens are going to be necessary, and the components issue may cripple the enjoyment factor for many. Though well-configured as a strategy game, *One False Step for Mankind* is, ironically, a faux pas in other important ways.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Hero Force: 1PG Super Adventure!

Published by [Deep7](#)

Written by Mark Bruno, Todd Downing & James Stubbs

Cover by John Richardson

13-page 691Kb PDF document; \$3.95

Hero Force: 1PG Super Adventure! is Deep7's attempt to stretch their *1PG* concept in that most of outré and over the top of genres -- the superhero comic. In particular, its inspiration is the comic books of the 1960s and the Silver Age, when the outlook was bright, governments could be trusted, and heroes were truly heroic. Heroes had (and held to) ideals -- not for them the dark act of bloody murder that might besmirch their spotless reputations. Save that for the villains of the piece and the comics of the 1980s. No, in *Hero Force: 1PG Super Adventure!*, heroes believe in truth, justice, and the American way!

The game comes in the standard *1PG* format, using the clean and easy-to-use layout seen in the previous 10 or so titles. The difference, though, is that they have used an outside artist to provide the cover. This is well done, and echoes the Golden Age as much as it does the Silver Age. The same goes for the few pieces of internal art, which are also very good.

Fans of the *1PG* series will little different to the basics of *Hero Force* compared to any other of Deep7's games. The differences come in adapting the rules to the genre, but these are minor, merely a matter of renaming various stats and skills. The first big change comes in the form of the Hero Type and Origins Tables, both of which give the usual range of bonuses. The six Hero Types listed -- the Blaster, the Elemental, the Mentalist, the Mystic, the Vigilante, and the Gadgeteer -- are essentially your basic superhero archetypes. They also define the list category from which their powers come. Listed alongside the six entries on the Origins Table -- the Alien, the Construct, the Divine/Immortal, the Experiment, the Mutant, and dedicated Training -- are the names of familiar heroes that possess said origin. These are taken from the pages of both DC and Marvel Comics, so that for the Divine/Immortal, Thor and Wonder Woman are given, while the Punisher and Batman are listed for the Training Origin. Although the intention is to have players roll on each table, there is nothing to stop a player picking what they want to get a superhero that they are happy with.

Of course, superheroes can do fantastic things, and to account for this, the major change to the *1PG* mechanics comes in the form of a whole new scale laid over the basics. Powers come in levels that work as multiples of other factors in the game, most maximizing at Level 3. The exact multiple varies from power to power, so for example, each level of an offensive power can inflict five points of damage, whilst a Gadgeteer's armor power provides an armor value of 10 for each level. The scale is fast and simple, so that Power Level 1 of Flight is simple hovering, Power Level 2 is movement at subsonic speeds, and at Power Level 3, a hero can fly faster than the speed of sound and even beyond the gravity well.

How many levels a player can buy depends upon a combination of his character's Brains attribute and their Control skill. This factor is also what a player will roll whenever he wants to use his powers within the game. Thus most players will shove as many points as they can into their Control skill in order to load up on power levels -- usually four or five. Then they pick the powers from those listed in the category for their Hero Type. Apart from the Gadgeteer and the Vigilante, the other types can also select from the list of the Universal Powers as well as their own. Gadgeteers essentially build an armored and augmented power suit, while the Vigilante receives a number of weapons and a set of fairly weak armor.

Despite the extra layer that *Hero Force* adds to the game and character generation, the process is still quick enough in comparison to other games. The result is a light, and roughly defined, hero able to slug it out with the average villain, while the rules allow for a hero to take down a bunch of thugs in a swathe. At the same time, heroes still have only as many Blood (or hit) Points as the average Joe. This is likely to make the superheroes in *Hero Force* more vulnerable than in other RPGs of the genre, but at the same time, it is in keeping with the ethos of the *IPG* line, wherein characters invariably possess a throwaway quality.

There are only a couple of new pieces of advice given for running *Hero Force*, the remainder having been seen in previous *IPG* titles. This probably makes this game ill suited for use by those new to the line, or those who have little experience of the genre. This is not to say that *Hero Force* is poorly written; after all, the authors should have had plenty of experience by now! Rather, it is well-written, and it is clear from the five scenarios that they have a love of the Silver Age.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The first of the five is James Stubbs' "Better Red Than Dead!" As members of Team Liberty, the heroes must thwart the plans of the Soviet super villain, The Red Menace, to steal a nuclear weapon and turn it on America. In Mark Bruno's "Trouble Down Below," another villain, Doctor Macabre, is kidnapping hapless civilians and turning them into mindless killing machines to take over the city. Galactus and Dr. Doom are the primary inspiration for Todd Downing's "This Earth Consumed!" in which members of Superforce investigate a series of strange earthquakes to discover the most powerful foe that they will ever face. It is so powerful, in fact, that no stats are given for him. James Stubbs' second scenario, "Shades of the Past," returns a Nazi super team from the final days of World War II to wreak revenge, while his third, "State of Emergency," is ripe for a crossover with Deep7's Irwin Allen tribute *IPG*, *Disaster!* Following a space battle over Earth orbit, wreckage from an alien space ship plummets into the ocean and threaten the heroes' home city with a tsunami. "State of Emergency" is more of an outline than a ready-to-play scenario, and unlike the other four will need some development before it can be run.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Hero Force: IPG Super Adventure! has more the feel of Marvel Comics than of DC titles, more the Avengers than the Justice League of America. It also has the feel of TSR's original *Marvel Superheroes RPG* in the slickness of its character generation and its mechanics, though the greater vulnerability of the characters and the accepted possibility of superhero death is otherwise at odds with such a comparison. While *Hero Force* does not come close to being the best *IPG* title, it does serve to push the envelope of the basic *IPG* mechanics and the adaptability of the core concept. What *Hero Force: IPG Super Adventure!* really does is deliver an issue or two of four-color gaming old-time fans will get a kick out of.

--Matthew Pook

Sherred Ten-Birds, Amoral Nature Wizard

for *Big Eyes, Small Mouth*

by Jesse Lowe

Sherred Ten-Birds is a wizard of some small power whose trademark is the Staff of Ten Birds, and it is from this staff that he is named. Sherred concerns himself with the meeting place between humanity (or its equivalent in the setting) and nature. Whether he is for one side or the other in this equation is up to the GM; as written, he is simply an observer, and meddles only when it suits his whim.

Sherred's magic is characterized by occasional (and dramatic) nature spells, a recurring bird motif, and near-constant use of mundane skill to supplement magical puissance. He will often trade services for new knowledge, usually mundane or practical; he once tended a woodsman's sick child for two months in exchange for tutoring in the arts of the land. Despite his study of nature, Sherred's healing spells are not very strong, and he relies on herbcraft and natural healing when he has to. Likewise, he has guided raiding parties through apparently impenetrable wilds in exchange for a share of their ill-gotten gains.

In appearance, Sherred is a short man clad in a simple belted tunic and trousers of green, brown, or rust, carrying a sack slung over his shoulder. Depending on the season, he may also be wearing sandals, boots, or a cloak. He generally eschews the traditional wizardly robes and pointy hat. He is slightly scruffy looking and often gives off a woody aroma, similar to the local trees; should this become overwhelming, he will most certainly bathe. His beard and hair are a dark brown laced with gray, and his face is beginning to take on the wrinkles of age.

He appears weathered by sun and rain, and his hands are calloused. At all times, he carries a five-foot long staff of dark wood, carved in the shape of ten birds linked together. The birds, from bottom to top, are: sparrow, owl, woodpecker, dove, crow, duck, hawk, hummingbird, gull, and quail.

In short, Sherred Ten-Birds appears and acts as if he were a typical hedge-wizard. It is often a rude surprise for his adversaries when he exerts his unusual power, usually at the worst possible time for them. Either as a result of this unusual power, or as a result of his usual behavior, he has few enemies; Elspeth, a merchant he ruined, is chief among them, but is largely impotent. He has had more than a few clashes with the wizard Mondavi the Fat, who dislikes Sherred meddling in the tract of wilderness that Mondavi claims for his own, but the fat wizard is too lazy, as a rule, to pursue Sherred beyond his borders.

Likewise, he has few allies beyond the birds of the wood. He has an on-again, off-again affair with Lily, a woman who runs a hostel on the edge of his forest. Lily's hostel acts as a caravan stop and a place for hunters to rest, and is always under Sherred's protection, regardless of the state of their love affair at the moment. On the other hand, those who stay at the hostel and anger Sherred may find themselves seriously harassed later in their journey. Lily is a widow of Sherred's age, with two grown sons in the army. She is moderately attractive, has a sharp wit, and is an excellent cook (her sausages are the pride of the area).

As written, Sherred's motivation and goals are fairly simple: by exploiting his natural talent for magic and the power of the Staff of Ten Birds, he tries to live an easy life between man and nature, occasionally acting as a force for good or evil if necessary. However, all that's needed to make him a hero or a villain is a simple change in outlook; with his abilities, he could act as a tyrant bent on turning nature to his will and wiping out local settlements, or as a guardian of the rural folk against nature, red in tooth and claw, or as a mediator between two bitterly opposed forces.

Adventure Hooks

- **Lilies of the Field:** Bandits have raided Lily's hostel and fled into the urban areas beyond the forest. Sherred can

follow them, and will, but needs guides in the civilized regions. Luckily, the heroes are close at hand . . . They will not only need to find the bandits and bring them to justice, but also keep Sherred from inflicting his own idiosyncratic notions of fair play on the city folk -- as well as keep him out of trouble with the law himself. Given Sherred's independent outlook and power, this will not be easy, and will require more diplomacy than force. For added tension, the bandits have kidnaped Lily instead of simply looting her hostel.

- **King of the Wood:** Sherred, by virtue of his long dwelling in the forest, has managed to become its ruler in fact and name. A by-product of this is that he now draws power from it, and shares its life force. One of his nemeses, probably Elspeth, has learned this and plans to destroy the forest to get at Sherred. How the characters are drawn in depends on their nature. The obvious choice is to have the nemesis hire them to start forest fires or to guard a logging company. Sherred will react to any threat posed by the nemesis with brutal force, and is unlikely to negotiate. (For this scenario, add Place of Power 6 (6 points) to Sherred's stats; it provides 90 Energy Points for Sherred to draw on in addition to his own reserve.)
- **Nature's Bounty:** Lately, Sherred's less moral actions have come to the attention of local authorities, especially since he guided a band of elvish raiders into the King's private reserve. A large bounty has been placed on his head, dead or alive. To get it, though, the would-be bounty hunters must beard the lion in his den and confront Sherred where he is strongest. Likely obstacles Sherred will place in their path include a variety of traps (deadfalls, pit traps, snares, punji traps, etc.) as well as constant observation by Sherred's feathered friends. He will attempt to divide the characters, cutting out the weakest members and disposing of them when they are alone. His Summon Storm spell could be useful for this. Furthermore, since Sherred has no fixed abode, the characters may have to search the entire forest, under attack at any inconvenient time -- and Sherred can move very quickly thanks to his staff's shapeshifting powers. Of course, the heroes may think to lay a trap for the wizard at Lily's hostel, should they discover the connection between the two. This is likely to work, to some degree, but will deeply anger Sherred (and probably tick Lily off as well).

Stats

Sherred Ten-Birds is 50 character points, or 48 character points if skills are not used in the campaign. His skills were purchased using the Medieval Fantasy costs.

Body 5, Mind 8, Soul 9

Attack Combat Value 8, Defensive Combat Value 6,
100 Health Points, 115 Energy Points, Shock Value 20.

Attributes

Animal Friendship 5
Combat Mastery 2
Damn Healthy! 3
Energy Reserve 3
Magic 2 (20 power points)
Highly Skilled 2
Item of Power 3 (The Staff of Ten Birds)

Defects

Nemesis (Mondavi the Fat) 1 BP
Nemesis (Elspeth) 1 BP
Significant Other (Lily) 1 BP

Skills

Animal Training 5, Swimming 1, Stealth 2, Wilderness Survival 5, Wilderness Tracking 2 (40 skill points)

Equipment

The Staff of Ten Birds

Large, sturdy sack

Rope

Tunic and trousers

Boots or sandals

A few days worth of food.

Magic Spells

Awareness of the Ten Thousand Things (Heightened Awareness 2) (2 power points)

Summon Storm: summons a moderately strong storm that covers an area equal to a small town. (Environmental Control 3) (3 power points)

Body of the Oak: The caster of this spell takes on the aspects of the mighty oak tree, while retaining his own mobility and quickness. He doubles in size, gains great strength, and his skin becomes as tough as bark. (Heavy Armor 1, Size Change 3 [Growth only], Superstrength 1) (10 power points)

Sense the Uncanny (Sixth Sense 1 [Detect Magic]) (1 power point)

Shield of Leaves: Shered summons a wall of leaves to protect him. When cast, the caster must define the area the wall will occupy, which can be no larger than 10 square meters and no more than 5 meters away. The wall stops up to 15 points of damage. (Force Field 1) (2 power points)

Nature's Aegis of the Mind (Mind Shield 2) (2 power points)

The Staff of Ten Birds

Sherred's staff grants him the following powers. These are magical, but do not cost Shered Power to use. The staff may also be used as a standard quarterstaff.

Aviform: The bearer of the staff may assume the form of any of the birds on the staff at will and remain in that form as long as need be. While in bird form, the bearer may still speak. (Each bird form uses the same template, so this is represented as a single use of the Metamorphosis Attribute. The template is: Flight 1, Heightened Awareness 2, Natural Weapons 2, Diminutive 3 BP, Marked (bird) 2 BP, and Not So Strong 4 BP for a total character point adjustment of -1 points.) (Metamorphosis 1) (5 points)

Body of the Flock: When this power of the staff is used, the bearer (and the staff) transforms into a flock of birds. The birds are all of the same species, which must be one of the ten represented on the staff and must be native to the region in which the spell is cast. The most typical species are sparrows, crows, and hummingbirds. The flock consists of three birds for every Health Point the caster has at the time of casting. (Swarm 3) (6 points)

Bird Brain: The bearer of the staff can communicate mentally with any bird. (Telepathy 3, Birds only) (3 points)

Professor William Headley

Designed by **Kenneth Hite**

GURPS Fourth Edition Stats by Andrew Hackard and Sean Punch

Dr. William Headley was a prominent parapsychologist at Columbia University. He labored to separate the myths and lore of primitive man from the rational truth being uncovered by modern experimentation. But, in 1933, he discovered that his beloved scientific truths pointed to beings from primordial eras and unholy stars, beings that existed to ravage and kill not just mankind but the Earth itself. He dedicated himself to an unceasing war against these horrors, these Things Man Was Not Meant To Know. Slowly, he accumulated knowledge from the outer places of the world, from Spitsbergen to the Belgian Congo to the mean streets of Brooklyn's Red Hook district. He obtained tomes bound in mysterious leathers, and written in nonhuman scripts; in dreams and sorceries he gradually deciphered their secrets. He mastered many of the conventional magical arts, from Tarot divination to crystal-gazing, and collected artifacts of subtle and terrifying nature.

His slow mastery of forbidden lore allowed him to defeat the Things' minions here and there, and incidentally to clear up a number of other unpleasant supernatural occurrences. He began to get a reputation for solving seemingly motiveless crimes with his "unique insights into abnormal psychology." The New York Police Department came to rely on him for assistance with "the weird stuff" and the FBI called him in once or twice to help out -- unofficially, you understand. Every so often the crimes he investigated fit a pattern, one Headley had begun to associate with a vile German cult, tied to the Nazi SS, who worshiped the Ancient Ones. With the occasional "off-duty" FBI agent, one or two students, and a few trusted professional colleagues, Headley built a team of investigators who incrementally peeled back the skin of the onion, exposing layer after layer of the cult's activities and burning them out where they could. In 1941, he joined the OSS, working to stop Hitler -- and the Cosmic Entities his minions served -- from conquering the world.

After V-E Day, Headley managed to obtain much of the SS library from their cult center at Wewelsburg. These books told him of another world, a parallel Earth where the Ancient Ones had reigned and departed, leaving vital clues to their nature and weakness. Using spells from these grimoires, Headley opened a gateway to this devastated Earth, and stepped through to investigate the spoor of his hated foes. Much to his surprise, he discovered a team of explorers from yet another Earth (one they called "Homeline"), attempting to determine what had destroyed this one (which they called "Taft-7"). They were as surprised to see him as he was to see them, but foolishly disregarded his warnings about the Ancient Ones' cities, and the danger that still remained from their abandoned servitors. When the Things attacked that night, most of the explorers died horribly -- and the two survivors fled back to their own world raving in madness. Unfortunately, Headley realized that their flight had opened the path to their own world for the Things that had been trapped on this hellish Earth. He had to follow the explorers and warn their comrades that unimaginable terror would soon descend upon them. Once more, he constructed a gateway to cross the worlds, hoping against hope to find and prepare the rest of ISWAT before "Homeline" went the way of Taft-7.

Professor William Headley

200 points

5'8", 165 lbs. (SM 0).

ST 9 [-10]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 16 [120]; **HT** 11 [10].

Dmg 1d-2/1d-1; *BL* 16 lbs.

HP 9 [0]; *Will* 17 [5]; *Per* 15 [-5]; *FP* 14 [9].

Basic Speed 5.00 [-5]; *Basic Move* 5 [0]

Dodge 8.

Social Background

TL 7 [-5].

CF Homeline [1]; Western [0].

Languages: Ancient Egyptian (Accented) [2]*; Arabic (Accented) [2]*; English (Native) [0]; German (Accented) [2]*; Latin (Native) [4]*.

Advantages

Language Talent [10]

Legal Enforcement Powers [15]

Ritual Magery 1 [15]

Signature Gear (Magic staff) [1]

Talent (Healer) 1 [10]

Unfazeable [15]

Wealth (Comfortable) [10]

Disadvantages

Bad Sight (Nearsighted; Mitigator: Eyeglasses, -60%) [-10]

Duty (To ISWAT; 15 or less; Extremely Hazardous) [-20]

Fanaticism (Destroy all Things Man Was Not Meant To Know; Extreme) [-15]

Guilt Complex [-5]

Insomniac (Severe) [-15]

Nightmares (12) [-5]

Weirdness Magnet [-15]

Quirks

Bad knee

Bibliophile

Distrusts Germans (-1 reaction from especially touchy Germans)

Makes decisions by consulting the tarot (Compulsion)

Pipe smoker (0-point Addiction to Tobacco)

Skills

Anthropology-14 (IQ-2) [1]

Biology/TL7 (Earthlike, Biochemistry)-14 (IQ-2) [1]

Criminology/TL7-16 (IQ+0) [2]

Detect Lies-14 (Per-1) [2]

Diagnosis/TL7-15 (IQ-1) [1]†

Dreaming-17 (Will+0) [4]

Exorcism-15 (Will-2) [1]

Expert Skill (Psionics)-14 (IQ-2) [1]

First Aid-15 (IQ-1) [0]†‡

Forensics/TL7-14 (IQ-2) [1]

Guns/TL7 (Pistol)-12 (DX+2) [4]

Hidden Lore (Things Man Was Not Meant To Know)-15 (IQ-1) [1]

Hypnotism-14 (IQ-2) [1]

Literature-14 (IQ-2) [1]

Mental Strength-17 (Will+0) [1]

Occultism-17 (IQ+1) [4]
Pharmacy/TL7 (Synthetic)-15 (IQ-1) [1]†
Physician/TL7-15 (IQ-1) [1]†
Psychology-15 (IQ-1) [1]†
Public Speaking-15 (IQ-1) [1]
Research/TL7-17 (IQ+1) [4]
Ritual Magic (Hermetic)-17 (IQ+1) [8]§
Savoir-Faire (Police)-16 (IQ+0) [1]
Symbol Drawing (Hermetic Sigils)-14 (IQ-2) [1]
Teaching-15 (IQ-1) [1]
Thaumatology-14 (IQ-2) [1]§
Theology (Satanism)-14 (IQ-2) [1]
Writing-15 (IQ-1) [1]

Ritual Paths

Path of Communication and Empathy-16 (IQ+0) [4]§
Path of Gate-17 (IQ+1) [8]§
Path of Necromancy-14 (IQ-2) [1]§

Ritual Spells

Banish-9 [6]§
Planar Summons-11 [5]§
Plane Shift-11 [6]§
Sense Emotion-15 [2]§
Sense Spirit-13 [2]§
Truthsayer-14 [2]§

* Cost modified for Language Talent

† +1 from Healer

‡ Default from Physician

§ +1 from Magery

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



A Treasure Worth Keeping

for *d20 System*

by **Brian Rogers**

One problem with the *d20 System* fantasy model is the structured increases in magic item power; the trading up of one item to another throughout the campaign. While most common with weapons, this also happens to wondrous items and other long-term magic: if you can only wear one cloak at a time, "upgrading" eventually comes into play. In many fantasy environments, the image of a hero hocking his *cloak of elvenkind* because he just scored a *cloak of the bat* is distasteful.

There is mechanical logic to the system, as magic items that are potent at the start of an adventurer's career generally matter less as challenges increase. In some fantasy, however, magic items are things of mystery: priceless and rare, heroes will touch only a handful and guard the ones they possess. Having a gray *bag of tricks* is great at low levels, but when facing a dragon being able to pop out a weasel is hardly an advantage. A truly mythical item must remain central to the adventurer whatever his level.

The [Naming Weapon feat](#) offers one possibility, but that's only for weapons. Living Room Games' *Earthdawn* offers an elegant solution in legendary items (which gain power as PCs piece together and recreate its history, awakening the artifact's potential through adventure), but with world specific mechanics. What's needed is a *d20 System* equivalent, where some magic items grow in power along with the character, where the *necklace of prayer beads* that's a small comfort at 1st level becomes a major relic at 17th.

The Iconic Magic Item

These are magic items that have limited power when discovered but become increasingly powerful in the hands of more experienced owners (or, alternately, over the course of the ownership). The basic idea is layering the powers of similar items into a single thing, with a mechanic to open up those powers when the rules suggest the owner would find the more valuable magic. Since the magic item disbursement guidelines are based on GP value, GMs should add the value of each power in piece by piece. That gives the relative value of the item at each stage of its development.

The attached chart (based on the "Starting Equipment for PCs Above 1st Level" table) assumes that an Iconic item should never account for more than half of the Player Character's total equipment value, and significantly less than that at higher levels. The "Get at Level" column shows the suggested value for all active Iconic powers: if an Iconic item's lowest level of power has a GP value of 1500 (between 1350 and 2700), it should likely be found by a 3rd level PC. If the next highest level of power adds 4000 GP of relative value, the PC should gain access to it sometime during his 5th level adventures.

Since an Iconic item puts the powers of several items into a single form (and hence reduces restrictions of weight, number of wearable items, etc.), it is consequently more valuable than its level of power suggests. Hence, the GP value of each power should be increased by 10% to find the Iconic cost.

Keep in mind that the following are just some simple examples -- reading the *DMG* with an eye for thematic or visual connections will reveal several other magic items that can merge into a single, increasingly potent additions to your hero's idiom.

Iconic Item Value

Iconic item	Get At Level
450	2
1,350	3
2,700	4
4,500	5
6,500	6
9,500	7
13,500	8
18,000	9
24,500	10
33,000	11
44,000	12
55,000	13
60,000	14
80,000	15
104,000	16
113,333	17
146,667	18
193,333	19
253,333	20

Iconic Necklace of Prayer Beads

The hierophant's skin was brittle and translucent, like the penmanship scrolls we'd scrape clean again and again. His grip was firm as his hand took mine, pressing the necklace into my palm. "You've proven yourself, lad. It's time for you to have these. Keep them safe." I had seen him work wonders while his fingers had worried these stones, and I wondered if my conviction would ever be that strong. He saw that in my eyes and continued, "I have faith in you, even if you do not yet have it in yourself. You will understand these, in time."

The *necklace of prayer beads* makes a great Iconic item, given the number of increasingly rare and powerful versions already in play. All the Iconic version does is mold all of those into a single necklace that grants the abilities of all the others once the wearer has faith enough to use them. This means a young and moderately inexperienced (5th level or less) divine spellcaster will start with access to the weakest of the necklace's powers. At 6th level in a divine spellcasting class, the next power begins to function, so that now the priest can cast *bless* once a day (the blessing bead) and have 10 minutes of increased spellcasting ability once a day (the karma bead). As the chart below shows, the necklace will keep giving new powers on a regular basis until the character reaches the highest non-epic levels of ability.

Iconic Prayer Beads	Power Cost	Iconic Cost	Get at Level
Blessing	1,500	1,650	3
Karma	5,000	7,150	6
Healing	10,000	18,150	9
Smiting	15,000	34,650	11
Wind Walking	30,000	67,650	14
Summoning	50,000	122,650	17

Iconic Bag of Tricks

Jack looked like a bumpkin, it was true. The word 'Commoner' defined his family, and left to his own he probably would have been as unexceptional as the rest. But when his land was claimed by an Ogre Mage, Jack managed to trick the giant into becoming a mouse, who was ravaged by Jack's tomcat and tossed into a cookpot. All that was left was this bag, and none of us ever knew what old Uncommon Jack would pull out of it when needful . . .

Like the *necklace of prayer beads*, the existing versions make a solid starting point for this item's powers. As with a standard *bag of tricks*, the owner reaches his hand in and feels furry lumps inside. Grabbing an animal of the desired power level requires taking 10 on a Knowledge (Nature) or Handle Animal check, with the DC set by the power level (the animals from a type 1 *bag* are DC 16, type 2 are DC 18, and type 3 are DC 21). Characters can root around in the bag as a full round action and make a standard skill check in hopes of pulling out something bigger, but the bag works best for those who possess a solid knowledge of animal lore (tying the *bag's* relative power to the character's level through skill bonuses).

Unlike the *necklace*, the existing versions aren't sufficient to make the *bag* relevant through high levels. Therefore, the Iconic *bag of tricks* mirrors the power's of other magic items. When the *bag's* owner can regularly (i.e. Take 10 to) make a Knowledge -- Nature or Handle Animal check at DC 24, he can pull out a force of badgers, rats, bears and horses to reinforce an existing structure or construct a new one, just like a *lyre of building*. Once the check reaches a 28, the owner can pull out 2d4+2 wolverines, brown bears or other CR2 creatures whose actions and duration mirror a *horn of Valhalla's* barbarians. Finally, if the owner's casual skill ever reaches 32, he has sufficient knowledge of the bag to step into it, bringing people along into the *bag's* pocket paradise as if it were a *rod of security*. Even if the creatures provided by the *bag* don't ever reach monstrous power, it's versatility is perfect for a ranger, barbarian or an ambitious [loner Commoner](#).

Iconic Bag of Tricks	Power Cost	Iconic Cost	Get at Level
Bag of Tricks 1	900	990	2

Bag of Tricks 2	3,000	4,290	4
Bag of Tricks 3	6,300	11,220	7
Lyre of Building	13,000	25,520	10
Silver Horn of Valhalla	51,800	82,500	15
Rod of Security	61,000	149,600	18

Iconic Cloak of the Bat

I wrapped the cloak around me, confident that it would conceal me from the guards. Once again I noticed how the fit was better than before, as if it had tailored itself for me. but this was the first time I felt it try to merge with my skin. I screamed in shock, and the only thing that saved me was that my shriek was so high that while the dogs went mad, the guards couldn't hear me. Dear God, what is this thing?

This takes the concept of an Iconic item and reverses it -- the full power of a *cloak of the bat* is reduced to its component parts, with the owner gaining access to each in turn the longer they own the item. When first discovered, the cloak grants the bonus to hide, and the wearer might mistake it for a similar *cloak of elvenkind*. As time passes (the GM can either set an actual timeframe or key it to the PC's level advancement) the cloak becomes more powerful, slowly granting increased protection when worn before the development of the flight and eventual polymorph. If the GM decides to keep this attunement a secret, the player might not even realize the improvements until some stressful circumstance initiates the flight and/or polymorph options.

This item makes a good example for inserting distinctive wondrous items whose base cost limits their appearance at low levels. Since the standard *cloak of the bat* doesn't have any powers past the polymorph, the GM might want to add additional abilities to the *cloak* for later levels (if the *cloak* follows a vampiric route, it might also act as *eyes of charming*; if morphogenic, the wearer's screech might function as a *chime of interruption*, and so on). The additional 10% Iconic Cost might be waived for that reason, though the fact that the Iconic *cloak* is likely to be encountered earlier in one's career than the standard version could be sufficient reason for the increased value.

Iconic Cloak of the Bat	Power Cost	Iconic Cost	Get at Level
Circumstance bonus to hide +10	2,000	2,200	3
Deflection bonus to AC +1	2,000	4,400	4
Deflection bonus to AC +2	6,000	11,000	7
Flight	5,500	17,050	8
Polymorph to Bat	8,500	26,400	10

Skilling Me Softly

Whenever I'm playing an RPG where my character has special abilities (psionics, super powers, or the like), I'll usually sink any experience points I have into buying or improving those abilities, as opposed to raising my skills or more mundane attributes.

(I also eat candy corn by biting off the white tip first, followed by the orange body, and then the yellow base, but that's beside the point.)

Anyway, I suspect the appeal in buying or improving those abilities is that it's easier, for me at least, to wrap my mind around them. New abilities add something to my character that I've never done before, while improving a skill just means that I'm doing something I've done all along . . . only slightly better. This is especially true in games where skills are represented by flat numbers or dice adds; what *is* the difference between First Aid-15 and First Aid-16? Or Melee Combat 2D+1 and Melee Combat 2D+2?

But if the second level of Telepathy lets me scan surface thoughts -- something my character couldn't do before -- well, *that* I can understand.

I suspect many games have understood and taken measures to address this incongruity. For example, the entire *d20 System* revolves around characters gaining abilities (which they call feats) that they didn't have before. Ironically, the upshot of feats is fairly logical and consistent; fighting-type feats let you deal damage more accurately or in greater quantities, while interaction-type feats let you more efficiently charm the pants off . . . well, things with pants.

And in a mathematical point of view, there isn't any difference (in most game systems) between a skill increase of +2, and a special ability that gives you +2 to the skill. But, psychologically, I suspect many gamers *like* looking at a character sheet with abilities that set them apart from normal folks; you don't have First Aid-16 . . . you have First Aid-14 and the Lifesaver advantage!

(As an aside, I also believe this is part of the reason behind humanity's tendency to bestow honorifics and labels on each other. What differentiates someone with a doctorate in psychology versus someone who's spent the same amount of time studying and applying psychological principles? Why, a sheet of paper that says other people think you're smart, of course! Mind you, I *do* feel obligated to point out that I say this as someone without a doctorate. But the Wizard agreed with my assessment, and he even gave me a ticking heart-watch as a memento.)

Is there anything that can be done to bridge this gap between abilities and skills within a game? Well, I think so. And here's what I've come up with.

Make sure it's understood what skill levels mean. Unfortunately, some games do a terrible job of explaining what a skill level represents, especially in systems where points don't have any limit. If a player can't mentally evoke the difference between a First Aid of 15 and a First Aid of 16, then raising the skill by that one point won't make much of a difference to him. I always appreciated White Wolf's Storyteller system in this regard; since skills are limited (for most folks) to levels of 1 to 5, it's easy to evoke what has changed for the character. Has someone raised his Religion score from 2 to 3? Well, that means he's gone from having a professional competency to a Masters-level one. If he ever makes it to level 5, that means he's one of the foremost experts in the world on Religion.

If a game system doesn't have a firmly established (and consistent) idea of what various skill levels mean, then just establish for the campaign what various benchmarks are. At the very least, good levels to establish are:

- Hobbyist
- Professional
- Doctoral
- World's Best

In open-ended skill systems, it might be worthwhile to cap skills at some arbitrary level (or else make additional levels beyond a certain point *very* expensive). That way, players can be assured that if they can raise their characters' Brawling skill to, say, 24, then that's as high as it can get; they are -- or are at least comparable to -- the world's best brawler.

Give some kind of benefit for certain levels of skills. Again, tapping into the "goodies" aspect of new powers and abilities, it might be possible to add benefits -- either minor or significant -- to certain levels of skills.

Again, the Storyteller system does this to a certain extent (at least, it did in the last version I played . . . who knows *how* it's changed in the past couple of years?). Upon achieving that fourth level of a skill, a character gets a specialization in the skill. Thus if our person with the Religion skill raised it to 4, he could have a specialization of "Death." In a situation where he needs to roll his Religion skill regarding knowledge or application of a faith's idea of death, he would get to reroll any 10s (giving him a chance at extra successes). It's not a huge benefit -- since it only comes up in situations where the specialization applies -- but it still helps differentiate a skill at 3 from one at 4. And it helps satisfy the "Oooh! Neat!" aspect of spending a bunch of experience points.

So perhaps reaching certain levels of having a skill in an RPG provides some minor ability that people without that level of skill lack. For example, maybe raising a First Aid from 15 to 16 gives a special point, which can be spent for a one-time bonus or reroll on a skill roll. Or, to steal the Storyteller idea, maybe a certain level will give a specialization, such as Poisons. This specialization might allow a reroll -- similar to many games' Luck-type abilities -- in situations where it applies. (If GMs want to limit this, they might say that it can only be used once a game session or the like.)

Make certain levels of skills required for certain applications. Let's face it; if one has a hypothetical skill of Mathematics at, say, 10 (which might be the equivalent of a high-school education), then no matter how well you roll you won't be able to solve a difficult Calculus-III-type equation. However, many games with skill levels don't allow for this possibility; it may be *difficult* to succeed with a low skill, but it can still be *possible* (especially if the game has die-modifying points or the like).

The "stick" side of the special ability "carrot," then, might be to say that certain levels of skill are required before some actions can even be attempted. For example, maybe First Aid-15 is required before some types of treatment are possible, such as trauma or massive wound care. This would give an incentive to raise that skill from 14 to 15. Alternatively, there might be a significant penalty for attempting skill roles that cross the boundary, or -- in a game with Karma, Willpower, or similar points -- it might require a special point expenditure to even attempt the more difficult roll.

So let's put it all together with a hypothetical game: *The System for Playing Roles Universally & Generically*. *SPRUG* uses a skill system for which the low-end of a skill is 10, and the top end is around 20.

The GM decides to use all the techniques I've suggested, because he knows nigh-infinite wisdom when he reads it.

He sets the maximum skill to 20; anything more than that will require a special point expenditure, and quite likely an extracted promise from the player to wash the GM's car for a year. He also decides that any value of 19 will make the person one of the world's most renowned experts in the field; this doesn't carry any game perks, but might entail a reaction bonus in situations where someone would be impressed by an expert in the field.

He sets the following levels, just to make sure he and the players are all on the same page as to what he envisions the skill levels to mean:

Hobbyist	10
Professional	13
Doctoral	16
World's Best	20

He decides that each skill level purchased above Hobbyist will bestow a Cheat Point. Each Cheat Point can be used to reroll *one* of the dice in the typical three-dice roll for that skill.

He decides that some activities will require a certain skill level to even be possible, going with the Professional and Doctoral levels; he decides that a player with one *less* than the required level can spend a Cheat Point to attempt the roll at no penalty, but otherwise it's at -6.

He also decides that one point *above* the Professional and Doctoral levels bestows a specialization, which allows a reroll of all the dice once a game session for that situation.

10	Hobbyist	Skill usable without default penalty
11	Hobbyist+1	+1 Cheat Point
12	Hobbyist+2, Professional-1	+1 Cheat Point, Professional skill check possible with Cheat Point
13	Professional	+1 Cheat Point; Professional skill check possible without Cheat Point or penalty
14	Professional+1	+1 Cheat Point; Specialization
15	Professional+2, Doctoral-1	+1 Cheat Point; Doctoral skill check possible with Cheat Point
16	Doctoral	Doctoral-Level skill check possible without Cheat Point or penalty
17	Doctoral+1	+1 Cheat Point; Second Specialization
18	Doctoral+2	+1 Cheat Point
19	Doctoral+3	+1 Cheat Point; Foremost Expert
20	World's Best	+1 Cheat Point

By using this system, the GM has helped to ensure that the player gets *some* kind of "goodie!" reaction to most skill levels, opening up new possibilities and opportunities for that skill in a similar way that buying a new level of Telepathakinesis makes new things possible. Only the 11- and 18-point levels bestow a minimal benefit. However, the 11-point level is easy to pass on the way to cooler things, and the 18-point level is probably of the most interest to someone who's interested in becoming a Foremost Expert (or better).

Of course, this kind of system is not without its problems. For one, it involves more bookkeeping. It also gives players more options (which they tend to like) and opportunities to disrupt the game (which the GM may not like). On the other hand, the Cheat Points *are* only usable one time, and so the absolute most any character would be able to use to influence one skill role is nine points. And it gives the GM some more control; if he knows the party's medic, with First Aid-16, is getting constantly overshadowed by another PC with First Aid-14 and Luck, he can ensure the medic gets a bit of spotlight by declaring a task to be Doctoral level; the medic is the *only* one who can make that skill roll.

In the general sense, GMs who use any of these techniques will also need to have a reasonable idea for the math involved; setting a skill maximum too low and then making skill rolls too difficult is a certain way to ensure that some tasks are impossible.

But, in all, many players seem to like it when they actually get a special ability when they spend a whole mess of experience points. For those kinds of games, it's often possible to accommodate the players fairly simply and without unbalancing things.

After all, by now you've spent the points necessary to be the World's Best GM.

* * *

Since I haven't mentioned it in a while, I'd like to take this opportunity to remind you all that *Pyramid* offers a free month to subscribers for every friend they get to subscribe! (Actually, I guess we offer it for any new subscriber . . . I mean, if you trick your archenemy into subscribing, you get a free month for that. *And* you can taunt him from afar over on the [discussion boards](#).)

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(At least, you should, if these new subliminal banner ads are working right . . .)

--*Steven Marsh*

The Last Cold War Spy Adventure

by Matt Riggsby

Editor's Note: The "Last _____ Adventure" series is designed to provide GMs with scenarios suitable for concluding a genre, transitioning a genre to a new premise, or providing an exciting "setting sun" one-shot.

*Despite the overarching title, genres represented by the "Last _____ Adventure" **may** continue having adventures published in **Pyramid**.*

*We will be publishing adventures in this series throughout the month of May. Last week we published "[The Last Steampunk Adventure](#)." In addition, our friends over at [JTAS](#) have gotten in on the act as well with their their own "Last Adventures" set in the **Traveller** universe. If the series proves popular, it may continue beyond as an irregular feature. As ever, we invite your comments by either the [discussion groups](#) or by writing us at pyramid@sjgames.com*

2:45 AM, August 18th, 1991. Apartheid is crumbling, Eastern Europe has thrown off Communism, and the world-wide web is *days* old. But those are the last things on the minds of a group of secret agents visiting South Africa when their phones start ringing off the hook.

Western intelligence has learned that Russia's missiles are no longer completely under Soviet control. A shadowy underworld figure known as Zed has programmed back doors into the antiquated missile control system, giving him control over an unknown number of ICBMs. A message to the Kremlin has threatened that unless he is given complete control over Siberia within three days, a missile will be fired at a random European city. Panicking hard-liners are already moving to depose a vacationing Gorbachev (using the traditional cover story that he has "fallen ill") to keep him from capitulation. It's up to the PCs to save the world.

The Briefing

Time is of the essence, so much of the agents' briefing will have to be done on the run. Drivers are being sent to bring the agents to the Capetown field office (possibly filling in information they have not yet received) before bundling them off to the airport. There is little time to ask questions and none to wait for answers.

The mission is easier said than done: Zed proposes to start launching missiles in three days (midnight of the 21st, local time) unless his demands are met. The missiles will go off unless Zed stops them, so killing him or destroying his headquarters will guarantee destruction, not prevent it. The agents are being sent to Victoria Falls, a tourist town in Zimbabwe near Zed's headquarters. The Capetown field office can provide personal weapons, surveillance equipment, survival gear, clothing, IDs, cash, and similar equipment. A range of civilian vehicles and accommodations can be provided once they reach Victoria Falls. More elaborate equipment can be requested but is unlikely to arrive in time. They are to infiltrate his compound, stop the missiles by any means necessary, and bring back the people responsible and any information about the Soviet missile system. They have a bit under 72 hours.

It's The End Of The World As We Know It

Obviously, espionage doesn't end with the Cold War, but the traditional enmity that defined the post-WWII world does. So does the Us vs. Them clarity of Communists vs. capitalists, even if the tactics employed in the struggle sometimes don't make "us" look that different from "them." This is the time of George Smiley and James Bond, of wars by proxy where two superpowers use other

Information on Zed is sparse and untrustworthy. Some time ago, the west's foremost authority on Zed was an MI6 analyst named Sarah Petrie. However, about five years ago, Petrie fled to join Zed's organization. She destroyed a great many files, and it is unclear how much inaccurate information she may have introduced into what remained. In sum, this is what the PCs' organization knows about Zed and his likely compatriots:

- **Zed:** Zed is an elderly Eastern European, possibly a gypsy or Jew. A WWII refugee, he hates both East and West (the Russians and Germans for taking turns destroying his home and the rest of the West for abandoning it to the Communists). He has spent most of his life in the Southern Hemisphere, settling in Zimbabwe a decade ago, putting him close to the sources of the diamond-smuggling operations he uses to fund his activities. He has become increasingly reclusive and has not been known to leave his compound for over a year, although it's certainly possible that he has left unobserved.
- **Kublai:** Kublai, an ethnic Mongolian, is Zed's right-hand man and personal bodyguard. He is a killer, a master of martial arts, and an excellent shot; knives are his favorite weapon, and he usually has several concealed about his person. He has been known to conduct business for Zed all over the world and command his thugs in the field, but in recent years has generally stayed close to the Zimbabwe compound. He rarely speaks, but he is believed to speak both Chinese and English with passable fluency, and perhaps a few other languages. Although generally indifferent to fashion, he is meticulous about keeping his beard and long moustache neat with a rose-scented moustache wax from France.
- **Sarah Petrie:** Remembered by her former colleagues as bookish and prickly, Petrie has apparently come out of her shell. With Zed's wealth behind her, she has developed a taste for designer clothes (in which she is, of course, stunning), swank parties, and, to put it politely, short-term relationships. She has also traveled extensively for Zed, taking care of tasks that require more subtlety than Kublai can muster, but is likewise currently in Zimbabwe. A gifted analyst, Petrie managed to talk her way into basic field agent training despite abysmally poor vision, so she's unlikely to be completely helpless in a confrontation.
- **Dr. Enrique Deguzman:** Zed's personal physician, Deguzman is a Cuban exiled by Battista's fall. He joined the Bay of Pigs invasion and was captured in its aftermath, undertaking a bloody escape to Central America a year later. As a result, he shares Zed's low opinion of both Communists and the western powers, and he has been employed by Zed for at least a decade. He shares Petrie's fondness for the good life, and they often attend the same social functions if they're in the same area, although rarely spending time together at them. He is talkative (usually about his passion for fine food or fine art) and an excellent dancer.

nations as pawns while delicately maintaining a balance of power under the threat of nuclear annihilation. Whether or not the PCs succeed, the balance will be irrevocably upset. It's just a question of how it all ends.

Zed's stronghold is an old colonial mansion in the wilds of Zimbabwe, a few miles up the Zambezi river from Victoria Falls. The land is officially kept as a private game reserve, but he is believed to have a small private army quartered there. Regular payments to the cash-starved Mugabe government keep all sides happy with the arrangement.

There's one more complication. The Russians, for obvious reasons, want control of their missiles back. There are not just one but two KGB teams either on their way or already in Victoria Falls to stop Zed's plan. One is being operated by Gorbachev loyalists, the other by hard-liners. One is a strike team, the other a group of highly-skilled general field agents. Their identities are, as yet, unknown, and it is unclear which team is working for which Soviet faction (and, indeed, where the loyalties of the individual team members lie). They might be a source of useful information, but control of the missiles should not be allowed to fall into their hands.

The PCs will be sent to Victoria Falls on a scheduled commercial flight leaving shortly after dawn. They will be met by a local operative (Christopher Tsvangi, undercover as a taxi driver), who may be able to provide them with currently unavailable information and equipment that can't be placed on the plane. Once the PCs have had a chance to ask a few questions, they are sent to the airport to catch their flight north.

Victoria Falls

Why would anyone come to an otherwise nondescript spot in the middle of

Africa? At a point along the zigzagging Zambezi river, there is a sudden drop into a deep gorge. The result is a spectacular waterfall over a kilometer wide and 100 meters high. The local name for the falls translates as "The Smoke That Thunders," from the noise of the falls and the plume of spray that rises from the falls year-round (even in the dry month of August) like a huge column of smoke. The spray is so intense that the falls, in the middle of what is otherwise a lightly wooded grassland, are surrounded by several meters of rain forest vegetation.

The three-hour flight is uneventful, so long as the PCs don't make trouble. If they bother to find out, their fellow passengers include a newlywed couple from France (Michelle and Edouard Masse) touring Africa, a recently retired German businessman and his son (the Fassbinders) doing the same, and three South African salesmen (Earl, Ted, and St. John Jones, no relation to one another), each with separate business in the town.

The PCs reach the Victoria Falls airport mid-morning; the tiny airport (one gate, no jetways) is about a half-hour drive away from the town proper. Most of the other passengers have already arranged transportation, so the PCs are mobbed by friendly taxi drivers and freelance tour guides; hooking up with Tsvangi might look questionable for a moment. However, if they're paying attention, they should be able to pick him out. He'll help them with their bags out to a large van and head off to town.

The town of Victoria falls is an international tourist destination, a square mile or so of hotels, tour operations, restaurants, bars, and souvenir shops, with residential villages and resort hotels trailing off into the bush. Agents won't stand out, no matter what their nationality. The river forms its northern and eastern border, just as it forms Zimbabwe's border with Zambia. Tsvangi will drop them at their destination if they've already arranged lodging or help with arrangements if they haven't.

Tsvangi also has news: Kublai, Petrie, and Deguzman are all in town today. They, along with a few men from the compound, have arrived for the apparent purpose of picking up supplies. Deguzman and Petrie have taken rooms at the Victoria Falls Hotel (see below). Deguzman is seeing the sights on a safari trip at noon, and both will be attending a party at the Victoria Falls Hotel that night. Tsvangi can get up to two agents on Deguzman's safari and all of them into the party at the hotel. They'd be fools to pass up the chance.

Safari

Most tourists view Africa's plentiful wild game from vehicles, but those with more exotic tastes can ride horseback or, in Deguzman's case, elephant-back. His mid-day recreation is an excursion through the bush riding tame elephants. Elephants are actually a very good platform from which to view wildlife; with a surprisingly silent tread, they're capable of getting much closer to wild animals than a motor vehicle. There are typically two riders and a driver on each, seated one in front of the other on a saddle like a long leather pillow. On this trip, a train of five elephants tours the bush for a few hours, beginning with a gourmet lunch al fresco and ending with drinks.

When the PCs arrive at the safari's base camp a half-hour's drive into the bush (assuming they decide to go), they find picnic tables set with tablecloths, silverware, and a feast being laid out by a staff clad in spotless white. Most of

Gadgets

Depending on how cinematic you want the adventure to be, some gadgets will be available. They might include:

- Small guns and explosives disguised as cigarettes, notebooks, binoculars, etc.
- An artificial gill that filters oxygen from the water, allowing unlimited time underwater.
- Fingernail-sized homing devices
- Self-igniting magnesium flares (useful for cutting through thin metal bars) disguised as pens or other small metal objects
- Ordinary-looking clothing made of an advanced bulletproof fabric

Who's Who

A lot of NPC names are floating around in this adventure, but only some of those NPCs are directly involved in events. From the plane, the Fassbinders are actually Casimir Yevirov and Ivan Koskov, part of the Soviet strike team. They are working with a Michael Shakala, a local

the other guests are already there: Deguzman, two Italian university students backpacking central Africa (Massimo Fresetti and Angelina Popono), the newlywed couple from the plane, an early middle-aged American couple from Iowa (the Gelmans of Des Moines, Bob and Marie, actually from Ankeny but Des Moines is the closest city that anybody's ever heard of so they always tell people they're from Des Moines . . .), their two bored teenaged daughters (Amber and Jennifer), and Dolores de la Joya, a stunning brunette chattering in Spanish with Deguzman (the PCs may remember seeing her at the hotel).

The PCs can be seated near Deguzman, but they'll have a hard time prying his attention away from his flirtation with the young lady. If they do, he'll happily discuss art and current affairs, but won't say much about where he lives or what he does; he'll only say that he's personal physician to an eccentric recluse. The most notable current affair, of course, is the news of the coup in the USSR. Deguzman scoffs at it, opining that the USSR will soon fall apart.

Soon enough, it's time to mount up on the elephants. Driver/guides take the elephants past a permanent ladder set up in a clearing, helping the guests on one at a time. A PC will have to make either a DX or IQ roll if he wants to end up on the same elephant as Deguzman.

It's a lovely day for a ride through the bush. The sky is clear, and the animals are moving slowly in the midday sun. About an hour into the trip, a shot rings out, destroying Deguzman's camera as he raises it to his eye. The other tourists panic and scatter for cover while the guides try to control the startled elephants. Deguzman himself is stunned, and the PCs may want to pull him off his mount before another shot.

A Vision or Hearing roll after the first shot will give the PCs a general idea of where the shot came from. A second shot (which misses Deguzman if the PCs move quickly) will allow them to pinpoint the shooter's location, in a cluster of trees atop a nearby hill. If they give chase immediately, they may see the fleeing gunman getting into a Range Rover at the base of the hill and taking off at high speed. If they have binoculars, they can get a license number. If they investigate after waiting for the shooting to stop, they'll arrive to see a cloud of dust marking where the Range Rover disappeared and a number of cigarette butts where the gunman waited. The cigarettes are dark brown with Cyrillic stamped on them: a popular Russian brand.

The tour guides will eventually gather up the scattered tourists and take them back to base camp for some much-needed drinks while the Zimbabwean police question them briefly. They blame the incident on none-too-bright poachers; Deguzman seems to know better, but won't say anything about it. Dolores puts herself in charge of taking care of Deguzman after his ordeal, making sure he has something to drink and his scratches from the exploding camera are bandaged. However, if the PCs helped him during the incident, he will take a moment to express his gratitude, perhaps mentioning that he can find work for men who are good in a tight spot. Not long thereafter, a car with tinted windows comes to retrieve him. Deguzman untangles himself from Dolores (not without making arrangements for later) and heads quickly for the car. Observant PCs will notice the car already has another passenger: Kublai.

Reception

The day's other big event is a black-tie reception at the Victoria Falls Hotel. The hotel is hosting the event in honor of Everard G. D. Pepperdale, a former British lieutenant colonel who retired to Zimbabwe and has set aside a large chunk of land as an animal preserve, for which he is being honored by fellow wealthy expatriots. The evening's events, commencing at seven PM, include some tedious speeches, the presentation of a plaque, and hours of dancing and drinking in the hotel's lavish ballroom and a buffet and conversation on the broad lawn.

KGB contact. Their strategy is to wipe out Zed's lieutenants and any other spy teams, leaving the field clear for a more direct assault. They don't know who the western or other Soviet team are, but will take out anyone who happens to be near their primary targets, just to be sure.

The second Soviet team is consists of Dolores de la Joya (actually Annissa Saminova), whose strategy is to get close to someone in Zed's organization, and Ted Jones (actually Yvgenny Romanov) from the plane, long undercover as a salesman of security gear. The second Soviet team has one significant advantage: They know the identities of at least a few of the PCs, so they'll be on the lookout for them. They'll try to distract or misdirect the PCs if they encounter one another, but won't resort to violence unless they have to.

Deguzman, in a well-tailored white tuxedo, is a bit reserved after his ordeal. His time is being monopolized by Dolores and they'll leave the party early (determined PCs might attempt a contest of Sex Appeal with Dolores to wrestle his attention away, but it won't be easy), but he'll share friendly words with PCs who helped him during the shooting that day. He'll feel them out on whether they've done dangerous work before; if they have, he'll suggest that they come out to "the hacienda" with him tomorrow . . .

Petrie, in a simple but flatteringly cut black gown and wire-rimmed pair of thick-lensed glasses, is in a very good mood and more open to conversation. She is flirting liberally but will focus on a sufficiently interesting conversationalist (win a contest of Sex Appeal or Carousing against a skill of 14 to be more interesting than other people; win another contest every 15 minutes of game time to keep her interest). Petrie won't talk much about what she does, except to mention briefly that she's in real estate; it won't take Detect Lies to show that she's using that as a euphemism. However, she'll be happy to talk about the latest music, fashion, movies, and theatre. Agents will find her intimidatingly bright and well-read.

Like a glowering statue, Kublai, clearly uncomfortable in a tuxedo, lurks around the edges of the party, nursing a drink and keeping an eye on both Deguzman and Petrie. If approached, he will feign not understanding whatever language the heroes use (if they speak Mongolian, he'll feign not understanding their dialect), but he will remember and be suspicious of anyone who does. At least one agent will be approached by an attractive young Russian, who will eventually want them both to drink to anyone and anything the two of them can think of, and at least one hero will be approached by an elderly expatriot, who will show far more interest than is suitable for a person of that age. They may, if they circulate a bit, see the Masses (the newlyweds from the plane), the older Fassbinder, and the Gelmans, looking out of place.

If an agent can successfully keep Petrie's interest for an hour, she'll suggest a walk to see the falls in the moonlight. The farther they are from the hotel, the more likely they are to be alone. She's clearly intending a romantic interlude, but events intervene. The path from the hotel to the falls goes down an overgrown slope and around a bend to the bank of the river immediately opposite the falls; there's a steep slope up to the left of the path, and a steep slope down to the river to the right, both covered with thick vegetation. As they pass the bend which puts them out of sight of the hotel, they are attacked by two people covered in black from head to toe. One is in front, the other behind, both expert martial artists, breaking from the cover of the thick growth of the falls. Petrie is their primary target, but they'll attack the PC as well. The path is only a few yards wide and there's no guardrail, so it will be easy for someone to go over the edge.

Before Petrie can be seriously hurt, another figure arrives. Kublai appears and joins the fight. He won't interfere to save a PC, but he will attack anyone who looks like he's even considering tangling with Petrie. Seeing Petrie on her way out, he decided to keep an eye on her in the open rather than Deguzman, who is in a relatively safe public place. Any other PCs who try to delay him when he heads for the outside will find themselves subject to a swift kick to a sensitive area. If they somehow manage to stop him, the agent with Petrie is on his own.

On finding themselves outnumbered (or, at least, overpowered) once Kublai appears, the assailants will attempt to flee, and neither Kublai nor Petrie will follow. If they manage to kill or incapacitate the attackers, they can discover that one is the younger Fassbinder (the other is their local contact). If they return to the party to look for the older Fassbinder, they'll discover that he has already gone.

Victoria Falls Hotel

There is perhaps no better place on the continent to have high tea and no finer place to in town to stay. Made possible by the opening of a train station directly across the street at the turn of the century, it is a low but sprawling (184 rooms) H-shaped building dripping with colonial-era elegance. The rear of the whitewashed building overlooks a huge, immaculate lawn and the deep gorge of the Zambezi just below the falls (which is just around a promontory and can be reached by a path from the hotel). The hotel contains three elegant restaurants, ballrooms, bars, a beauty salon, a plethora of on-site services, and broad hallways and luxurious rooms decorated with colonial mementoes.

If the PCs stay at the Victoria Falls Hotel (and why wouldn't they? It's the best place in town), they check in behind a memorably attractive Spanish brunette and in front of two of the salesmen from the plane.

Being attacked does not keep Petrie in an amorous mood. However, if the PC she was with proved a competent fighter or if she went over the edge and was rescued, she'll make an offer similar to Deguzman's to come to the compound the next day with the suggestion of lucrative employment.

The Compound

Sooner or later, the PCs should end up at Zed's compound. It lies 25 miles west of Victoria Falls along the Zambezi river, not far from where the borders of Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Botswana meet. If the heroes manage to befriend Deguzman, they can get a ride there in a truck full of crates of supplies and a handful of thugs in Zed's employ. They'll also meet Ted Jones again, here to fix a potential problem with an alarm system. If one of the agents befriends Petrie, he can ride along in her Porche (Deguzman brings Dolores in his own BMW).

The agents will have satellite photos showing the layout of the compound. A private dirt road approaches the compound from the south through a thicker-than-usual area of forest. An electrified fence, patrolled at irregular intervals by pairs of armed guards, stretches around Zed's compound through the forest, using trees as posts. The fence is designed to keep out large animals, so agile humans can probably find a way to climb surrounding trees and get over it.

The road ends at a lightweight gate, permanently manned by a pair of guards. Uninvited visitors will be turned away at the gate, no matter what their excuse, although if they can feign accident or injury, persuasive PCs may be able to arrange a ride back to town. If they're particularly insistent, Kublai and a few guards will come out to quiet them down. Permanently.

Immediately beyond the gate is an expanse of well-manicured lawn and a two-story, Georgian-style mansion. On the far side of the house are a number of outbuildings: a stable for horses; a garage with an assortment of light trucks, jeeps, and a Rolls-Royce limousine; a generator shed; fuel tanks; barracks for most of the guards; a satellite dish; a small boathouse on the river; and a few storage sheds for gardening equipment, spare weapons storage, etc. There is extensive underground construction as well: a backup generator, computer rooms, several laboratories, and a large control room from which Zed can oversee his organization's operations. The compound houses about 45 guards, four serving as unofficial sergeants, fifteen scientists and technicians, and a like number of cooks, janitors, and other support personnel.

When the caravan arrives, they'll see Zed watching from a balcony over the mansion's main entrance, but he doesn't come down to greet them. Any PCs in the party are given a better idea of what they'd be doing if they came to work here: Zed is described as an eccentric tycoon with many enemies. He needs a security detail willing to defend him against unscrupulous competitors so that he can work in peace. The job is potentially very dangerous and requires a certain flexibility, but it pays well and few if any questions will be asked. The agents are invited to stay the night to consider the offer. They'll be given a brief tour of the compound (not including the private and underground areas of the mansion, although they may see lab-coated technicians at a distance) and small private rooms in the barracks. If a PC has befriended Petrie, he'll be invited to a private dinner in her rooms.

The rest of the day is, if not quite their own, at least flexible. They will constantly be in the company of at least one submachine-gun-armed guard, although the guns are worn as a matter of course rather than as a threat. Any guards with a Good or better reaction to the PCs will happily describe the approximate number and jobs of personnel in the compound and volunteer the fact that Zed has secret labs under the mansion. The guards know that Zed is involved in criminal dealings, but they don't know their exact nature. No one, apparently, gets close to Zed except his inner circle.

Where's Christopher?

He's busy. He's on call to ferry the PCs around town, although he may suggest that they don't use him exclusively so that they're not seen together too often. He's also in touch with headquarters. The second morning (that is, the morning after the attacks on Deguzman and Petrie), he will bring news of the Russian teams. Each is composed of a pair of agents: One is two men, the other a man and a woman. At least one of the second pair may already be undercover as an employee of Zed's. If they're about to head off to the compound, he'll warn them that he can't go there himself without raising suspicions, but they might be able to arrange a meeting in advance. If they got a license plate number from the Range Rover driven by Deguzman's would-be assassin, he can tell them that it was rented recently by a Hermann Fassbinder.

The technicians occasionally hang out with the guards, but the computer techs are constantly busy these days. Deguzman has work to do, so Dolores borrows a horse for a short ride, accompanied by a guard so she doesn't get lost; PCs can join in if they desire.

At this point, things become complex and will remain so for the next two days. Ted Jones and Dolores are, of course, members of the Russian infiltration team. They have decided to divide responsibilities: Dolores will concentrate on figuring out how to stop the missiles while Jones tries to come up with a way to expose any PCs who may have infiltrated the compound with them.

The heroes will want to do some snooping on their own, and there are some interesting things to find. Dolores and Jones have small radios and a few weapons disguised as innocuous personal items (lighters, lipstick, etc.), which the investigators might, on close examination, recognize as Russian-made. A game of cat and mouse may develop: Dolores will try to find out what she can without disturbing Deguzman; Jones will keep an eye on the PCs' quarters, waiting for them to go looking around so he can search for anything incriminating; and Kublai, who doesn't trust *any* of the newcomers, will be up late just in case.

Zed's rooms are a combination of a luxurious suite and a hospital. His bedroom has medical equipment (oxygen tanks, EKG, etc.) hidden behind the antiques. His office, immediately adjacent, is filled with European folk art as well as newspapers and magazines (none is newer than two years old). The desk and filing cabinets are full of papers in total disarray. Zed's handwriting is almost entirely illegible, and what little can be read seems unhelpful, mostly mentions of unspecified enemies and revenge. Kublai's room, with weapons on every wall and in most drawers and cabinets, is across the hall.

Deguzman's rooms are as elegantly appointed as Zed's, although his office is full of medical journals. He keeps medical records for everyone, but Zed's records aren't with the others. His file is hidden in a secret compartment behind a painting on the wall. It will take some medical skill to decode, but his diagnosis is one of accelerating senile dementia. Deguzman's own room has a bookcase full of Latin American literature. A sharp eye will pick out one exception, a copy of Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, in which is hidden a sheaf of plane tickets taking Deguzman from Victoria Falls to Prague on the 22nd.

Petrie's rooms are, of course, just as comfortable. She likewise has plane tickets hidden (without Deguzman's sense of irony), these taking her to Warsaw on the 22nd. She also has a hidden wall safe containing correspondence with real estate agents through Eastern Europe. She has apparently been negotiating to buy property in her own and Deguzman's names. There are a number of computer printouts there as well. Someone with Computer Programming skill can tell that it deals with I/O and display of data for a missile control system. However, there's nothing that specifically deals with missile launch codes or firing the missiles themselves.

Bang Vs. Whimper

If Jones manages to find evidence of the PCs' identities, he'll tip off Kublai, or he might find some spies out on his own. Kublai will round them up and Zed will make a brief appearance to pronounce their fate: The treacherous foreigners won't survive any longer than the wicked powers they serve (he might, puzzlingly enough, refer to them variously as Communists and Facists, regardless of their actual political persuasions). He has the captives tied up and put in small boats which will be towed down the Zambezi towards Victoria Falls. The boats will be cut loose about five minutes upstream of the falls; going over will, of course, be fatal.

If confronted with plane tickets or computer printouts, Deguzman and Petrie will initially refuse to answer agents' questions and, if they can, call for guards, which will in turn lead to either a shootout or more spies being sent down the river. Under extended interrogation (if they can arrange it), Deguzman will reveal that he and Petrie are about to remove Zed and take over his organization, but he doesn't know the details, save that it involves recruiting foreign spies. Petrie will be tight-lipped, but as the deadline of the 21st approaches, she'll offer to stop the missiles if they kill Zed and Kublai. Indeed, she may need to approach them with that offer (see Twist Ending below) if the PCs haven't already discovered enough information to make them suspicious about the whole affair.

At the end, the Soviet strike team reappears. At the very least, the elder Fassbinder is on the loose. At sundown of the third day, he and anyone who escaped the fight at the falls two nights before will begin a methodical assault. Armed with sniper rifles and night vision gear, they will start taking out lights and anyone who moves or appears in windows. When they've done as much damage as they can, they'll move in with short-range weapons to kill who they can. If it comes to that, Dolores will reveal her identity to one of the PCs (making sure she's got the drop on him), proposing a temporary alliance to delay the strike team and find out how to stop the missiles.

Midnight approaches, and the Soviet strike team is trying to blast its way in. If they can make contact, Petrie (or Deguzman, if she's incapacitated) will approach the heroes with an offer: She can stop the missiles, but they'll have to get into Zed's control room. They need the PCs for cover, both going in and coming out. They'll have to bypass locks and potentially fight Kublai and 10 of Zed's best guards (and possibly fend off several technicians). In return, the heroes must let them go after the fight is over. The PCs need to make a decision, and make it quickly.

Twist Ending

Petrie will keep the heroes focused on fending off Kublai and the guards for as long as possible, but midnight will eventually come and go. If they capture Zed rather than killing him, his poor mental state will quickly become apparent. If at all possible, Petrie will attempt to escape the compound, so the agents may need to chase her down. But when the sun rises and CNN reports the end of the Soviet coup, she still has one more card to play if the heroes are inclined to arrest her.

Zed's mental condition, she reveals, has been deteriorating for years. Really, it should have been obvious to the heroes as well, she says. Demanding to rule Siberia? Putting spies in boats and shoving them down-river instead of just shooting them? Petrie detected his slow slide into senility and hatched a plan of her own. Rather than slave away in a tiny cubicle for a civil servant's salary, she had a chance for something far more exiting and lucrative. She knew enough about Zed and his organization to join it. Working with Deguzman, she started taking informal control of most of Zed's resources.

Two obstacles remained: Zed himself and Kublai. Zed's organization was still nominally loyal to him and she'd never have full control as long as he was alive. And there's no way she could kill him while Kublai lived, not without inviting immediate revenge. How could she take them both out? She could, she realized, do it by letting Zed do as he pleased.

Not long ago, Zed's organization gained partial access to the Soviet missile control system. Zed's impulse was to destroy the hated Soviets and Europeans at once, but Petrie talked him into something more profitable. Of course, she knew that this was a threat that no nation could ignore, and Victoria Falls would soon be swarming with spies ready to stop Zed. All she had to do was sit back and wait for them to remove the figurehead and his bodyguard; why else would she and Deguzman let strangers into the compound so easily?

And the missiles? There was never going to be a launch, because she never had that level of access. She fooled the system into making it *think* a launch was immanent, but why do something that would throw the world economy into turmoil? Petrie is bullish on the newly opened Eastern Europe, and she looks to make a bundle off it.

The immediate threat is gone (indeed, it was never there), but there's still a decision to be made. The heroes are still under orders to bring back what

New World Order

Now that the Cold War is over, what are the cold warriors to do? Yesterday's mortal enemies will be tomorrow's new friends, and the deep, dark secrets of the KGB will be readily available for purchase from apparatchiks-turned-entrepreneur.

In a way, it's an embarrassment of riches. Instead of Us vs. Them, a vast spectrum of enemies will soon arise: Russian gangsters, Columbian drug lords, Middle Eastern radicals, even neo-Nazis. The end of the Cold War takes the lid off of any number of problems that have been simmering for years.

But it's a brutal world as well. A few exceptions and some collateral damage aside, the spooks of the Cold War usually killed for a reason. The terrorists and criminals of the new millennium kill indiscriminately. Old-timers may have to struggle to adjust to a world where the man on the street is as much a danger as the trained professional. Or, at least, to missions in poverty-

information they can about the Russian missile system. The soon-to-be-former Soviets are still under orders to stop that information from falling into the hands of others. Can the agents convince their Russian counterparts that their orders have been rendered moot? Can the Russians convince the agents of the same? Or will there be one last small battle in the Cold War?

stricken backwaters far from the fleshpots of Europe.

NPCs

Only particularly relevant skills and abilities are listed here; the GM may flesh them out as desired.

Zed

Zed is a shadow of his former self. As late as the early 1980s, he might have been able to turn Petrie's limited penetration of the Russian defense net into something catastrophic. Now, it's just a false alarm.

ST 7; DX 10; IQ 14; HT 8.

Advantages: Multimillionaire.

Disadvantages: Absent-minded, Age (76), Megalomania, Bad Sight (Nearsighted).

Skills: Leadership-13, Strategy-13, Tactics-13, Streetwise-13, Intimidation-12, Engineer: weapons systems-11.

Kublai

Kublai knows nothing about Petrie and Deguzman's plan. All he knows is that large things are afoot. He is fanatically devoted to Zed and will defend him to the death, taking as many enemies with him as he can.

ST 14; DX 15; IQ 11; HT 13.

Advantages: Toughness (DR 2), High Pain Threshold.

Disadvantages: Unattractive, Bad Temper.

Skills: Judo-18, Karate-18, Knife-19, Throwing: Knife-17, Fast-draw: Knife-17, Guns: .38 automatic pistol-16, Guns: 9mm submachinegun-16, Stealth-16.

Sarah Petrie

Her thick glasses are a prop. She secretly arranged to have laser eye surgery, still an experimental procedure in 1991, and wears non-corrective lenses to fool potential enemies into thinking she still has that particular weakness.

ST 10; DX 12; IQ 16; HT 10.

Advantages: Beautiful, Strong Will +2.

Disadvantages: Compulsive Carousing, Greed.

Skills: Intelligence Analysis-18, Computer Programming-17, Streetwise-17, Fast-talk-16, Savoir-Faire-16, Judo-13.

Emilio Deguzman

Deguzman doesn't dislike Zed, but he knows a losing proposition when he sees it. He's quite fond of his luxuries and

will eventually, if sometimes reluctantly, sell out his companions if he gets a better offer.

ST 11; DX 11; IQ 13; HT 10.

Advantages: Attractive, Manual Dexterity +3.

Disadvantages: Greed.

Skills: Physician-14, Brawling-12, Savoir-Faire-12, Carousing-12.

Dolores de la Joya/Annisia Saminova

ST 12; DX 14; IQ 13; HT 11.

Advantages: Very Beautiful.

Skills: Acting-16, Fast-talk-15, Sex Appeal-16, Carousing-15, Stealth-15, Karate-15, Guns: 9mm pistol-16, Lockpick-15, Pickpocket-15, Climbing-14.

Ted Jones

ST 11; DX 13; IQ 12; HT 11.

Skills: Acting-14, Fast-talk-14, Stealth-14, Karate-15, Guns: 9mm pistol-15, Lockpick-14, Electronics Operations: security systems-14.

Gunter Fassbinder/Casimir Yevirov

This is the leader of the strike team. He is far more experienced and patient than his assistant.

ST 12; DX 12; IQ 13; HT 11.

Advantages: Combat Reflexes.

Skills: Guns: sniper rifle-18, Stealth-18, Guns: submachinegun-16, Karate-14, Stealth-16, Tactics-14.

Hermann Fassbinder/Ivan Koskov

ST 13; DX 13; IQ 11; HT 12.

Advantages: High Pain Threshold.

Disadvantages: Overconfident.

Skills: Guns: sniper rifle-16, Karate-15, Stealth-13.

Generic Henchman

Use this for Zed's henchmen; they're armed with submachineguns and pistols, and some hand grenades are available. Add Streetwise-14 and Scrounging-14 for Christopher Tsvangi and Karate-14 and Stealth-12 for Michael Shakala.

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

Skills: 1 Guns skill at 13, Brawling-12.

Dr. Elliott Jason Novatney

for *GURPS*

by K. David Ladage

The Lie

Dr. Novatney is, perhaps, the most successful genetic scientist in the world. He has written over two dozen articles in accredited journals from 1994 to present; however, you will find no published work with his name associated after 1986. Were you to find a well-stocked library and do the research, you would learn that Elliott Jason Novatney was born to Amanda Grace and Humphrey Alan Novatney in Rock Island, Illinois on September 7th of 1936. He moved three times before he landed in Alexandria, Virginia, where he graduated High School in 1954 with a C+ average. He tried to join the Navy in 1955, but was turned down after the entrance physical when it was discovered he was a bleeder (hemophilia type-A). Careful not to injure himself, Elliott took several low-impact jobs and worked his way through community college; transferring to the University of Virginia after four years, he graduated from the Pre-Med program in 1960. He then began his post-graduate work at Johns Hopkins.

Dr. Novatney's career was exceptional. By 1975, he was published six times, he was the Associate Director of Research at Johns Hopkins and remained the heir apparent, and (in his mind) was very close to a cure for Hemophilia. In 1976 his mother died of complications following a fall; she had simply lost too much blood by the time she reached the hospital. Elliott knew his mother had Hemophilia, as the condition is passed from the mother, although his family never discussed it. Without Amanda in his life, Humphrey died in his sleep 11 months later. Dr. Novatney took this rather hard.

His work suffered. In 1980 he was passed over for Director of Research, and so resigned his position at Johns Hopkins, opting instead to start over at the Bethesda Naval Hospital. By 1984 he seemed to have gotten his life back together. He met, got engaged to, and was ready to marry Helen Victoria Chase, when he was shot to death outside of a Georgetown restaurant. He was killed, according to the police report, in a mugging in which his assailant was angry when he discovered that Dr. Novatney had no cash on him. Helen Chase went back to New York where she eventually married into a wealthy political family. And that would be all that you might find a well-stocked library.

The truth, however, is not quite that simple.

The Truth

In 1980, Dr. Novatney was approached by several government contacts indicating that he was the top choice to head a secret government research project. He had taken the death of his parents hard, this was true, but it had not effected his work in any significant way. He was still on the fast track to becoming Director of Research at Johns Hopkins. Dr. Novatney, however, had no desire to work for the government (he had some offers from some rather lucrative pharmaceutical companies). He declined their offer.

Those same agents then arranged it so that, despite his record and qualifications, he was passed over for the Director's position. He fought the decision and lost. He was asked to resign after a heated argument with the hospital staff. Suddenly, he found himself almost unable to get work. Eventually, he discovered that this was due to the fact that he suddenly had a police record. After clearing this up, he managed to get a position with Bethesda Naval Hospital where he was again approached to head this secret government project. Realizing that they were not going to take no for an answer, he agreed.

Starting in 1984, Dr. Novatney began working on what was code-named Project: SIX. As a prominent and well-known

individual (not only for his medical research but for the fact that he was engaged to marry into one of the wealthiest banking families in the United States), he could not simply disappear from the public eye and continue to work on this project. So his death was faked and he was shuffled off to a top-secret lab in the Mid-West.

As his face was well known, Dr. Novatney did not leave the compound of the project very often for the first few years. By 1989, he was able to travel the Mid-West without much fear of recognition. The project was going very well. They had made many discoveries, advanced in the project's goals, and were no more than 15 years away from unmitigated success in 1990. But by that time, the resources needed to continue Project: SIX had grown beyond the government's ability to obfuscate.

Thus, the solution was obvious. An organization was formed (that had very few government ties) that would act as a front. This organization would siphon money from all sorts of sources and even handle a large portion of the research that was deemed "acceptable" to release into the public domain. It was a success. This front organization is called The Human Genome Project.

Project: SIX

The specific nature of Project: SIX is dependent upon the type of campaign you want to drop Dr. Novatney into. Regardless of the campaign, however, SIX is a ruthless organization dedicated to advancing the power and might of the United States government through genetic research. They will (and often do) kill innocent people in the name of scientific advancement. All in an effort to give the US the upper hand.

In each case, however, the role of Dr. Novatney should be one that rides the line between good and evil; between light and dark. No matter what evil the organization is doing, Dr. Novatney's (primary?) motivation is for the research into cures for genetic disorders -- such as his own hemophilia. He sees this as a win-win situation: The government gets something and the word gets something. Depending upon the campaign, here are a few possible goals and motivations for SIX:

- **Aliens Among Us:** In a horror or conspiracy campaign, SIX can be an organization studying captured alien life forms. If the Earth is involved in a secret interstellar war, the project could simply be to find weaknesses in the alien life that can be exploited. If not, perhaps the alien life forms have abilities and powers based upon their genetics that the government is attempting to duplicate in humans to build a new breed of super-soldier. SIX in this case could even be an acronym for the Scientific Investigations into Xenobiology (even if this is not the name that the government had in mind, it could be a name the members of the project use when they discuss it).
- **Meta-Human Gene:** In a super-powered (or psionics) campaign where the powers involved are genetic in nature (such as *Wild Cards*), SIX can be an organization that is attempting to artificially create the conditions needed to cause the meta-human gene to activate. Destructive testing of the subjects with chemicals, radiation, or what-have-you would not be uncommon. In a game where super-powers are not extant, but you wish to introduce them, this version of SIX could be used as well. Depending upon the level of advancement SIX has made, one could even add minor powers to various members of the team to simulate any stable gene-sequences they have discovered.
- **Super-Virus:** In a campaign that wants to deal with long-term goals of the characters, the idea of a genetically designed virus becomes possible. Imagine a virus that can target specific genetic patterns. Suppose the patterns that were being targeted were those that are common in the Middle East or Asia. Suppose this virus was being designed so that each batch could be "programmed" to go after a specific person so that a carrier agent could be infected with the virus but have no symptoms; yet by making contact with the target, they would contract a serious illness and die within 48 hours. The possibilities here are endless.
- **Thaumaturgy:** In a *Technomancer* campaign, Dr. Elliott Jason Novatney and his SIX organization could very well be the same (or even a competing) organization that ran "Project UMBER Regal" (pp. T54 and MO82). This would mean that SIX is involved in Genetic Thaumaturgy (T50); additionally, SIX would be trying to unlock the genetic codes that control or aid in the manipulation of magical energies -- attempting to create genetically engineered magi. If this is the case, then you may wish to add some level of Magery to the good Doctor's stats below.

Character Stats

Dr. Elliott Jason Novatney

392 points

Age 68, although he appears to be in his mid-50s; 5'9", 147 lbs.; distinguished gray hair, green eyes; gaunt looking man with long, bony fingers; in his lab he wears a tattered white lab coat, outside of his lab he is most often in faded jeans, simple tennis shoes and a silk shirt.

ST 9 [-10]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 12 [20]; **HT** 10 [0].

Advantages: Empathy [15]; High Technology +1 (Bio-technologies and Genetics only, -10%) [18]; Legal Enforcement Powers (international jurisdiction, not obligated to respect civil rights of others, able to kill with relative impunity) [15]; Patron (US Government, 12-) [60]; Strong Will +2 [8]; Wealth (Wealthy) [20]; Zeroed (only after 1986, -10%) [9].

Disadvantages: Duty (US Government, 15-) [-15]; Hemophilia [-30]; Megalomania [-10]; No Sense of Humor [-10]; Secret (faked death) [-10]; Sense of Duty (United States) [-10]; Stubbornness [-5].

Quirks: Overconfidence (mild) [-1]; Reclusive (mild) [-1]; Secretive [-1]; Superiority Complex [-1]; Workaholic [-1].

Skills: Administration-16 [10]; Area Knowledge (Midwest)-16 [8]; Area Knowledge (Washington, D.C. and surrounding areas)-16 [8]; Area Knowledge (New York)-12 [1]; Biochemistry/TL8-22 [48]; Chemistry/TL7-16 [12]; Computer Operation/TL7-12 [1]; Dancing (formal)-10 [2]; Detect Lies-15 [2]; Diagnosis/TL8-18 [16]; Diplomacy-12 [4]; Driving (Cars)/TL7-10 [2]; Electronics Operation (Medical)/TL7 and TL8-18 [14]; First Aid/TL7-18 [12]; Genetics/TL8-22 [48]; Guns (pistols)/TL7-12* [1]; Law (American)-16** [4]; Law (international)-12 [4]; Leadership-12 [2]; Mathematics-14 [8]; Physician/TL8-18 [16]; Physiology/TL8-18 [32]; Politics-12 [2]; Psychology-14 [2]; Research-20 [18]; Savoir-Faire-16 [8]; Surgery/TL7-18 [32]; Swimming-10 [1]; Teaching-14 [6]; Writing-14 [6].

Languages: English (native)-12 [0]; Latin-12 [2].

* Includes +2 from IQ

** Includes +4 for being home legal system

Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Pyramid Review

The Book of Archetypes 2: Attack of the Archetypes (for All Flesh Must Be Eaten)

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48-page 7½ by 9½-inch softcover; \$15

As the title suggests, *The Book of Archetypes 2: Attack of the Archetypes* is a sequel to [The Book of Archetypes](#) and is thus another supplement for Eden Studio's all-zombie RPG, [All Flesh Must Be Eaten](#). It is a second collection of characters that are ready to use, either by the players or as NPCs by the Zombie Master. Like the first volume, this is a slim little tome that brings together 30 new archetypes along with few new rules and items of equipment to go with them. The format is also the same: one archetype per page dominated by a solidly sized illustration that divides a character's statistics on the left and his personality on the right.

But *The Book of Archetypes 2* differs from its forebear in three important ways. First, it is fan-written, meaning that all of the archetypes were created to be played, rather than by the book. This might be a problem for some, but in a "cut to the chase, there's a zombie horde at the door," let's-get-playing-*now* sense, this really does not matter. Second, many of this book's archetypes were designed for use with *All Flesh Must Be Eaten's* three genre books -- [Enter the Zombie](#), [Pulp Zombies](#), and [Fistful o' Zombies](#). Third, this collection of archetypes is not as vile as the first, there being no sexual content or connotation present. The language is still strong in places, though.

Just over half of these archetypes fall into the generic category, not belonging to a specific setting. They include eight Norm types: the Club DJ, the Criminologist, the *Se7en*-inspired Homicide Detective, the Librarian, the Lost Child, the Sewer Dweller, and the all-too-British Stranded Aid Worker (complete with a cup of tea, cricket pads, and bat). The seven Survivor types are the overly efficient Administrative Assistant, the Aging Decker (who looks remarkably like the batrachian Frohicke of *The X-Files'* Lone Gunmen fame), the axe-wielding Thorazine-addicted Asylum Escapee, the Houdini-esque Escape Artist, the Mercenary, the *Aliens*-inspired Space Marine (complete with the adapted quote, "One question Sarge. Is this gonna be a real zombie encounter or is this another bug-hunt?"), and the Street Fighter. These are joined by five Inspired types -- the singing Camp Counselor who knows how to get the kids to handle the undead, the Miraculous Survivor accompanied by his invisible Spiritual Ally, the Reborn Druid Sage, the Reluctant Faith Healer, and the Voodoo Houngan.

The remaining archetypes are designed for the game's three genre books. They can be used as a ready-to-play cast, which is helped by built-in links between some of the characters. Thus for *Enter the Zombie* the book gives two playable Zombie types, the Disillusioned Martial Artist and the Old Crone; two Martial Artist types -- the Iron Head (who has an iron skull, not iron palms) and the Shaolin Soccer Mom (with the quote, "You cannot hope to stand against my Tiger Style Kung Fu . . . Timmy, stop hitting your sister!") -- and three Shooter types: the Chow-Yun-Fat-style Indentured Killer, the Olympic Marksman, and the Smuggler. Of these, the latter archetype and the Indentured

Killer have links to a crime boss in San Francisco, while two archetypes for *Pulp Zombies* have settled in Kokomo after a zombie manifestation in Chicago. These are the torch-singing Canary (Pulp Hero) and the Horn Player (Legendary Hero). The other *Pulp Zombie* archetypes are all of the Pulp Hero type, and are the Driver, the jetpack flying Aviatrix, and a second version of the Smuggler, this time of whisky rather than of people.

Yet a third version of the Smuggler archetype is given for *Fistful o' Zombies*, and, like the other seven, are all Survivor types. They include the Fastest Gun In The West, the Pinkerton, the Riverboat Captain, the Trail Boss, the Wild West Retired Sheriff, the Wild West Reverend, and the Wild West Zombie Rancher. Two of these, the Trail Boss and the Wild West Retired Sheriff, are clearly inspired by Clint Eastwood movies.

The very last archetype, the Young Apprentice, is best suited for *Enter the Zombie*, but like many of the archetypes given in this supplement could be used in other settings, or at least inspire the creation of characters for other settings. The Young Apprentice is also built using a character type new to *All Flesh Must Be Eaten*, but not to the UniSystem. Intended for the creation of sorcerer-type characters, the "Lesser Gifted" cast member type is adapted from the publisher's *WitchCraft RPG*, and is slightly more powerful than either of the Survivor or Inspired character types. "Lesser Gifted" is the main new addition to the game, the others including new Qualities and Drawbacks (such as Curious and Tireless), the Iron Head Chi technique, and three new Metaphysics: Spiritual Ally, Spirit Armor, and Invisibility. The new equipment includes brass knuckles, chain (though still *no whip!*), the katana, and the pulse rifle. Though the latter, much like the Lost Child's tricycle, is likely to find little use in most games.

If this supplement has bad point, it is not in the price, which *is* high for just a 48-page book. But then it is a 48-page book with a piece of art per archetype. Rather, that bad point is the inclusion of the Lost Child archetype, which few players are really going to want to play. Had it been given more points and perhaps the Spiritual Ally Metaphysic, then it might well have been more appealing. Otherwise, this collection is both a simple *and* a clever set of characters that is handily presented and quick to use. Simple because they can be used as is, clever because they are versatile enough to slip into, or adapt to the game's three genre supplements, or even find their way into Eden Studio's other UniSystem RPGs. Thus *The Book of Archetypes 2: Attack of the Archetypes* is as good as *The Book of Archetypes*, though with perhaps slightly less general usefulness, but lots of mix 'n' match.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Carcassonne Limited Edition

Published by [Rio Grande Games](#)

Written by Klaus-Jürgen Wrede

Carcassonne: Full-color, 72 land tiles, 40 followers in five colors, scoring track, rules

The River: Full-color, 12 river tiles, rules

Inns & Cathedrals: Full-color, 18 land tiles, eight gray followers, six point tiles, six large followers

Traders & Builders: Full-color, 24 land tiles, 20 trade good tokens, 12 followers (pigs and builders) in six colors, cloth bag

Carcassonne: King & Scout

Written by Klaus-Jürgen Wrede

Illustrated by Doris Matthäus & Johann Rüttinger

Full-color, 12 land tiles, rules

Have you had enough of *Carcassonne* yet? The publishers sure hope not. They're still cranking them out, one game or supplement after another. The good news is, if you're a newcomer to the game, they have quite a deal for you. After releasing the initial game, the company went through a series of supplemental expansions, one of which was combined into the basic game when it was reissued. Further supplements since then have been combined into *Carcassonne Limited Edition*, a sort of Domesday version of the game.

The set, now in a gold box, contains the basic game and the expansion *The River*, both of which have been detailed in their own *Pyramid* [review](#). It also has the *Inns & Cathedrals* supplement (oddly it's called simply *The Expansion* in its page of rules), and *Traders & Builders*.

Inns & Cathedrals adds new land tiles, a set of gray "meeple" followers and counters for a sixth player, and six large-size followers, one for each player. The large meeples are used just as normal pawns: They gain points for a player and can be reused if their owner completes a structure. These oversized followers count double, however, when determining which players get the points for a set of contested tiles. New tiles are provided for tracking scores over 50.

The titular inns and cathedrals are two new structures pictured on some of the 18 new tiles. An "inn on the lake" always sits beside a road, and a thief who completes the road gets two points for each tile on that section. If that road is not closed off by the end of the game, however, he receives no points for that road (ordinarily a player would receive at least a nominal point award for even an incomplete road). The same is true of the cathedrals, which are placed inside cities. A knight completing such a city gets three points instead of two for the tiles and pennants, or nothing if he fails to finish the city. Since the players often received awards for incomplete structures in the original rules, this possibility for a zero score is an improvement that helps rectify that inequity.

The *Traders & Builders* supplement is a little more involved, and adds a good deal more to think about during play.

For trading, several tiles have been added to the mix showing city sections with a trade good -- wine, grain, or cloth. Players build and complete cities as usual, but if they complete one with a trade-good symbol, they get a matching trade-good counter. Whoever has a majority of counters at the end of the game scores an extra 10 points for each of the three commodities he controls.

The builder is another new follower, something like a chess pawn in silhouette, and each player receives one. It may only be placed on a road or city where the player has already placed a regular follower. If you extend that road or city with the tile you draw, you get to draw and play a second tile, and you may place new followers on it as usual. Finally, each player has a pig, for use with farmers. Although they do not count as another follower for purposes of determining ownership of a field, the pig will give a successful farmer an additional point per city the fields serve.

Traders & Builders provides a cloth bag for the tiles. Aside from storage, the color scheme on the backs of the many supplements and print runs may fail to match up closely enough in some sets. The bag can be used to draw tiles at random.

Although these additions drain *Carcassonne* of some of its original simplicity, the combined sets remain a fairly easy exercise. There's more to track, but greater opportunity to take charge of one's own game. There are multiple avenues to pursue, and if players decide they dislike certain elements they can easily subtract some while keeping others.

Since its release, *Carcassonne: Limited Edition* (and its sister game *Carcassonne: Hunters & Gatherers*) has been updated with a crossover supplement, *Carcassonne: King & Scout*. This 12-piece set offers five new tiles for *Hunters & Gatherers* and seven for the original game (yes, if you only own one of the two games, half this supplement will not be of any use).

Most of the tiles for *Carcassonne* are just added landscape tiles. The one that stands out is a city crossroads -- two cities on one tile, each crossing awkwardly over the other like a bridge over a river. The more substantial tiles are the king and the robber baron. Whoever completes the first city gets the king. From that point, whoever finishes a bigger city takes the king from that player. So long as bigger cities are built, this trade continues to game's end. At that point, the player in possession of the king gets one point for every completed city on the board, regardless of who built it. The robber baron functions in identical fashion, but his purview is completed roads. While they add another strategic consideration, the biggest contribution of these two tiles is to add a real sense of urgency to an already-competitive environment.

For *Hunters & Gatherers*, all the new tiles are meaty. They are doled out evenly to the players before play begins. The shaman allows the owning player to pull one follower per turn from the location where it was played -- whether that feature is completed or not -- and use it somewhere else. The other tiles must be played onto the board instead of one's normal tile play for the turn, and a tribe member must be placed on it, to remain on that feature permanently. The scout lets you discard your first tile draw in favor of a second draw. The hunter on the bridge can count toward the number of followers in a field on both sides of a river. The owner of the dug-out receives a bonus from the biggest lake in his river system every time a new segment of it is completed, regardless of who played the tile. Finally, agriculture scores one point per tile in its field. This last item is the only questionable inclusion, as it is easy for a field to quickly grow out of control, and hemming it in to limit that player's score can be a game-long endeavor.

The *Carcassonne* series entire remains one of the best values in gaming. Now, with all the original sets combined into one at a substantial savings (about \$13), and the new *King & Scout* set for both versions, the experience stays fresh with digestible, incremental improvements at bargain prices.

--Andy Vetromile

Pulpy Goodness

Feats to Emulate Over-The-Top Pulp Action and Adventure in the *d20 System*

by Owen K.C. Stephens

Pulp games tend to have less grasp on reality, and focus more on extreme adventure, larger than life heroes and villains, and the pacing of the story. The things characters do in a pulp style adventure can be emulated by allowing skill checks with high penalties for difficult actions, but this isn't particularly satisfying. The problem is that penalizing skill checks for difficult but in-genre actions doesn't make those actions a good idea -- far better to avoid the tightrope when sword fighting if your Balance check is at -5. A GM who wants to encourage pulpy attitudes needs to do something to reward them, or at least make them a reasonable choice for the player.

Pulp feats are designed to accomplish this. By making characters take feats to accomplish pulp style actions a GM can allow them to avoid the penalties that might reasonably be applied without giving everyone carte blanche to do anything. Players must design characters to fill a particular pulp niche, and take feats appropriate for that role. If a GM really wants to encourage pulp genre, players can be given one or two bonus feats which may only be used for pulp feats.

Pulp feats may seem unbalancingly powerful. They aren't, but only because everyone has access to them. A group where no-one dies because everyone has a Hat is balanced, if a bit odd. A GM may decide not to allow normal NPCs access to these feats, in which case PCs and noteworthy NPCs do gain a power boost, which is appropriate to the pulp era.

These feats should never be allowed in a non-pulp setting.

CINEMATIC DODGE [Pulp]

You can jump about so erratically it becomes very difficult to hit you.

Prerequisites: Dex 15+

Benefit: You may decide at the beginning of any round to start using Cinematic Dodge. Each round you use this feat, you must change your circumstances. For example, a character using cinematic Dodge might block foes' attack with a chair one round, jump onto a table a second round, duck behind some barrels on a third round, and defend himself with a beer stein on a fourth round. If a character fails to change his circumstances, he loses Cinematic Dodge for the rest of that encounter.

While using Cinematic Dodge, all attacks made against the character have a 50% miss chance, and all attacks that hit do only half damage. A character using Cinematic Dodge automatically fails any Concentration check. Additionally, any natural roll of 1 or 2 on any 2d20 check ends the character's move for the round, and fails.

Special: A character may only have one Cinematic feat.

CINEMATIC KNOWLEDGE [Pulp]

You are a walking encyclopedia.

Prerequisites: Int 15+, Max ranks in at least two Knowledge skills.

Benefit: Your internal store of information is vast. Whenever buying a rank in a Knowledge skill, you may choose one topic covered by that skill in which you are specialized. For example, a character with 5 ranks in Knowledge (nobility and royalty) could have 5 specializations -- Royalty of England, Nobility of England, Inheritance Laws, French Heraldry, and The Graystoke Family Tree.

Whenever making a knowledge check in an area of specialty, you roll twice and take the better of the two results.

Special: A character may only have one Cinematic feat.

CINEMATIC MOVEMENT [Pulp]

You can push yourself into a frenzy of activity, allowing you to accomplish amazing feats of acrobatics, but also putting yourself at risk of a catastrophic mobility malfunction.

Prerequisites: Dex 15+

Benefit: You may, at the beginning of any round, opt to begin moving cinematically. This means you suffer no numerical penalties to movement-based skill checks. This means that no matter what difficult circumstances you place yourself under, you do not take penalties to Balance, Climb, Jump, Move Silently, Ride, Swim or Tumble checks. This does not lower set DCS (a Jump check for distance is still increased), but you take no penalties for circumstances (carrying someone), spells (being slowed), or conditions (even if shaken).

A character may still be limited in ways having nothing to do with penalties. A character that is held cannot move at all, and no reduction of penalties changes that. Also a GM need not allow a maneuver he wouldn't allow at all under normal circumstances. (Something a GM would allow at a -10 penalty, such as Tumbling while carrying someone, may be performed without the penalty. Something the GM just wouldn't allow, such as Tumbling across a high-wire while heavily encumbered and hog-tied, carrying a glass of water, is still impossible).

When moving cinematically, and move-based skill check that results in a natural 1 or 2 on the d20 roll is a catastrophic failure. The character stops, loses the rest of his move, and is considered flat-footed until his next move.

Special: A character may only have one Cinematic feat.

CINEMATIC PERSUASION [Pulp]

Your ability to talk circles around people is next to magical.

Prerequisites: Cha 15+, Bluff as a class skill, max ranks of Bluff.

Benefit: Your gift of gab is extraordinary. You may make Diplomacy and Bluff checks in a single round. If you wish, you may make these checks cinematically, in which case your bonus is only your Cha modifier, and your foe's opposed check is based solely on his Wis modifier. However, you automatically fail on a natural roll of 4 or less, and even if you succeed the resulting change in attitude lasts only 1d6 rounds.

Special: A character may only have one Cinematic feat. A character who fails to buy maximum ranks of Bluff at each level cannot use Cinematic Persuasion until he has bought the skill back to maximum ranks.

DEDUCE! [Pulp]

You can jump to conclusions others don't see.

Prerequisites: Wis 15+, max ranks in Sense Motive.

Benefit: You can make deductions about a person, place, thing, or event. You may do this once per game session without cost (see below for using it more often). To do this, you may play a game of 20 Questions with the GM. (You may ask a series of questions which can be answered yes/no. The GM must truthfully answer always, never, sometimes, or don't know.)

You may use this feat more than once per session, but doing so costs 100 exp per additional use.

Special: A character who fails to buy maximum ranks of Sense Motive at each level cannot use Deduce! until he has bought the skill back to maximum ranks.

DON'T BE DEAD, DUDE [Pulp]

Prerequisites: Cha 15+

Benefit: You have such great faith that you can prevent someone from being dead, as long as you make the effort quickly. A character who is killed no more than 1 minute ago, and suffering no more than double his total number of hit points, can be brought back in this way. It requires 10 full rounds (starting within the 1 minute time limit) to revive the character, or three rounds if you make a DC 15 Treat Injury check and yell "Don't you give up on me!"

Characters killed other than through hit-point loss can be revived up to an hour after death, as long as their corpse was never closely examined beforehand.

You may only use this feat once in each lunar month, and only on characters with no more than double your levels or hit dice. Additionally, using it invokes an experience debt for you. The experience point debt is 1,000× the current level of the creature you revive. This debt is recorded separately on your character sheet. From now on, whenever you gain experience half of it goes to your exp total, and half goes to pay off your debt. Once your debt reaches 0, you accumulate exp normally. You cannot use this feat if you have an experience debt greater than your exp total.

HAT [Pulp]

You have a heroic hat. It may be battered, ornate, common, or extraordinary, but it definitely looks good on you.

Prerequisites: Character must have a head.

Benefit: Your hat is never taken from you under normal circumstances. You may be captured and strip searched, picked up by a tornado, run through a hail of bullets or ride a runaway tank off the edge of a cliff, but unless some other feat specifically says you lose your hat, it stays with you.

You may opt to take off your hat of your own free will, but you get it back as soon as you need it. As long as you have your hat, you feel more confident, giving you a +1 morale bonus to all Cha-based skills.

Normal: Most people's hats aren't this ubiquitous.

Special: With your GM's permission, your hat can actually be some other piece of personal apparel. Eyeglasses, lucky flasks, pocket-watches and gloves are all common "hats."

SIDEKICK [Pulp]

You're not the main hero.

Benefit: You can't die. No matter how bad things looked for you, the GM must come up with some way for you to have survived. The GM may decide to spare you immediately (you grab the edge of the cliff), in which case you may continue play normally, or he may spare you after a delay (you landed in the river, and are dragged out by a friendly

bear that mistakes you for her cub), in which case it may be a few scenes before you return to the group.

Your level cannot be higher than 2 levels below the lowest level PC. You gain exp normally, but can't level up if the lowest level PC isn't at least 3 levels above you. You are never mistaken for the hero. You are never the focus of attention some other PC isn't also receiving. The princess doesn't fall in love with you unless her older sister is in love with another PC, you aren't knighted unless everyone is knighted.

Special: You may abandon this feat at any time, though you can't replace the lost feat slot, and you can't ever take it again.

SPARE HAT [Pulp]

You have another hat, in case your first hat is lost.

Prerequisites: Hat.

Benefit: Even if a feat causes you to lose your hat, you keep it. This works just once, however, After that, you lose the Spare Hat feat, and do not gain a new feat to replace it.

Normal: Most people who lose their Hat feat must pay an exp debt to get it back.

SPIRIT OF J. CHAN [Pulp]

You're more Cinematic than most characters.

Benefit: You may take multiple Cinematic feats. You still can't use more than one at a time.

Normal: Most characters are limited to one Cinematic feat.

TIP YOUR HAT TO DEATH [Pulp]

Prerequisites: Hat.

Benefit: Any time an event results in your character's death, you may decide to survive. If you are in an environment that's immediately fatal, you also get moved to the nearest safe location.

However, surviving in this way causes you to lose your hat, and The Hat feat, unless you happen to have Spare Hat, or are willing to buy a new hat with an experience debt. The experience point debt of getting a new hat is 500× your current level. This debt is recorded separately on your character sheet. From now on, whenever you gain experience, half of it goes to your exp total, and half goes to pay off your debt. Once your debt reaches 0, you accumulate exp normally.

Normal: Without this feat, someone with the Hat feat just leaves a good-looking corpse.

TOO P-O'D TO WEAR A HAT [Pulp]

Prerequisites: Hat.

Benefit: You may decide you are too angry to wear a hat, ripping it off and casting it aside. This causes you to lose the Hat feat unless you have a Spare hat or take an experience point debt (see TIP YOUR HAT TO DEATH for rules on buying a new hat with experience points).

Because of your great anger, so great as to sever the hero/hat bond, you gain a +3 morale bonus to all actions taken in the encounter you cast off your hat. If you do it outside an encounter, you gain the bonus for the next 10 minutes per level or until an encounter met in that time ends, whichever comes first.

UBIQUITOUS LUGGAGE [Pulp]

There is some luggage that stays with you. No matter where you go, no matter what you do, it finds you.

Benefit: There is some luggage that always finds you within three days of you losing it. The total luggage volume cannot exceed one square foot per character level. No matter what seems to happen to your luggage, three days after you lose sight of it, it finds its way to you. It may float to your deserted island, be found untouched in a burned mansion, or be returned to you as a gesture to the Red Cross when you're in prison.

Everything in the luggage that isn't a living creature arrives relatively unscathed. However, nothing prevents people from watching you go through your luggage right after returning it to you, or stealing things from it when you know where it is. Also, your luggage may end up looking fairly disreputable, though it's never seriously damaged.

Normal: Most people can't even take an airplane trip without risking lost luggage.

WHIP MASTER [Pulp]

You can do things with a whip other's can't.

Prerequisites: Proficiency with whip.

Benefit: You threaten the area you can strike into with a whip (allowing you to make whip-based attacks of opportunity, including trip attacks). You act as though you had the Improved Disarm and Improved Trip feats when using a whip, and can make grapple checks with your whip to pin a target.

Additionally, you may use your whip like a 1-fingered hand if you make a successful attack. For example, if you hit the AC of a control panel, door knob, or candle, you can treat that object as though you were standing next to it and hand a hand with just one finger (flip a switch on the panel, open the door, snuff out or pick up the candle).

Normal: Whips don't threaten the area around them in the most current *d20 System* rules. The other stuff you can't do with a whip under any *d20 System* rules.

GURPS In Retrospect

By Steve Jackson

The launch of *GURPS Fourth Edition* will be yet another milestone in a path that has stretched now for nearly 20 years. Since the release of *Man to Man* in 1986, we've published around 200 *GURPS* titles, and there are more than a million copies in print. And that's just in English; the game has been translated into Japanese, French, Spanish, German, Italian, Korean, and Portuguese.

Our path will take some interesting turns before long. The online version of *GURPS* is coming along; that will open up the system to a lot of people who have never seen it before, and make it possible for old groups, split up by time, to resume their adventuring. But how did we get where we are today?

It started before there was such a thing as Steve Jackson Games. My first RPG system was *The Fantasy Trip*, published by Metagaming starting in 1977. It had its strong and its weak points, but I liked it. (And some people are still playing it today.) But all things come to an end. My relationship with Metagaming ended, and a year or so after that, so did Metagaming itself. For quite a while I harbored hopes of buying the rights to publish it myself . . . but that proved not to be.

Now, the original impetus behind *TFT* was, quite frankly, to create a playable combat system for *Dungeons & Dragons*. That combat system was *Melee*, and followed by the magic version, *Wizard*. At the time those minigames were created, there was no thought of building them into a complete roleplaying game . . . they covered character creation and combat, and that was it. The decision to write a whole roleplaying system around them was Metagaming's. Not, I hasten to add, that any arm-twisting was required to get me to work on it. To the contrary; it was the biggest, neatest project I'd ever had, and the more we used *Melee/Wizard* combat to resolve *D&D* battles, the more the shortcomings of the rest of the 1970s-vintage *D&D* rules grated on me.

Thus, *The Fantasy Trip*. And it had its day in the sun . . . but sometime in late 1982, I had to admit that there would never be a new edition . . . at least, not from me. Time to move on. So I started thinking about what the next evolutionary step might be. The goal of *TFT* had been well met. It was now possible to play out positional, tactical combat in a RPG. But I had a new goal. I wanted to create a system that would work for any background, any genre. A universal system.

TFT had been solidly based in fantasy. But it might have grown into a universal system (Metagaming had actually started to move in that direction, and while I was trying to buy the game back, I made many, many pages of notes on how that might be done. Alas, lost now . . . I looked for them a few years ago and could not find them.) But that was no longer an option.

Getting Started

Obviously, the new game would have to be significantly different from *TFT*, both for legal safety and because I didn't want to repeat myself. But there were a few points about *TFT* where I felt I'd gotten things just exactly right; I didn't want to change those for the sake of change.

- The game used only 6-siders, and in moderate numbers. No polyhedra, no huge munchkiny handfuls of dice.
- Character creation was point-based. As far as I know, *Melee* was the first RPG(esque) game to do that. By the early 1980s, of course, it was a standard.
- The game was skill-based, without classes or levels.
- At the same time, there were some significant issues with *TFT* . . . issues that I wanted to address, and that in the addressing would let me differentiate the new game from the old one.
- *TFT* skills were "Boolean" . . . you either had them or you didn't. If you didn't have Broadsword skill, a broadsword was just a piece of metal in your hand. I wanted to represent the real-world fact that you can *try*

almost anything, even if you haven't studied it, and that some skills will help you learn others. This, of course, became the **GURPS** default system.

- **TFT** lacked any way to represent "special abilities" . . . what we now know as advantages and disadvantages. (Incidentally, the **Hero System** was the first published game that I know of to extend point-based character creation to cover advantages and disadvantages. But that's not where I got the idea. Forrest Johnson had already written a *Space Gamer* article laying out the basic concept and giving advantages and disadvantages for **Melee/Wizard** characters. I bet he'd be delighted if he knew how many games had followed the trail he blazed.)
- The lists of skills and spells, which had seemed so long when I created **TFT**, proved not so long in practice. When campaigns ran for a year or more, experienced characters began to collect almost every ability they were eligible for . . . which meant that highly developed characters grew more similar rather than more distinct! Obviously, we needed more potential for character differentiation.

So I got started. There was a great deal of writing, and a great deal of rules tweaking, and eventually playtesting and more tweaking. Somewhere in there it became obvious that the combat system could be released first, as a game of its own. That's what happened. **Man to Man** was introduced at GenCon in 1985. And the gamers . . . both **TFT** fans, and those who had never seen **TFT** . . . liked it and wanted to know when the whole thing would be out. I was relieved, to say the least! The first supplement, **Orcslayer**, shipped before the end of the year. This was set in the fantasy world of Yrth, and introduced some characters that you'll meet again when **GURPS Banestorm**, the new Yrth worldbook, appears in 2005.

Onward to **GURPS**!

So **GURPS** became, not just the top priority, but very nearly the only priority for 1986. We started *Roleplayer*, a free newsletter for **GURPS** fans. SJ Games shipped only a single product in the first half of 1986 (**Dueltrack**, a **Car Wars** supplement). But that kept the doors open while we worked to finish the **Basic Set** and get it to the printers. I can clearly remember our "death march" to meet the final deadlines. We've had crunches since then, but never have so many people worked so long and hard . . . doing layout and pasteup until we couldn't see clearly, grabbing a nap under the layout table, and waking up to do it again.

And then came Origins and the release of the **GURPS Basic Set**. It was a boxed package, as was customary for RPGs in those days. It included the obligatory three books: Characters, Adventuring, and a pair of introductory adventures. And lo and behold, the gamers said it was good! And **Man to Man** was an Origins Award nominee at that same convention. By the end of the year, we'd shipped two worldbooks: **GURPS Fantasy** and **GURPS Autoduel**.

And the system grew. When **GURPS** was first released, people told me I was thinking too big. "How can it be a universal system when you don't have any worldbooks yet?" By the end of the year it was ". . . when you've only got two worldbooks?" . . . Soon it was ". . . only five worldbooks?" Then ". . . only 10 worldbooks?" But somewhere along there, people saw that yes, indeed, there was a lot of support, and that it was an ongoing thing. Now it's "But the system has 200 books! How can I buy all those?" The answer has always been "You don't *need* anything but the **Basic Set**. Buy the supplements that interest you."

The first edition sold out quickly, and the **Basic Set** reprint in 1987 was designated the Second Edition. There were a number of rules tweaks, but nothing earth-shaking, and a small change in presentation. The books in the box had heavier covers, printed in blue instead of just black-and-white.

The system went into a Third Edition in 1988. Times and styles had changed; instead of three books in a box, this was one single stand-alone book. At 256 pages, plus the 16-page "Instant Characters" booklet, it incorporated everything that had been in the boxed set. The new edition also benefited greatly from the work of system developer David Ladyman, who created the Speed/Range Table, a concept we are still using. This was also the point at which Will rolls were added to the system.

Other than that, the biggest change from Second Edition was the incorporation into the **Basic Set** of important new material from several worldbooks, creating new sections on Magic, Psionics, and Modern and Futuristic Weapons, and adding material in other places. The Third Edition of the **Basic Set** went through *eight* printings. The total number of

copies in print of that edition alone approached 100,000!

Then in 1994, we shipped the "Third Edition Revised." There weren't any big rule changes here . . . it was a question of presentation. A great many important advantages, disadvantages, and skills had been added to the system since the release of the Third Edition. So we dropped the "Caravan to Ein Arris" adventure from the *Basic Set* (but it will be available again soon as a freebie from [e23](#)) and used the resulting 18 pages for all the most important new character information, plus a couple of useful tables.

In 1995, I did something very important for the line . . . I stepped aside from its day-to-day development. Sean "Dr. Kromm" Punch had been serving as a volunteer Q&A coordinator. We contracted him as full-time *GURPS* Line Editor. Note those very important words "full-time." Where before I had been able to give only a fraction of my attention to the continuing development of the system, now Kromm was able to think about it all the time. He continues to serve in that position, and now knows the game, I dare say, much better than I do. The top-to-bottom system revision that created the Fourth Edition would not have been possible without Kromm.

Kromm's first big job was to compile *all* the new advantages, disadvantages, and skills, from important to trivial, in *GURPS Compendium I* . . . just so nobody would feel they *had* to buy a new *Basic Set* just to get 18 new pages! The companion volume, *GURPS Compendium II*, likewise pulled together a great many rules options and expansions and added more. Both these were released in 1996.

In July 1998, we released the first edition of *GURPS Lite*, compiled by Kromm. This is a complete, playable set of RPG rules . . . the essence of *GURPS* in 32 pages. Although it's a free product, designed mostly for use by GMs in introducing new players to the system, it was also a significant step in system development. It proved once and for all that the *GURPS* system could be boiled down to a relatively small set of core rules . . . and *GURPS Lite* is proving very useful as we work with Worlds Apart to make *GURPS Online* happen.

GURPS Lite was also at the core of the last major evolution of *GURPS* before this new edition. That, of course, is the "Powered by *GURPS*" meta-line . . . books that include both background material and the Lite rules, so they can stand alone as fully playable RPGs. This started with the 1998 release of *GURPS Discworld*, which simply included the *Lite* rules as a supplement. Later "Powered by *GURPS*" releases have taken the *Lite* rules and incorporated them into the text, for greater ease of use. This approach has proven especially worthwhile with licensed products like the *Hellboy Sourcebook and Roleplaying Game*, which reach fans who have never played *GURPS* before.

Which brings us up to 2004, and the Fourth Edition. You've probably seen the pattern already. The development of *GURPS* has been a process of defining a core system, expanding it, then retooling the core system to more efficiently incorporate the expansions. Fourth Edition is the latest turn of the wheel, with the most sweeping set of changes yet . . . but at its heart, it's still *GURPS*. And that was the goal.

Designer's Notes: Transhuman Space: Toxic Memes

by Jamais Cascio

I leapt at the chance to do *Transhuman Space: Toxic Memes* as my follow-on to *Transhuman Space: Broken Dreams*, as I was looking forward to a chance to move away from the struggles of global powers and look more closely at how people would live in the world of 2100. As a professional futurist, it's more satisfying to explore how people live in a changed world than simply to enumerate the various new technological wonders they use. One of the most attractive elements of the *Transhuman Space* setting for me is the degree to which it embraces the massive social changes which would result from the political, economic, and technological shifts it posits for the next hundred or so years.

I had three concurrent goals in putting together *Toxic Memes*. The first was to show the various ways in which the year 2100 was a bizarre and, in many ways, utterly alien place when compared to the world of today. Radical extension of the human lifespan, the emergence of multiple species of humanity, augmented reality, and the like -- these all shift the way we think about the world around us, from the beliefs we espouse to the conspiracies we fear and the fashions we wear. I was fortunate to have numerous creative contributions from a variety of *Transhuman Space* players; about a third of the entries in *Toxic Memes* are based on contributions.

The second goal for *Toxic Memes* was to explore the development of advanced memetic science, with its ability to shape how people think and believe, in an information- and communication-saturated world. The result is something of an arms race between meme-crafters (using sophisticated AI tools to construct the precise phrasing of a message in order to alter opinion) and ordinary citizens and consumers (relying increasingly upon shared networks to filter out harmful memes and highlight appropriate ones); it's a battle between virulent memes and aggressive memetic immune systems. Some of the ideas I put into *Toxic Memes* depicting how the people of 2100 use their communication and information networks have seeds in the present; this is one of the many parts of the *Transhuman Space* future we may see well before the end of the century.

The third *Toxic Memes* goal was to build game mechanisms for crafting and deploying memes which would both reflect the sophistication of the Transhuman Space setting and feel usable (even recognizable) to GMs and players living in the present-day. In this, I based the final chapter on Memetic Engineering on Jon Zeigler's "[Designer Notes for Transhuman Space: Fifth Wave](#)," in which he laid out a draft memetics game mechanism. I should hasten to add that the system as presented in *Toxic Memes* diverges considerably from Jon's approach, and that any defects should be blamed on me, not him.

The memetic engineering guidelines received a great deal of attention during playtesting, and one variant emerged in the course of the discussion which I really liked, but didn't have an opportunity to add to the final text. This was the notion of "building-block memes," or "memetic modules." These are the easy-captured, one-sentence seeds of ideas which can be used to build up more complex memes, especially when used as part of a political or commercial campaign.

(Most of these modules will be recognizable from present-day advertising, politics, and religion. This isn't surprising, as these three realms are the most advanced "memetic alchemists" of our era.)

Memetic Modules

The following list includes some of the more popular plug-in modules for memetic engineering applications such as *Meme Engine* and *ParadigmMaker 2.1* (see p. TS119). These are the commonplace templates upon which memetic campaigns are often built. The modules are incomplete -- the memeticist must fill in relevant information about the target population and campaign goals. Most template-based campaigns combine two or more modules to build up more complex and powerful memes.

- **Alpha:** Might makes right.
- **Authority Is Accuracy:** Memes presented by persons with political/scientific/religious/etc. authority are automatically more valid than those presented by "regular people."
- **Beautiful Plumage:** Like attracts Like.
- **Beginner's Luck:** Unskilled first attempts are always more successful than later unskilled ones.
- **Can't Get No:** Achievement of a goal renders the goal valueless.
- **Conformity Cuddle:** If someone is like you, they are good.
- **Cooties:** Touch can contaminate, reducing prestige, attractiveness, value, self-confidence.
- **Dialectic for Murder:** Every thesis offered always has an antithesis which is an equally valid proposition.
- **Eat Your Veggies:** If it's unpleasant, it must be good for you.
- **Emotional Magnetism:** Opposites attract.
- **Everybody's Doing It:** Popular acceptance indicates objective value.
- **Fame is Value:** A variant of the "Everybody's Doing It" meme, this meme indicates that if a person is famous for one reason or another, they must be qualified to speak on a wide range of topics intelligently.
- **Fandom Menace:** If you like something more than the popular level of acceptance, you are weird and different.
- **Fools, I'll Show Them All:** If someone is oppressed/injured, future revenge is valid.
- **Forbidden Fruit:** If something's forbidden, it must be good/fun.
- **Gods Among Men:** Unusual and sought-after personal characteristics (beauty, intelligence, athleticism) are objective demonstrations of superior value as a person.
- **Knowledge is Power:** A belief that information is, in and of itself, useful, even out of context, and that this information is the property of society as a whole, and thus must be made available.
- **Like a Sex Machine:** Product Makes You Sexy.
- **Machiavelli's Koan:** The ends justify the means.
- **Made of Titanium:** Product contains a material or ingredient that makes it inherently, indefinably, better, even if an unbiased analysis would show that the material makes no performance difference.
- **New & Improved:** Product, service, or idea is better because it's newer, even if it doesn't vary significantly from earlier version.
- **Nobody's a Loser:** The pursuit is more important than the achievement.
- **Nostalgia Traditions:** Old is more valuable than new.
- **Objective Solipism:** My opinions on a topic are objective fact.
- **Opiate:** If it's popular, it sucks.
- **Organic Noble Savage:** Primitive/unrefined is better than civilized/refined.
- **Owned By Cats:** Tied to a humor response, victim pretends to be the servitor of his or her pets. This is a gateway meme for advertising; presence of meme shows target's willingness or predilection to act in a subservient role to another entity or object.
- **Pariah Punishment:** If someone is different, it's fun and right to punish them and ostracize them further.
- **Popular Pariah:** Do X/Use X/Believe X, or everyone will shun you.
- **Product Makes You Smarter:** Use of this product/embracing this idea demonstrates that you are objectively smarter than others.
- **This Time, For Sure:** The idea that repetition will leads to greater chance of substantial success (which may not be borne out statistically).
- **Vanguard of the Revolution:** If nobody knows about it yet, it must be good.
- **Victim Validation:** If someone is oppressed or injured, they are better than their oppressor/attacker.

The Candidate's press manager burst into the Message Control Center, barking at the hired-gun memehackers. "He's gone off the range again, talking about raising taxes. We need talking points now!" The memeticists hadn't yet become accustomed to this sort of retroactive policymaking, and jumped immediately into action. They didn't like using templates, but they needed something fast.

"Let's start with Eat Your Veggies spun with Authority is Accuracy," the first proposed.

"Can't do A is A, that template hasn't been revved to match the last Meme Engine pitch/pattern vocal tracks. The mix results in doubled conspiracy meme harmonics, and that undercuts us with the first-layer punditocracy," the second replied.

"So, let's see . . . New & Improved, instead?"

The second considered. "Yeah, that'll work. The results model tweaks up nicely, although we get a weird splinter meme here. 5% chance of spawning a temporary cult."

"Woah, look what happens when we throw in Like A Sex Machine! Big uptick in the hypergeezzer vote!"

"Works for me. Let's run the process and model and ship it upstairs."

** * **

(Special thanks to Chad Underkoffler for first proposing the "building block" meme idea and seeding the list; additional contributions come from Peter Dell'Orto, K. David Ladage, and me.)

Santa is Really Your Parents

Computational Data Point 01:

In the first issue of *Superman* after the comic and titular character were revamped, Superman makes an observation that his super-strength seems to be working, at least in part, by some kind of tactile telekinesis.

Computational Data Point 10:

Once for a *Fading Suns* game, I had a geeky scientist NPC whose cat hovered through the corridors of the spaceship in a lazy but controlled zero-g spiral; when the heroes investigated, they noted that a piece of what appeared to be buttered toast had been grafted via cybernetics to its back (butter-side up). The players (and characters) were pretty intrigued by this bit of throwaway development, but then I had that he had installed a grav suppressor into the cat, which would suppress the ship's artificial gravity at its whims; the toast was just a prop.

What do these two data points have to do with each other?

Simply put, I ended up explaining something that didn't need to be explained.

In the second case, I was referring to a joke that was ancient by the standards of the *Fading Suns* universe, and is merely very old in ours: Since toast always lands butter-side down and cats always land on their feet, then one way to generate antigravity is to attach a piece of toast, butter-side up, to a cat's back, and drop it. The players had known the joke out of game, and one of the characters even had an ability to explain it in game. And, indeed, the players were amused. But when I explained how it was done in-game, they seemed less interested . . . both during the explanation and with the cat itself afterwards.

In the first example, the creators were trying to come up with a logical justification for something that was scientifically impossible. After all, if a super-strong character ever *did*, say, grab hold of the underbelly of a jumbo jet and attempted to pick it up -- as is relatively common in the comics -- then the physical stresses would usually be enough to tear the plane apart. But if Superman has tactile telekinesis . . . well, then, he can do all types of interesting feats of strength, all the while secure that his telekinetic field would keep the integrity of the object intact.

The only problem is, people don't *want* an explanation as to why Superman picks up huge objects. They know why he does it . . . it's because he's Superman. The fans knew this, future creatives working on Superman know this, and so far approximately zero stories or references have been built on this earlier plot point.

In gaming, there are many elements that start out, for one reason or another, unexplained. Magic -- its source or origins -- is a popular one; so are many legends. (And one of the same creators who was responsible for the "Superman has tactile telekinesis" bit was also behind a storyline that explained that all superhero powers derived from a cosmic "godwave" that originated when a world blew up eons ago, sending its energies across the cosmos. This revelation has, thus far, been used in approximately zero stories since then.) Anyway, as an RPG campaign continues, the pressure to come up with new and interesting stories can lead the GM to struggle to find new topics. But any GM should think really hard before tapping any of those "unexplained" elements for plots.

Now, this is a different concept from a campaign built around revealing secrets, such as conspiracy or "explore the unknown" games. Much of the enjoyment for such games comes from the anticipation that knowledge will be revealed, and the GM shouldn't disappoint the audience. (Mind you, I've already written a [whole other column](#) about that topic.)

For those who might consider the possibility of revealing secrets that players are happy not knowing, I offer a few observations.

Don't answer any question people aren't asking. For example, were people really clamoring for an explanation as to

where the immortal head-chopping Highlanders came from? Not that I'm aware of . . . which made the revelation that they were some kind of spaceship-y alien whatzits all the more infuriating to most folks, and has caused that movie to be referenced in other *Highlander* stories in approximately zero times since then.

Likewise most fans weren't clamoring for a "real" explanation as to how Superman can pick up giant things; the majority of people just accepted and appreciated that fact, and those who are interested in that level of physical detail were more likely to be dealing in the implications of Superman's [intimacy and paternity](#).

Answers often make things less interesting, not more. Why did the Roman Empire fall? Lead pipes. Even though the theory is not without its problems, a goodly number of people still view the theory that Rome went crazy because of lead poisoning from its plumbing systems as the be-all and end-all of that question. So if you give something an easy answer, there's a chance it will reduce down the interest on that topic. ("What is magic? A type of charged particles harvested and channeled by those with elvish blood.") On the other hand, if you give something an overly complicated answer, you run the risk of people being dissatisfied that they know the answer *and* not understanding or fully caring.

Revealing secrets of the unknown is different from dealing with *repercussions* of those revelations. However, the two concepts are similar. If all psionicists in the world are revealed to be descendants of a precursor race, separate but compatible with humanity, the implications this would have on a world would be phenomenal: There would be research into the precursor race, calls for separate classifications, and perhaps legal and judgmental implications. ("I'm sorry, I can't marry you . . . you're not <sob> *human!*") Even something as relatively un-earthshaking as the discovery of fetal alcohol syndrome -- first diagnosed in 1968 and not widely accepted for years afterwards -- has had profound (if subtle) changes on global attitudes and actions in a remarkably short period; today, expectant and would-be mothers either know not to drink or are corrected if they try. What effect would a *greater* revelation have on the world? (For those of you perusing the archives, I also note that I've written about the [effects of revealing secrets](#).)

Finally, feel free to disregard all these rules if the story is good. *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* is built around the idea of the truth behind a legend being revealed, and it is by far the best movie teaming up John Wayne and James Stewart . . . at least, so far. And the classic computer game *Starflight* -- quite probably the best sci-fi computer game ever -- had as its climax [SPOILER ALERT!] the revelation that the strange crystals the universe had been using to power their ships were, in fact, sentient beings. [END SPOILER ALERT] So it's possible to reveal secrets about things people take for granted -- such as strange pseudoscience crystals that power ships -- if it tells a good story.

But be careful. For every brilliant story told by revealing a secret, there's a whole swarm of midichlorians lurking, ready to pounce. Just like how a joke isn't funny if you have to explain it, so too can secrets be ruined if they're explained. And pointing out that my Computational Data Points were in binary will probably dissatisfy everyone, regardless of whether they got the joke. After all, like the shirt says, "There are 10 kinds of people in this world: Those who understand binary, and those who don't."

--Steven Marsh

The Last Stone Age Adventure: The Hidden Valley of the Kulku

by David Morgan-Mar

The Kulku people have lived in the valley of the Kulku since the Mother Crocodile slithered through the mountains, her tail carving the valley, and her eggs giving birth to the first Kulku. Relations with the Pesik people in the next valley, a day's walk toward the rising sun, have been good in times of plenty, but this is not one of those times. The spirits of the forest have not been kind in recent years, the last crops have been poor, and game is becoming scarce.

As Kulku hunting parties roam further in search of food, there is potential for conflict with the Pesik. The hunters of the tribe must also be skillful negotiators, or warriors if the need arises. But that is nothing to what is about to happen. The world of the Kulku and Pesik is about to be turned upside down.

The Setting

This adventure takes place in the forests of New Guinea. The year in the outside world is some time in the 1930s, but in these remote reaches it may as well be the stone age. For that is the technology and society with which the inhabitants are familiar.

The valley of the Kulku is a highland valley nestled against the northern edge of the spine of mountains that run east-west along the island of New Guinea. It is some 50 miles from the north coast -- 50 miles of difficult, swampy terrain, sparsely inhabited by nomadic tribes who gather wild sago palm as a staple. The rivers that flow from the Kulku and Pesik valleys join into one before becoming lost in the swamp.

The Kulku tribe numbers around 1,000 individuals of various ages, spread across a dozen villages dotted along the valley. Living in a somewhat more fertile region, they practice a primitive style of agriculture, growing taro, yams, and bananas, and raise pigs for meat. The valley can only support a limited number of pigs, so hunting expeditions must occasionally seek additional protein to supplement the diet. Tree kangaroos and cassowaries are the largest game animals, and both are uncommon and elusive. In poor times, like now, the tribe is reduced to eating rats and frogs.

The Pesik tribe, inhabiting the next valley over, is similar. The two tribes speak slightly different languages, but they overlap enough that adding a few gestures will usually get the point across. It may be appropriate for a PC to understand the Pesik language fully, as the tribes sometimes swap children for marriages. The lowland swamp dwellers speak an entirely different tongue, not readily understood by either Kulku or Pesik.

Outside the immediate area of the villages, the terrain everywhere is formidable, reducing movement on foot to at best a few miles a day. The villages within a valley are linked by well-traveled paths that provide normal movement. There is no maintained path between the valleys.

The Hunt

The adventure begins with a small band of hunters, perhaps with some non-hunting members tagging along to gather

Setting the Scene

The GM should set the scene for the players, members of the Kulku tribe, without mentioning the neighboring Pesik in terms more specific than "there are other tribes within a few days' travel." These tribes should be described as potential rivals, but not outright enemies. Depending on GMing style and the likely reactions of the players, the GM may also want to leave out any references to New Guinea and the 1930s, and set up the adventure as a true stone age setting, leaving the developments to come as a surprise.

wild foods from the forest, setting out to find food for the tribe -- in other words, a group of PCs. Females participated in hunts in some New Guinea tribes, so it will not strain realism to allow PCs of either sex among the hunters; similarly, either could be gatherers.

They will typically be equipped with stone axes or stone-headed maces, and spears or simple bows. Spear and arrow tips are fire-hardened wood only, and should do less damage than typical medieval technology equivalents. Armor is unheard of; in fact, clothing is almost unheard of. The hunters own small wooden shields, but these are for war, not hunting, so will be left at home.

The direction they set out doesn't much matter (the Pesik can be fudged around to the west if necessary), except that south is out of the question as the mountains become impassable. Heading north into the swamp is also undesirable, as game is scarce and crocodiles common, although letting inexperienced heroes discover this for themselves might be entertaining.

After a few hours of walking through the jungle, the hunters spot a cassowary. These solitary birds are big and powerful, and must be tackled with care as they can disembowel a human with a single claw strike. Players used to more advanced weaponry should be given a fight to remember as they take on a dangerous wild animal with barely adequate technology. Remember that throwing spears or firing arrows in a dense forest is difficult, attracting vision and cover penalties, and a wounded cassowary will simply become enraged. If the heroes need further convincing that they are not lords of the forest, another bird can join the fight or attack any non-combatants.

The Confrontation

Just as the hunters are feeling pleased with themselves for having dispatched a fearful quarry and gained valuable food for the tribe, they are confronted by hunters from the neighboring Pesik tribe. If any of the heroes has superior senses or alertness, they may gain some advance warning of the Pesiks' approach, but there is little that can be done to avoid an encounter. (The Pesiks, for their part, heard the fight and came running to investigate.)

The Pesik hunters emerge from the forest, clearly upset, and indicate that the Kulkus are hunting on *their* territory and the cassowaries belong to *them*. This is an opportunity for some roleplaying as the two groups argue the finer points of territoriality in the trackless jungle, with only partially intercomprehensible languages. Remind the players that times are tough, meat is sorely needed back at the villages, and the Pesik are rivals, but not outright enemies.

The Pesik band should be evenly matched with the Kulkus if a fight breaks out, which may be a possibility depending on the negotiations. Character roleplayers may prefer diplomacy or bargaining, but the threat of hostility should hang over the meeting, and the Pesik will be prone to violence unless the Kulkus accede to their claims. Any fighting should not be fatal -- the Pesik will withdraw after suffering a few wounds.

If the heroes manage to negotiate their way out of a fight, they will likely be bringing home less food than they had hoped. This needs to be reported to the chief, Belim. Belim will look grave and say the hunters should not have let the Pesik get away with such demands, as the Kulku need the meat and are clearly more important. The village's wise man, Menteko, says it is folly to fight with the Pesik, and that cooperation might see both tribes collect more food for all. Belim dismisses his adviser with an angry grunt. The hunters may try to argue either side in this meeting to swing the chief or the wise man -- if they don't it becomes clear that there is a growing rift between them.

On the other hand, if the heroes fought with the Pesik, this enrages Belim, who swears the Pesik will pay for this outrage. Menteko urges calm and advises that a diplomatic mission to the Pesik would be a better option than a war party. Again, he is dismissed out of hand by Belim, and again the hunters might step in with words of persuasion for either side.

No matter how the return to the village plays out, Belim will ask for volunteers for a party to enter Pesik territory and confront their chief over the encounter in the forest. Naturally, eager young hunters such as the heroes would be ideal.

The Cargo

The next morning, as the expedition prepares to leave, everyone is frightened by a strange noise from the sky. A huge bird, bigger than anyone has ever seen before, flies noisily over the forest. It can only be glimpsed fleetingly through the canopy of leaves. As its throaty drone fades away, there is a muffled crashing noise from the north, as though several trees have all fallen over at once.

Within minutes a boy runs into the village from the north. He has run from the northernmost Kulku village, carrying news of something frightening in the forests on the edge of the swamp. He urges Belim, Menteko, and any hunters to come quickly. (If the hunters decide to react faster than this and race off to the north, they will meet the boy halfway between the villages. The boy will demand they go back for Belim and Menteko, as what he has seen is clearly evil magic. They can ignore his pleas and continue north, while he fetches Belim after them.)

If the heroes have done nothing to smooth over relations between Belim and Menteko, the wise man will refuse to leave the village. The boy says he is needed to deal with evil magic, but nothing he says will convince Menteko. Belim expresses the sentiment that they are better off without the old meddler, making it almost impossible for the heroes to convince him to come along now. On the other hand, if the heroes made any leeway in attempting to placate the two elders the previous day, Menteko will be keen to come and see what has happened. If the hunters think to, they can take their wooden shields with them.

The northern village is full of terrified Kulku, with a few brave hunters desperately awaiting reinforcements before investigating the forest to the north. Belim will order them to guard the village -- to their obvious relief -- while he leads his own party toward the swamp.

After three hours of walking, near the point where the Kulku and Pesik rivers join (and, significantly, between them), the tribesmen will see an otherworldly sight. Scattered all over the ground are big shiny . . . fruit? And bundles of things, tied with rope. Smashed bits of wood. And . . . *meat!* Rats and birds are already eating it and will need chasing away as soon as the tribesmen can overcome their fear.

This is a food drop intended for the Archbold Expedition, which struck inland from the coast some 12 days ago. To avoid having to carry all their supplies, they are having food dropped ahead of them by plane. The expedition of scientists, hunters, guides, and bearers will make their way to the drop site in a day or two.

But meanwhile, it is up to the Kulku what to do with it. The meat is dried and salted. The bundles contain packets of flour, sugar, salt, and tea leaves, as well as sacks of rice, dry beans, potatoes, and onions. There are some boxes of rifle ammunition. The shiny fruit are tin cans. There is no can opener (not that the Kulku would know what to do with it). Let the players have some fun experimenting with the supplies and trying to open the cans -- or trying to figure out they are something that *can* be opened. They variously contain fruit, vegetables, and dog-food-like chunks of stewed meat.

Belim is pragmatic and will recognize the value of the haul. He will order his people to carry it back to the villages. If Menteko is there, he will declare the find to contain bad magic and warn Belim to leave it alone. Belim will ignore him. It will be up to the heroes whose orders they follow.

Sharing the Cargo

Either way, a party of Pesik will arrive a couple of hours after the Kulku. The heroes will recognize some of the same men from the hunting party they bumped into the day before. Any fear they feel at the strange sight will quickly be overcome if the Kulku are already sampling and making off with the supplies.

One of the Pesik wise men, Kiyali (who was not with yesterday's hunting party), is leading the group; the Pesik chief currently has a bad limp and was not up to the walk, but they won't divulge this information. In broken language Kiyali will indicate that the area is Pesik land and the find belongs to the Pesik. Belim will take umbrage at this and

proclaim loudly that the land is neutral and the Kulku found the food first, so it is theirs. The Pesik tribesmen will look agitated and keep a firm grip on their weapons, while Kiyali approaches with hands up in a gesture of parley. Belim will remain hostile.

What happens next is up to the actions of the Kulku hunters. If they make any threatening or insulting moves, one of the Pesik hunters will lose his nerve and hurl a spear, prompting Belim to strike at Kiyali with his heavy stone club, and probably starting a battle. On the other hand, if the heroes make conciliatory gestures or encourage discussion and truce, they can get the leaders to sit down and try to reach some sort of agreement. If the hunters look like doing nothing and Menteko is present, he will quietly urge them to interfere peacefully before Belim and Kiyali come to blows. Having been spurned by his chief, Menteko does not want to interfere himself, but can see that some conciliation is needed to avoid a conflict. If the heroes do not do anything, Belim argues with Kiyali for a minute and then loses his temper and strikes him.

If battle occurs, it will be between evenly matched sides, with any injuries from the previous day's encounter on the Pesik side replaced by new hunters. It should be more vicious, as obviously more is at stake, and both sides will be urged on by their leaders. The only possible force for peace will be the heroes themselves, or Menteko if he is present. After a few rounds of fighting (hopefully before anyone is too badly injured), Menteko raises a commanding voice and brandishes his ceremonial staff. He warns that anyone continuing to fight will be cursed by the spirits of the mysterious food. Coming from a respected wise man, this is a credible threat, and all the NPCs will pay it heed. (If necessary, the GM should emphasize this to the players.) With the fighting stopped, there will be nothing for it but to bargain, but Belim will seethe with anger at Menteko.

If nothing else breaks up the fight, people may die before one side or other decides to withdraw. The Pesik will retreat quickly into the forest after two men are incapacitated -- any Kulku retreat will be largely up to the heroes. They may have to abandon Belim to his rage, or forcefully carry him away. Depending on who is injured or killed in this battle, the consequences could be far-reaching. Belim is stronger than Kiyali, so it is possible the Pesik wise man will fall, which would trigger all-out war between the tribes.

On the other hand, it is possible that the encounter can be resolved peacefully and some agreement reached on splitting the food. Belim will be stubborn, but Kiyali is ready to make a deal, pointing out that there is more food than the two parties can carry away, and animals will get to the rest before they can return. With a bit of encouragement from the heroes, Belim will grudgingly accept; without encouragement he will remain stubborn and the argument will drag on for hours.

If a sharing agreement can be reached, or the Kulku drive the Pesik away, the next step is carrying the food back to the villages. It will take 100 man-trips to carry it all away -- many more than the manpower available. Allow the hunters to arrange a procedure. They may wish to post guards while some of them return to the village for more help. Remember it takes three hours to walk to the nearest village when unencumbered, and there will be about seven hours before sunset. It is likely that overnight guards will need to be posted, if anyone thinks of it.

If the Kulku have retreated from battle, it is up to the heroes what to try next. Possibilities include sneaking back to the cargo after the Pesik carry some away, mounting an ambush, or even raiding the Pesik valley. Either option carries plenty of opportunity for action, and the GM should let the heroes gain something for any well-planned effort.

The Expedition

The Archbold Expedition is a British exploratory expedition, seeking to chart the region and contact any native tribes. They have no idea that the mountain valleys support distinct *agricultural* populations, especially after long contact with the nomadic gatherer tribes of the coastal areas. Financed by Lord Archbold, the group is led by Dr. Fredrick Owens, a competent anthropologist, though ill-prepared for the surprises of the New Guinean highlands. A dozen other Europeans accompany him, made up of two other anthropologists, a botanist, zoologist, artist, photographer, the inevitable daughter of one of the scientists, and five hunters. Rounding out the party are 40 natives, variously guides, interpreters, and bearers. The expedition so far has not gone well, with the terrain tougher than imagined, some of the Europeans falling ill, one of the previous supply drops lost, and a lack of game animals to supplement their diet. They

arrive in Kulku territory ragged, tired, hungry, and a little desperate.

The timing and location of the arrival of the expedition can be adjusted for dramatic effect. If there is plenty of conflict and action ensuing from the encounter at the cargo, this can be played out over the next two or three days of game time before bringing the expedition in. If things have been settled relatively peacefully and there is not much happening other than ferrying food back to the villages, let the expedition arrive sooner.

Either way, the first place the expedition will reach is the cargo drop. It is possible that by the time they arrive, the tribesmen will have cleaned it out and abandoned the site. Since they are now low on supplies, this will make the expedition even more eager to contact natives and obtain some food.

If the transfer of the cargo is proceeding slowly, or someone has been left at the site to look after it, the expedition may meet the Kulku there. The other option is to have them find an empty cargo drop, push on upriver into the valley, and stumble across the Kulku near the village.

When it occurs, the strangeness of the encounter to the Kulku cannot be overstated. The Europeans will appear as frightening pale spirits, but the presence of the native guides will go some way to quelling fear. The natives are, however, all from the lowland tribes, meaning none of them understand the Kulku language. This point will take some communication to get across to the Europeans, who initially assume the natives can understand one another.

This encounter -- which should occur with the heroes present -- is an opportunity for roleplaying with lots of gestures. The Europeans naturally assume the Kulku have their missing cargo and want to negotiate for its return, so they will try various mimes for exchanging goods and eating.

If the Kulku at any stage become aggressive, an expedition hunter will fire a rifle into the air, scattering birds and attracting the attention of the Pesik, who will hear it and assume it is another load of cargo. Naturally, this brings a party of them moving through the forest as fast as they can. If the Kulku persist in aggression, the Europeans will have no hesitation in shooting at them.

Dr. Owens is desperate for food supplies, and benignly but misguidedly believes that the natives are better off eating their own natural diet, so will initially insist that *all* the cargo be returned. He is not hard-hearted, however, and if the Kulku manage to convey that the tribe is facing starvation he will relent a little, but still needs to find food for his own expedition. Any news that the Pesik tribe have also made off with some of the supplies will make Owens want to establish contact with them too, for both anthropological and supply-procurement reasons.

Studying Each Other

Assuming no violence at the first encounter, the expedition will set up camp near a Kulku village. Belim will want to meet them as soon as possible, and Menteko will tag along. This will set the scene for more arguments, as Belim refuses to believe the cargo belongs to the Europeans, and wants the lowland tribesmen off Kulku land. Menteko at first points out that these demanding strangers have been brought here by the curse of the cargo.

For their part, the lowlanders are not happy about being in the territory of a highland valley tribe, and the heroes may witness some impassioned arguments between them and the European members of the expedition.

There are several events that could happen on the first day of contact. If any shots were fired, a party of Pesik may appear, precipitating either more parleying or hostilities, depending on how relations have gone so far. The presence of the expedition complicates matters, of course, and outright warfare between the tribes will be broken up by guns if necessary. If Kiyali is uninjured, he will try to establish relations with the Europeans, as he is quick to

Deposing Belim

At some point during the adventure, it should become painfully clear to the heroes that Belim is too paranoid and aggressive to serve as an effective leader for the Kulku. If they don't take the hints from his behavior, step up the arguments between Belim and Menteko, or have Belim round on and perhaps strike one of the hunters. Belim should be played as unstable and violent -

spot their equipment and believes they can bring more cargo.

Allow any actions by the heroes to follow through to logical conclusions. They may decide to plan a raid or attack on the expedition, try to communicate further, or may want to do something about the Pesik. If they have no particular course of action, Belim will call a meeting and proclaim that the strangers are obviously carrying valuable supplies, and must be up to no good if they are in league with lowlanders. He proposes a night mission to infiltrate their camp and steal supplies. Menteko opposes this, partly out of contrariness, but also because he now realizes the Europeans are just people, but that they have fantastic equipment and could help the Kulku if befriended.

The simmering tension over the tribal leadership will boil over at some point, as Belim and Menteko get into a heated argument. The hunters will have to take sides as Belim launches an attack on the wise man. If within earshot of the expedition, they will race over to break things up, with firearms if necessary. By now it may be clear to the heroes that Belim is an unwise leader in these circumstances and something should be done to depose him.

Another possible event is that Menteko can be encouraged to tend to the sick expedition members. They are suffering from malaria, for which Menteko can brew a foul herbal concoction to relieve the symptoms. This help can either be prompted by the heroes, or suggested by Menteko once his attitude to the white men improves.

Whatever happens during the day, the expedition's native bearers and guides will stealthily desert during the night. They will not be detected unless Kulku are posted all around the encampment, but even so there is little that can be done to prevent them running into the moonlit night and heading for the coast. This is a major problem for the expedition, since the Europeans are ill-equipped to carry the equipment and supplies they need.

The Journey

The obvious solution is for Owens to recruit Kulku tribesmen to act as guides and bearers to the coast. Depending on developments so far, there are several ways that such a deal can be arranged. The expedition has three things of value: firearms and other modern equipment; the ability to help the Kulku in their disagreement with the Pesik; and the ability to arrange more cargo drops once they return to civilization.

Owens will be very reluctant to help the Kulku attack the Pesik, but will be happy to act as a mediator. As long as the language barrier can be overcome, Owens is able to promise cargo drops for both tribes, as long as the expedition can get back to the coast. With his original guides and bearers gone, Owens will promise anything to secure the help he needs. He will not want to trade arms or equipment, but can promise delivery of the same at the coast.

The journey will take two weeks, much of it slogging through swampy terrain at a rate of only about four miles a day. Note that several NPC villagers will also be needed, along with the heroes. The expedition has left caches of supplies along the return route, but some of these will have been raided by the returning lowland tribesmen, so the travelers will have to survive on the unlooted caches and by hunting. Game is scarce, but good luck or wilderness skills will manage to rustle up a few birds that can be shot. The group should face an encounter with crocodiles at some point.

If peace has not been made with the Pesik, a war party from that tribe will follow them. They will keep out of sight at first, and are unlikely to be noticed unless anyone does rearguard scouting. As their supplies begin to run out a few days into the journey, however, they will risk raiding the expedition camp at night, attempting to steal food by stealth, taking out any sentries as necessary. If played right, this could be interpreted as mysterious losses to spirit forces by the Kulku until evidence of the Pesik is found.

- as much as it takes to get the heroes thinking they would be better off with another leader.

If the heroes hatch a plot to overthrow Belim, play it out logically. Such a coup will probably end in violence, but Belim will step down after a bit of fighting if it is obvious he no longer has the support of his hunters. Who becomes the new chief is up to the heroes. As a wise man, Menteko will not accept the position, but will quickly pledge his support for a new leader.

GMs with players who enjoy political roleplaying may spice things up with additional NPCs and factions.

Eventually, the expedition will reach the coast. The Kulku will be amazed to see more Europeans there, living amongst the lowlanders, and a small ship anchored in a natural harbor. Owens tries to explain that he can radio from the ship to arrange a plane to drop food supplies in the Kulku valley -- but it is doubtful how much of this he can get across. Something he does manage to communicate is that he would like a few of the Kulku to accompany him on the ship, to show them new wonders of the outside world. The NPC villagers can be sent home with news, but it is up to the heroes what adventures they have from here.

Aftermath

Whatever happens, the Kulku no longer live in the stone age. They will likely bring back guns, modern (for the 1930s) medicines, steel tools, and a much wider appreciation of the outside world. Cargo drops will be treated as almost mystical at first, but will help them through the current food shortage. Soon a permanent track will be blazed through the forest and swamp, and the Kulku will be in easy touch with the coastal settlement and Europeans.

The Europeans bring crops better suited to the mountain valley climate -- sweet potato will quickly supplant the taro and yams as a dietary staple -- and more types of livestock, enabling the Kulku to improve their diet tremendously. Missionaries will trek into the valleys and teach the Kulku about Christianity, driving their animistic beliefs to the background. And they will not tolerate hostilities between the Kulku and Pesik.

If the heroes choose to accompany Owens back to civilization, whole new adventures await. They can quickly learn to fire guns, but English will take longer. Owens may employ them to help on further expeditions in New Guinea, or even elsewhere in the world. Or they can stay at home and help their tribe adapt to European life, dealing with invasions of cliffhanging adventurers who want to explore their land for gold, take their people as slaves, or exploit them for works of art. Either way, adventures can segue into a pulp era campaign.

Variations

Similar encounters between stone age communities and more advanced explorers, settlers, or conquerors have occurred many times throughout history. The pre-contact part of the adventure can be played almost identically in the African, South American, or Central American jungles, changing only the plants and animals. Adapting the geography and climate makes it work in North America. Note that most jungle tribes were strictly hunter-gatherers, unlike the agricultural New Guineans.

Central or South American tribes can be contacted by Spanish Conquistadors. They won't have air-dropped supplies, but will probably be encountered with horses. The villages can be moved to a coast, and the initial contact can include the amazing sight of a full-rigged ship sailing into the bay. In reality, the Spanish quickly overwhelmed and conquered the much more numerous natives by force, but an alternative approach might see cooperation.

More remote tribes may be contacted a century or two later, with adventurous natives being thrust into the world of swashbucklers and pirates afterward. An expedition of slavers rather than explorers would be appropriate. Some tribes in the Amazon basin have remained uncontacted into the 20th century, and the adventure could be played as is there.

In Africa, the expedition might be Belgian or Dutch, and the era will be the 19th century. Played straight, this could lead into a Victorian horror campaign, with the forces of vodoun unleashed on the European world, and natives recruited to help fight it -- or natives might be taken slaves and use their spirit magic to fight for freedom. In this case, the air-dropped cargo will again be missing.

The cargo can be kept in, though, if Europe has developed steampunk technology. Steam dirigibles or other flying contraptions can assist a ground expedition, resulting in the contacted tribes being introduced to a whirlwind high-tech steam-powered world.

A little more work can adapt the adventure to Martian or Venerean tribes, contacted by Victorian explorers who crossed the void in ether flying spaceships, kick-starting a *Space 1889* style campaign involving the aliens fighting for

justice against conquering Earth factions, perhaps assisted by more moral Earthlings. Or turn it around and have genuine Cro-Magnon humans contacted by visiting aliens, ending the stone age and plunging it straight into space opera . . .

Further Reading

- Diamond, Jared. *The Rise and Fall of the Third Chimpanzee* (Vintage, 1991).
- Diamond, Jared. *Guns, Germs and Steel* (Vintage, 1997).
- ***GURPS Cliffhangers***
- ***GURPS Dinosaurs***
- ***GURPS Low-Tech***

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Magic in the Crucible

for *GURPS*

by Peter V. Dell'Orto

This article is a supplement for both ["Martial Arts Styles for Mages"](#) and ["Campaign in a Box: Kung-Fu Crucible."](#) While the previous article focused on fully integrating martial arts styles with magic, it also seemed obvious that magic could simulate the really powerful characters and moves in wuxia films and in video games. This article can be used to enhance a current Crucible game, or to start a whole new campaign in a more magical Crucible.

Why the Crucible?

The Crucible is an ideal setting for magic-based martial arts styles. Console and Arcade video games always have a few fireball-tossing, shapeshifting, arm-extending voodoo Shinto snake priests running around. Finishing moves are filled with not just wuxia-style jumps and leaps, but raging flames and thunderous cracks of lightning from the heavens. Where do all of these fighters perfect their style, brave enough to face a martial artist whose blows will scorch the flesh or fry their mind? Why, the Crucible, of course. Where else?

The Setting: Always Magic, or Adding Magic?

The first question to be answered is, did the Crucible always have magic?

If you are starting a new campaign based in the Crucible, it is easy to add magic-based martial arts to the setting; follow the advice in this article and ["Kung-Fu Crucible"](#) and decide on the power and mana levels. The heroes do not necessarily have to be aware of such magical powers; perhaps they come from a more austere setting, only to be whisked to the Crucible to test their mettle against Flying Dragonjutsu stylists that really fly, and Tiger Kung-Fu stylists that fight in tiger form. This can make an excellent campaign nova for a campaign -- see ["Going Nova: Big Newness in Your Campaign"](#) by Ken Hite and ["Getting A New Writer"](#) by Brian Rogers.

It also makes a good crossover setting for Supers-style martial artists. They are already used to dealing with wizards, alien invasions, bizarre plots twists; the Magical Crucible is a good place to visit even if they do not stay. This "just visiting" style can be a good change of pace, and can be used instead of the usual Not Very Deadly Deathtrap routine if a martial-arts super is captured. "You wake up in a small cottage . . ."

If you are already running a game in the Crucible, it may seem problematic to introduce such a decidedly overt change into the setting by adding magic. However, remember *The Prisoner*, one of influences behind the standard Crucible setting. In *The Prisoner*, Number Six encountered elements that seemingly would have been hard to miss, but were introduced suddenly (and disappeared just as suddenly) without comment from the rest of the villagers. One day the Crucible can be lacking magic entirely, the next day it could have magic as it was always there . . . and disappear the next. Not all players will react well to such a new introduction (even Number Six had his own issues with this kind of event at times). A smoother transition is possible if you are already playing at the Wu-Wu-Wuxia or Chambara levels: A new "dim mak" practitioner shows up, but his attacks more closely resemble Deathtouch than Pressure Secrets. Later, a showy stylist using fire as part of his warm-up act can spit a few flames or toss a few "fireballs" in his fights. Are they novelties or has the Young Master found some new place to bring in stylists from?

The Rules

Now that you have decided to put magic in the Crucible, how is it implemented? The critical decision to make is the

Austerity level of the game. This is turn will determine the Mana Level of the Crucible.

The Crucible works well at multiple Austerity levels, but magic-based wuxia powers work best at low levels of Austerity. The Crucible benefits the most from magic at the "Chambara" and "Wu-wu-wuxia" level of Austerity. It can work at Chi level as well, but works best when used in a campaign that centers on characters using high-powered, physics-defying powers. In a Chi Austerity game, magic may be completely overpowered by the martial arts. The default assumption is that The Crucible is at High Mana. A dial of mana levels can be used to vary this assumption to make very different campaigns.

Low Mana is not recommended; it defeats the purpose of adding magic to the Crucible. Magic added with Low Mana will be very weak, cost a large amount of points, and be relegated to secondary status. This is possible, but it does not fit the "theme" of the Crucible. If the masters wish to test the power of magic-using stylists, they would not hamper them so . . .

Chi: Normal Mana: Magical stylists can use spells normally, but must be naturally skilled and train hard to be effective. This level best matches the "normal" power level of fantasy magic -- spells will enhance, but not replace, martial prowess. Because of this, you are likely to end up with specialist mages occurring in order to maximize their ability to use their power against martial artists.

Chambara: High Mana: Anyone can learn a few mana-manipulating tricks; with the "Master of One Style" option all martial arts may know spells appropriate to their style. At this level integrated magic/martial arts styles utilizing fairly powerful magics really shine. Most fighters are capable of video-game like feats -- throwing fireballs, elemental attacks, and even flight.

Wu-Wu-Wuxia: Very High Mana: Magic flies thick and fast; this is the arcade game or epic wuxia level. Magical powers are used regularly in combat with almost no regard to cost, but the penalties for the slightest mistake (failure is a critical failure, critical failure is disastrous) can be devastating to the stylist. Any fighter without significant magical and or chi powers is reduced to spear-fodder status by those that have them.

Very High Mana is best suited for games simulating extremely powerful wuxia fighters. Since all fatigue comes back at the end of the character's turn, the only limiting factors on wuxia fighters will be the number of spells "on" and the maximum amount of mana they can expend at once. Spell-based attacks will fly thick and fast; attacks not backed up by magic will be secondary. Critical Failures are also best handled by GM decision rather than the chart on p. M6. Few failed "magical" strikes in wuxia films result in summoned demons or casting on the wrong target. Spectacular failures of powers can still occur however, and Critical Failure rolls are the best way of simulating this occasion failure of the Flying Heaven Lightning Strike to do what it is supposed to . . .

Take That! And That! And Some of These!

A staple of high-powered wuxia combat are attackers throwing a bewildering amount of attacks, especially when face with numbers of spear fodder. This is no different with magic-using wuxia fighters. At the same time, the emphasis needs to be on martial arts, not on standard fantasy wizards. Therefore spells need to be cast faster, but limits need to exist to discourage wizards who eschew martial arts to simply toss huge Area spells around.

No spells can be cast without gestures -- in fact, most spells require them. Kiais, shouted battle cries, and frequent announcements of the maneuver you are using are de rigeur for some campaigns. Regardless of skill level, no spells will be able to be cast with less than "full" gestures -- spoke and hand gestures, or at least extensive hand gestures (for your vow-of-silence monk types).

Multiple attacks are calculated normally for Magic Jet, Magic Breath, and Spell Throwing, depending on the method chosen: 1 for 8 points of skill, 1 for 3 points of skill over 12, etc. This will bring these skills in line with other Trained By A Master martial artists.

Especially at the lower Austerity levels, it makes sense to use a variant of the "Reduced Concentration for Cinematic

Skills" sidebar rule (p. MA61). Allow Trained By A Master mages to spend attacks for seconds of concentration to throw spells; this will dramatically increase the effective speed of mages. Mages are still be only able to cast one spell (plus a Blocking spell, see below) per turn, with some exceptions:

Missile spells: Unlimited missile spells are allowed, up to the normal limits of concentration and number of attacks. *Example:* A mage with Trained By A Master, Fireball-20 and Spell Throwing (Fireball)-21 would have four attacks. He could throw four 1-die Fireballs per turn, two 2-die (spending 1 attack per extra second needed to generate the fireballs), or a 3-die fireball and a 1-die fireball (2 attacks per extra second for the 3-die, 1 attack for the 1-die). All of these attacks will be unaimed, but with skill 21 accurate attacks should not be a problem.

Blocking Spells: One option is to allow extra blocking spells, at 1 extra Blocking spell per 3 points of skill over 12. These defenses are *instead of* and not *in addition to* the normal complement of parries and blocks. For example, a mage with Karate-21 and Iron Arm-21 gets 5 parries from Karate and 4 from Iron Arm; he can use up to 5 total parries including blocking spells, but only throw up to 4 Iron Arms (the limit of his Iron Arm spell level) among those 5 defenses. This will allow mages to block furious numbers of attacks very easily (in fact, automatically if the spell succeeds), and the GM should consider *carefully* before allowing it. It works best in a campaign where PCs will be fighting large numbers of spear-fodder opponents, as using these spells will make penetrating defenses even harder. Blocking spells ignore Feints, Ripostes, penalties to defend against Spinning Punches and Spin Kicks, etc. and make the defense penalties for maneuvers like Back Strike, Lunge and Fleche easier to deal with.

Extended Criticals

Another option recommended for a Magical Crucible game is the Extended Critical rule from p. MA59 and p. CII73. This rule should be extended to magic as well, allowing more occurrences of automatic victory over resistance and more spells cast without cost. If this is done, a GM should only give "special bonuses" to critical successes if the roll is a 3 or 4. Criticals of a 5+ should make the spell free (and bypass resistance normally if a Resisted spell).

For the Wu-wu-wuxia level of power, especially when PCs are fighting lots of spear-fodder (not common in the Crucible, but it could happen), another option is to ignore the Rule of 16. Powerful stylists should be able to casually defeat the Will of spear-fodder with their resisted spells; to make up for it most stylists should be a lot of points in Will and Mental Strength. This fits the magical wuxia movie style well -- the final battle is always a contest of will between good and evil . . . but only after hundreds of lesser foes have been mown down by the powers of the heroes or villains or both. To simulate this, anyone without Magery (any level), Mental Strength, Weapon Master (any level) or Trained By A Master should be exempt from the Rule of 16, making nearly automatic victory over resistance more likely. Combined with the Extended Criticals option, this allows high-skill fighters to truly dominate when facing lesser-skilled opponents.

Your Chi is No Good!

One possible assumption for a magic-as-wuxia powers game is that Magic will replace Chi; instead of using Invisibility Art, Pressure Secrets, and Blinding Touch you will use Invisibility, Deathtouch, and Strike Blind. Chi powers do not exist, since they are simulated with spells instead. But what if both Cinematic Skills using Chi and Wuxia Magic coexist? If Chi powers have been completely replaced, no further decisions need to be made. But if both coexist (and the Crucible is the place for that to occur if anyplace is) you need to decide how they interact.

The distinction between Mana and Chi should be decided by the GM. Are they facets of the same universal source of power, each tapped differently by the stylists? Or are they opposed but linked forces, with Mana as the Yang and Chi as the Yin? Or are they diametrically opposed powers, with each side warring over the superior of their special powers?

If they are facets of the same power, flavor demands minor changes. First, most stylists will use both Cinematic Skills and Magic. Recover Strength becomes Recover Chi; only the same changes.

If they are opposed but linked, stylists who get out of balance in their skill levels may be regarded warily by fellow

stylists. Those too dependent on mana may be perceived as having too much Yang and those who learn both equally well may be perceived as being In Harmony and regarded well. That could be the basis of a positive Reputation, while an imbalance might be a matter of reputation or result in Ying-Yang Imbalance (p. CI100).

If the powers are opposed, fierce fighting between camps would likely occur -- the Young Master must know which is superior! The various Lodges will have chosen between Chi powers and Magic; if not prohibited by the GM it might just be prohibited by custom. In that case, stylists who choose to study both would have a powerful edge and a dangerous Secret. Keeping it hidden in the confines of the Crucible would be a truly Herculean task.

Regardless of how Chi and Mana are distinct, interaction of the powers should occur. The easiest way to do this is "effects based" interaction. Dispel Magic will not undo Blinding Touch, but Cure Blindness will. Instant Restoration might counter the effects of Hand of Death. See Invisible will detect stylists using Invisibility Art to move around undetected (or more prosaically, Keen Eyes and Alertness might help counter it as well). This type of interaction is compatible with all three ways of perceiving Chi and Mana -- if the powers are the same, the ways of manipulating them should affect one another. If they are opposed, it should be possible to challenge one force with another. If they are linked, it only reveals the true subtle interaction of the universe by the myriad of ways they play upon one another.

Advantages, Skills, and Styles

Magic Resistance is not recommended in this setting. The idea of "interference" from particularly resistant defenders causing wuxia powers to fail does not fit the genre very well. Mental Strength (p. CI142) is recommended instead; all Trained By A Master characters should be allowed to learn the skill even if it is not within their style. Strong Will is also a very good advantage for tough NPCs and PCs to have; it will both help to resist attacking spells and keep them standing after absorbing lots of damage.

Extra Fatigue and **Extra Fatigue (Magic Only)** (see *GURPS Myth*) are highly recommended for this style of game; wuxia fighters are defeated by superior foes, not from being too tired! **Extra Fatigue (One Spell Only)** is excellent for a "finishing move" spell, especially with a low recovery rate. As an alternative, see Special Abilities from "[Cinematic Points!](#)" for another way to handle powerful but rarely used attacks. Powerstones can be used, but do not especially fit the Crucible. Extra Fatigue is a much better fit.

For example, Arnise the Whirlwind is a Tae Kwon Do stylist who wants a "last ditch attack move" comprising of the Windstorm spell. He wants to affect an area 5 yards across with his whirling form; this is Area 3 and costs 12 points. He buys Extra Fatigue (Whirlwind) +10 for 10 points, which along with his Whirlwind-21 gives him the ability to cast this without tapping into any of his other fatigue reserves. Arnise can use this whenever he wants, and can create a Whirlwind even after his Extra Fatigue pool is expended, but at a great cost . . .

Trained By A Master

Trained By a Master is still a requirement for Cinematic Skills and Cinematic Maneuvers. Trained By A Master is also a requirement for multiple attacks, extended criticals, and all of the other rules described above. At the GM's option, it can substitute for Magery to allow Masters to learn only those spells their style teaches; treat the Trained By A Master stylist as having the equivalent of Magery at the appropriate level to learn any spells within the style. This is *only* for purposes of determining if the spell can be learned, no bonuses to spells or other benefits of Magery are accrued. To gain the benefits of both, a stylist should have both Magery and Trained By A Master.

Another alternative to Trained By A Master for learning spells is One-Style Magery.

One-Style Magery

Cost 10/6/6

Otherwise identical to Single College Magery, this form of Magery allows its possessor to learn and use spells within a

single martial arts style. It affects all primary, optional, and prerequisite spells for a single style, plus Recover Strength.

Style Familiarity

Cost of Style Familiarity is normal; however any style that exists both with and without magic counts as two styles when purchasing it. If the 25- point level is allowed, it should cover both Chi and Magic variations of any styles.

Weapon Master

Weapon Master is ideal for armed magical styles. Weapon Master should act identically to Trained By A Master for multiple attacks for armed styles. For these purposes, treat "Spell Throwing" as a weapon skill for multiple attacks, but *not* for the +1/5 skill damage bonus.

Esoteric/Cinematic Skills

All Cinematic Skills and Maneuvers from *GURPS Martial Arts* are available if Chi powers are being used. Also recommended are the skills Chi Treatment, Mountain Heart, and Ying/Yang Healing from *GURPS Compendium I*.

Example Styles

The styles below are named generically; this is intentional. They make excellent basis for similar styles; change the weapons slightly and mix up the maneuvers and give them entirely different names to get a good mix of wuxia styles. Naming the styles is as simple as rolling on the Crucible's Special Move naming chart. Example names are in parenthesis for each style.

Additional styles can be made by taking standard *GURPS Martial Arts* styles and adding spells to them. The styles from Martial Arts for Mages are easily adapted or modified -- Death Fist can have Stealth added as a primary skill and Invisibility Art added to Cinematic Skills to make it a ninja-like style, Flaming Sword fits right in especially with dual-wielded Flame Jets, and Stone Missile Fighting can be the basis for a good ranged style.

Flying Sword ("Heaven's Graceful Blade")

13 points/24 points

Flying Sword is a style of grace and beauty -- long leaps, acrobatic flips, and fast flying. Spinning Strike is not normally allowed for swords; here it represents the incredibly acrobatic flying and twisting sword maneuvers used in the style. These can be extremely effective, especially against lower-skilled opponents, but are less so against highly skilled foes. Against those foes stylists use Feints instead of Spinning Strikes. This style is extremely acrobatic and the vast majority of its techniques are executed while airborne.

Fighting While Seated is used to represent those masters who fight, in flight, while seated in the lotus position ("Flying Lotus Sword"). Because of the vulnerability of shieldless flying foes to missile attacks, Missile Shield is a common optional spell. Some stylists add a variety of throwing weapons to the style, propelled by Winged Knife. Paku and Shuriken are especially popular choices.

Variations of this style can use almost any martial arts weapons -- paired butterfly swords, spear, light horse cutters, knife-wheels, etc. Campaigns using The Sword (p. SW14) would find this an excellent style for those using that skill.

Primary Skills: Acrobatics, Fencing [2], Fencing Art [2], Jumping.

Secondary Skills: Fast Draw (Sword), Parry Missile Weapons.

Optional Skills: Calligraphy, Karate.

Maneuvers: Feint (Fencing), Spinning Strike (Sword).

Cinematic Skills: Flying Leap, Kiai, Mental Strength, Power Blow.
Cinematic Maneuvers: Enhanced Parry (Sword), Fighting While Seated.
Primary Spells: Flight (VH), Hawk Flight (VH) [2].
Optional Spells: Missile Shield, Winged Knife.
Prerequisites: Magery +2 plus Apportation, Levitation.

Leaping Fist ("Southern Jumping Monkey Kung-Fu")

15 points/20 points

This style emphasizes fast movements and long-reach strikes. Stylists move in leaps and bounds, often magically hasted. Walk on Air is used to allow the practitioner to "bounce" in mid-air, allowing multiple leaps without ever landing. The optional spell "Great Haste" is used for that "finishing move" flurry.

Unlike actual "flying" styles, this style depends on long leaps, air-walking and wall-walking to get around. A common variation of this style uses Hawk Flight instead of Flying Leap and Wallwalker ("Northern Flying Monkey Kung-Fu").

Primary Skills: Acrobatics, Karate, Karate Art, Jumping, Running.
Secondary Skills: Parry Missile Weapons.
Optional Skills: Judo, Spear, Broadsword.
Maneuvers: Axe Kick, Jump Kick, Sweep Kick.
Cinematic Skills: Flying Leap, Mental Strength, Power Blow.
Cinematic Maneuvers: Flying Jump Kick, Roll With Blow.
Primary Spells: Walk on Air, Haste, Wallwalker.
Optional Spells: Great Haste (VH), Cloud Vaulting (VH).
Prerequisites: Magery plus Apportation, Create Air, Purify Air, Shape Air.

Flaming Fist ("Fist of Agni")

17 points/24 points

This fearsome style uses flurries of punches, kicks, and fireballs interspersed to force a foe to submission. The style is explosive, and includes a lot of theatrical moves that are more show than substance. Opponents should be warned that this style is dangerous for all of its flashiness. Chi-powered Flaming Fist masters launch both Fireballs *and* punches and kicks at range using Flying Fists.

Some variants of this style use a variant version of Flaming Weapon that works only on the caster's fists and feet! For this sub-style add Flaming Weapon (Fists) to the Spells; remove Fireball and Spell Throwing Fireball. Style cost decreases by 1.

Primary Skills: Acrobatics, Karate, Karate Art, Spell Throwing (Fireball).
Secondary Skills: Fire-Eating.
Optional Skills: Hypnotism, Performance.
Maneuvers: Back Kick, Hook Kick, Jab, Spin Kick.
Cinematic Skills: Breaking Blow, Flying Fists, Meditation, Mental Strength, Power Blow.
Cinematic Maneuvers: Springing Attack, Roll with Blow.
Primary Spells: Fireball [2], Create Fire, Resist Fire.
Optional Spells: Flaming Armor, Burning Touch.
Prerequisites: Magery plus Ignite Fire, Extinguish Fire, Heat, Cold, Shape Fire.

Transforming Fist ("Claw of the Tiger")

16 points/37 points

Animal styles of Kung-Fu are popular, but some styles transcend mere aping of animal styles and transform the stylist

into that animal. The style below is for the very popular tiger style. A style exists for each Shapeshifting spell -- for example "Bear Kung-Fu," "Bloodfist of the Eagle Kung-Fu," "Snake Fist," and so on -- and can exist for other Shapeshifting spells otherwise unknown. Imaginative stylists may develop have Shapeshifting (Giant Mantis), Shapeshifting (Monkey), Shapeshifting (Wombat) (for "Byzantine Shadow Wombat Kung-Fu") . . .

All maneuvers in this style are taught for both human form and animal form. In tiger form, the stylist will *bite* instead of grappling, and Shuto becomes a slipping bite designed to confuse aggressive defenders. Springing Attack is very powerful when executed by a triple-strength stylist in tiger form. Tiger stylists tend to go for the neck or head with their attacks.

Primary Skills: Acrobatics, Jumping, Karate, Wrestling.

Secondary Skills: Animal Handling, Intimidation.

Optional Skills: Naturalist, Survival (Jungle).

Maneuvers: Head Lock, Hit Location (Karate), Neck Snap, Shuto.

Cinematic Skills: Blind Fighting, Flying Leap, Mental Strength, Power Blow.

Cinematic Maneuvers: Enhanced Dodge, Springing Attack, Roll with Blow.

Primary Spells: Shapeshifting (Tiger) [2].

Optional Spells: Beast Soother, Beast Speech, Master.

Prerequisites: Magery plus six spells of any kind. Animal spells are very popular prerequisites for this style.

* * *

Special thanks goes to Chad Underkoffler for his inspiration and encouraging me to use The Crucible, and Adam Solis, who came up with the idea of "One Style Magery" on the Pyramid Message Boards and graciously permitted me to use it here.

Magic in the Crucible

for *GURPS*

by Peter V. Dell'Orto

This article is a supplement for both ["Martial Arts Styles for Mages"](#) and ["Campaign in a Box: Kung-Fu Crucible."](#) While the previous article focused on fully integrating martial arts styles with magic, it also seemed obvious that magic could simulate the really powerful characters and moves in wuxia films and in video games. This article can be used to enhance a current Crucible game, or to start a whole new campaign in a more magical Crucible.

Why the Crucible?

The Crucible is an ideal setting for magic-based martial arts styles. Console and Arcade video games always have a few fireball-tossing, shapeshifting, arm-extending voodoo Shinto snake priests running around. Finishing moves are filled with not just wuxia-style jumps and leaps, but raging flames and thunderous cracks of lightning from the heavens. Where do all of these fighters perfect their style, brave enough to face a martial artist whose blows will scorch the flesh or fry their mind? Why, the Crucible, of course. Where else?

The Setting: Always Magic, or Adding Magic?

The first question to be answered is, did the Crucible always have magic?

If you are starting a new campaign based in the Crucible, it is easy to add magic-based martial arts to the setting; follow the advice in this article and ["Kung-Fu Crucible"](#) and decide on the power and mana levels. The heroes do not necessarily have to be aware of such magical powers; perhaps they come from a more austere setting, only to be whisked to the Crucible to test their mettle against Flying Dragonjutsu stylists that really fly, and Tiger Kung-Fu stylists that fight in tiger form. This can make an excellent campaign nova for a campaign -- see ["Going Nova: Big Newness in Your Campaign"](#) by Ken Hite and ["Getting A New Writer"](#) by Brian Rogers.

It also makes a good crossover setting for Supers-style martial artists. They are already used to dealing with wizards, alien invasions, bizarre plots twists; the Magical Crucible is a good place to visit even if they do not stay. This "just visiting" style can be a good change of pace, and can be used instead of the usual Not Very Deadly Deathtrap routine if a martial-arts super is captured. "You wake up in a small cottage . . ."

If you are already running a game in the Crucible, it may seem problematic to introduce such a decidedly overt change into the setting by adding magic. However, remember *The Prisoner*, one of influences behind the standard Crucible setting. In *The Prisoner*, Number Six encountered elements that seemingly would have been hard to miss, but were introduced suddenly (and disappeared just as suddenly) without comment from the rest of the villagers. One day the Crucible can be lacking magic entirely, the next day it could have magic as it was always there . . . and disappear the next. Not all players will react well to such a new introduction (even Number Six had his own issues with this kind of event at times). A smoother transition is possible if you are already playing at the Wu-Wu-Wuxia or Chambara levels: A new "dim mak" practitioner shows up, but his attacks more closely resemble Deathtouch than Pressure Secrets. Later, a showy stylist using fire as part of his warm-up act can spit a few flames or toss a few "fireballs" in his fights. Are they novelties or has the Young Master found some new place to bring in stylists from?

The Rules

Now that you have decided to put magic in the Crucible, how is it implemented? The critical decision to make is the

Austerity level of the game. This is turn will determine the Mana Level of the Crucible.

The Crucible works well at multiple Austerity levels, but magic-based wuxia powers work best at low levels of Austerity. The Crucible benefits the most from magic at the "Chambara" and "Wu-wu-wuxia" level of Austerity. It can work at Chi level as well, but works best when used in a campaign that centers on characters using high-powered, physics-defying powers. In a Chi Austerity game, magic may be completely overpowered by the martial arts. The default assumption is that The Crucible is at High Mana. A dial of mana levels can be used to vary this assumption to make very different campaigns.

Low Mana is not recommended; it defeats the purpose of adding magic to the Crucible. Magic added with Low Mana will be very weak, cost a large amount of points, and be relegated to secondary status. This is possible, but it does not fit the "theme" of the Crucible. If the masters wish to test the power of magic-using stylists, they would not hamper them so . . .

Chi: Normal Mana: Magical stylists can use spells normally, but must be naturally skilled and train hard to be effective. This level best matches the "normal" power level of fantasy magic -- spells will enhance, but not replace, martial prowess. Because of this, you are likely to end up with specialist mages occurring in order to maximize their ability to use their power against martial artists.

Chambara: High Mana: Anyone can learn a few mana-manipulating tricks; with the "Master of One Style" option all martial arts may know spells appropriate to their style. At this level integrated magic/martial arts styles utilizing fairly powerful magics really shine. Most fighters are capable of video-game like feats -- throwing fireballs, elemental attacks, and even flight.

Wu-Wu-Wuxia: Very High Mana: Magic flies thick and fast; this is the arcade game or epic wuxia level. Magical powers are used regularly in combat with almost no regard to cost, but the penalties for the slightest mistake (failure is a critical failure, critical failure is disastrous) can be devastating to the stylist. Any fighter without significant magical and or chi powers is reduced to spear-fodder status by those that have them.

Very High Mana is best suited for games simulating extremely powerful wuxia fighters. Since all fatigue comes back at the end of the character's turn, the only limiting factors on wuxia fighters will be the number of spells "on" and the maximum amount of mana they can expend at once. Spell-based attacks will fly thick and fast; attacks not backed up by magic will be secondary. Critical Failures are also best handled by GM decision rather than the chart on p. M6. Few failed "magical" strikes in wuxia films result in summoned demons or casting on the wrong target. Spectacular failures of powers can still occur however, and Critical Failure rolls are the best way of simulating this occasion failure of the Flying Heaven Lightning Strike to do what it is supposed to . . .

Take That! And That! And Some of These!

A staple of high-powered wuxia combat are attackers throwing a bewildering amount of attacks, especially when face with numbers of spear fodder. This is no different with magic-using wuxia fighters. At the same time, the emphasis needs to be on martial arts, not on standard fantasy wizards. Therefore spells need to be cast faster, but limits need to exist to discourage wizards who eschew martial arts to simply toss huge Area spells around.

No spells can be cast without gestures -- in fact, most spells require them. Kiais, shouted battle cries, and frequent announcements of the maneuver you are using are de rigeur for some campaigns. Regardless of skill level, no spells will be able to be cast with less than "full" gestures -- spoken words and hand gestures, or at least extensive hand gestures (for your vow-of-silence monk types).

Multiple attacks are calculated normally for Magic Jet, Magic Breath, and Spell Throwing, depending on the method chosen: 1 for 8 points of skill, 1 for 3 points of skill over 12, etc. This will bring these skills in line with other Trained By A Master martial artists.

Especially at the lower Austerity levels, it makes sense to use a variant of the "Reduced Concentration for Cinematic

Skills" sidebar rule (p. MA61). Allow Trained By A Master mages to spend attacks for seconds of concentration to throw spells; this will dramatically increase the effective speed of mages. Mages are still be only able to cast one spell (plus a Blocking spell, see below) per turn, with some exceptions:

Missile spells: Unlimited missile spells are allowed, up to the normal limits of concentration and number of attacks. *Example:* A mage with Trained By A Master, Fireball-20 and Spell Throwing (Fireball)-21 would have four attacks. He could throw four 1-die Fireballs per turn, two 2-die (spending 1 attack per extra second needed to generate the fireballs), or a 3-die fireball and a 1-die fireball (2 attacks per extra second for the 3-die, 1 attack for the 1-die). All of these attacks will be unaimed, but with skill 21 accurate attacks should not be a problem.

Blocking Spells: One option is to allow extra blocking spells, at 1 extra Blocking spell per 3 points of skill over 12. These defenses are *instead of* and not *in addition to* the normal complement of parries and blocks. For example, a mage with Karate-21 and Iron Arm-21 gets 5 parries from Karate and 4 from Iron Arm; he can use up to 5 total parries including blocking spells, but only throw up to 4 Iron Arms (the limit of his Iron Arm spell level) among those 5 defenses. This will allow mages to block furious numbers of attacks very easily (in fact, automatically if the spell succeeds), and the GM should consider *carefully* before allowing it. It works best in a campaign where PCs will be fighting large numbers of spear-fodder opponents, as using these spells will make penetrating defenses even harder. Blocking spells ignore Feints, Ripostes, penalties to defend against Spinning Punches and Spin Kicks, etc. and make the defense penalties for maneuvers like Back Strike, Lunge and Fleche easier to deal with.

Extended Criticals

Another option recommended for a Magical Crucible game is the Extended Critical rule from p. MA59 and p. CII73. This rule should be extended to magic as well, allowing more occurrences of automatic victory over resistance and more spells cast without cost. If this is done, a GM should only give "special bonuses" to critical successes if the roll is a 3 or 4. Criticals of a 5+ should make the spell free (and bypass resistance normally if a Resisted spell).

For the Wu-wu-wuxia level of power, especially when PCs are fighting lots of spear-fodder (not common in the Crucible, but it could happen), another option is to ignore the Rule of 16. Powerful stylists should be able to casually defeat the Will of spear-fodder with their resisted spells; to make up for it most stylists should be a lot of points in Will and Mental Strength. This fits the magical wuxia movie style well -- the final battle is always a contest of will between good and evil . . . but only after hundreds of lesser foes have been mown down by the powers of the heroes or villains or both. To simulate this, anyone without Magery (any level), Mental Strength, Weapon Master (any level) or Trained By A Master should be exempt from the Rule of 16, making nearly automatic victory over resistance more likely. Combined with the Extended Criticals option, this allows high-skill fighters to truly dominate when facing lesser-skilled opponents.

Your Chi is No Good!

One possible assumption for a magic-as-wuxia powers game is that Magic will replace Chi; instead of using Invisibility Art, Pressure Secrets, and Blinding Touch you will use Invisibility, Deathtouch, and Strike Blind. Chi powers do not exist, since they are simulated with spells instead. But what if both Cinematic Skills using Chi and Wuxia Magic coexist? If Chi powers have been completely replaced, no further decisions need to be made. But if both coexist (and the Crucible is the place for that to occur if anyplace is) you need to decide how they interact.

The distinction between Mana and Chi should be decided by the GM. Are they facets of the same universal source of power, each tapped differently by the stylists? Or are they opposed but linked forces, with Mana as the Yang and Chi as the Yin? Or are they diametrically opposed powers, with each side warring over the superiority of their special powers?

If they are facets of the same power, flavor demands minor changes. First, most stylists will use both Cinematic Skills and Magic. Recover Strength becomes Recover Chi; only the name changes.

If they are opposed but linked, stylists who get out of balance in their skill levels may be regarded warily by fellow

stylists. Those too dependent on mana may be perceived as having too much Yang and those who learn both equally well may be perceived as being In Harmony and regarded well. That could be the basis of a positive Reputation, while an imbalance might be a matter of reputation or result in Ying-Yang Imbalance (p. CI100).

If the powers are opposed, fierce fighting between camps would likely occur -- the Young Master must know which is superior! The various Lodges will have chosen between Chi powers and Magic; if not prohibited by the GM it might just be prohibited by custom. In that case, stylists who choose to study both would have a powerful edge and a dangerous Secret. Keeping it hidden in the confines of the Crucible would be a truly Herculean task.

Regardless of how Chi and Mana are distinct, interaction of the powers should occur. The easiest way to do this is "effects based" interaction. Dispel Magic will not undo Blinding Touch, but Cure Blindness will. Instant Restoration might counter the effects of Hand of Death. See Invisible will detect stylists using Invisibility Art to move around undetected (or more prosaically, Keen Eyes and Alertness might help counter it as well). This type of interaction is compatible with all three ways of perceiving Chi and Mana -- if the powers are the same, the ways of manipulating them should affect one another. If they are opposed, it should be possible to challenge one force with another. If they are linked, it only reveals the true subtle interaction of the universe by the myriad of ways they play upon one another.

Advantages, Skills, and Styles

Magic Resistance is not recommended in this setting. The idea of "interference" from particularly resistant defenders causing wuxia powers to fail does not fit the genre very well. Mental Strength (p. CI142) is recommended instead; all Trained By A Master characters should be allowed to learn the skill even if it is not within their style. Strong Will is also a very good advantage for tough NPCs and PCs to have; it will both help to resist attacking spells and keep them standing after absorbing lots of damage.

Extra Fatigue and **Extra Fatigue (Magic Only)** (see *GURPS Myth*) are highly recommended for this style of game; wuxia fighters are defeated by superior foes, not from being too tired! **Extra Fatigue (One Spell Only)** is excellent for a "finishing move" spell, especially with a low recovery rate. As an alternative, see Special Abilities from "[Cinematic Points!](#)" for another way to handle powerful but rarely used attacks. Powerstones can be used, but do not especially fit the Crucible. Extra Fatigue is a much better fit.

For example, Arnise the Whirlwind is a Tae Kwon Do stylist who wants a "last ditch attack move" comprising of the Windstorm spell. He wants to affect an area 5 yards across with his whirling form; this is Area 3 and costs 12 points. He buys Extra Fatigue (Whirlwind) +10 for 10 points, which along with his Whirlwind-21 gives him the ability to cast this without tapping into any of his other fatigue reserves. Arnise can use this whenever he wants, and can create a Whirlwind even after his Extra Fatigue pool is expended, but at a great cost . . .

Trained By A Master

Trained By a Master is still a requirement for Cinematic Skills and Cinematic Maneuvers. Trained By A Master is also a requirement for multiple attacks, extended criticals, and all of the other rules described above. At the GM's option, it can substitute for Magery to allow Masters to learn only those spells their style teaches; treat the Trained By A Master stylist as having the equivalent of Magery at the appropriate level to learn any spells within the style. This is *only* for purposes of determining if the spell can be learned, no bonuses to spells or other benefits of Magery are accrued. To gain the benefits of both, a stylist should have both Magery and Trained By A Master.

Another alternative to Trained By A Master for learning spells is One-Style Magery.

One-Style Magery

Cost 10/6/6

Otherwise identical to Single College Magery, this form of Magery allows its possessor to learn and use spells within a

single martial arts style. It affects all primary, optional, and prerequisite spells for a single style, plus Recover Strength.

Style Familiarity

Cost of Style Familiarity is normal; however any style that exists both with and without magic counts as two styles when purchasing it. If the 25- point level is allowed, it should cover both Chi and Magic variations of any styles.

Weapon Master

Weapon Master is ideal for armed magical styles. Weapon Master should act identically to Trained By A Master for multiple attacks for armed styles. For these purposes, treat "Spell Throwing" as a weapon skill for multiple attacks, but *not* for the +1/5 skill damage bonus.

Esoteric/Cinematic Skills

All Cinematic Skills and Maneuvers from *GURPS Martial Arts* are available if Chi powers are being used. Also recommended are the skills Chi Treatment, Mountain Heart, and Ying/Yang Healing from *GURPS Compendium I*.

Example Styles

The styles below are named generically; this is intentional. They make excellent basis for similar styles; change the weapons slightly and mix up the maneuvers and give them entirely different names to get a good mix of wuxia styles. Naming the styles is as simple as rolling on the Crucible's Special Move naming chart. Example names are in parenthesis for each style.

Additional styles can be made by taking standard *GURPS Martial Arts* styles and adding spells to them. The styles from Martial Arts for Mages are easily adapted or modified -- Death Fist can have Stealth added as a primary skill and Invisibility Art added to Cinematic Skills to make it a ninja-like style, Flaming Sword fits right in especially with dual-wielded Flame Jets, and Stone Missile Fighting can be the basis for a good ranged style.

Flying Sword ("Heaven's Graceful Blade")

13 points/24 points

Flying Sword is a style of grace and beauty -- long leaps, acrobatic flips, and fast flying. Spinning Strike is not normally allowed for swords; here it represents the incredibly acrobatic flying and twisting sword maneuvers used in the style. These can be extremely effective, especially against lower-skilled opponents, but are less so against highly skilled foes. Against those foes stylists use Feints instead of Spinning Strikes. This style is extremely acrobatic and the vast majority of its techniques are executed while airborne.

Fighting While Seated is used to represent those masters who fight, in flight, while seated in the lotus position ("Flying Lotus Sword"). Because of the vulnerability of shieldless flying foes to missile attacks, Missile Shield is a common optional spell. Some stylists add a variety of throwing weapons to the style, propelled by Winged Knife. Paku and Shuriken are especially popular choices.

Variations of this style can use almost any martial arts weapons -- paired butterfly swords, spear, light horse cutters, knife-wheels, etc. Campaigns using The Sword (p. SW14) would find this an excellent style for those using that skill.

Primary Skills: Acrobatics, Fencing [2], Fencing Art [2], Jumping.

Secondary Skills: Fast Draw (Sword), Parry Missile Weapons.

Optional Skills: Calligraphy, Karate.

Maneuvers: Feint (Fencing), Spinning Strike (Sword).

Cinematic Skills: Flying Leap, Kiai, Mental Strength, Power Blow.
Cinematic Maneuvers: Enhanced Parry (Sword), Fighting While Seated.
Primary Spells: Flight (VH), Hawk Flight (VH) [2].
Optional Spells: Missile Shield, Winged Knife.
Prerequisites: Magery +2 plus Apportation, Levitation.

Leaping Fist ("Southern Jumping Monkey Kung-Fu")

15 points/20 points

This style emphasizes fast movements and long-reach strikes. Stylists move in leaps and bounds, often magically hasted. Walk on Air is used to allow the practitioner to "bounce" in mid-air, allowing multiple leaps without ever landing. The optional spell "Great Haste" is used for that "finishing move" flurry.

Unlike actual "flying" styles, this style depends on long leaps, air-walking and wall-walking to get around. A common variation of this style uses Hawk Flight instead of Flying Leap and Wallwalker ("Northern Flying Monkey Kung-Fu").

Primary Skills: Acrobatics, Karate, Karate Art, Jumping, Running.
Secondary Skills: Parry Missile Weapons.
Optional Skills: Judo, Spear, Broadsword.
Maneuvers: Axe Kick, Jump Kick, Sweep Kick.
Cinematic Skills: Flying Leap, Mental Strength, Power Blow.
Cinematic Maneuvers: Flying Jump Kick, Roll With Blow.
Primary Spells: Walk on Air, Haste, Wallwalker.
Optional Spells: Great Haste (VH), Cloud Vaulting (VH).
Prerequisites: Magery plus Apportation, Create Air, Purify Air, Shape Air.

Flaming Fist ("Fist of Agni")

17 points/24 points

This fearsome style uses flurries of punches, kicks, and fireballs interspersed to force a foe to submission. The style is explosive, and includes a lot of theatrical moves that are more show than substance. Opponents should be warned that this style is dangerous for all of its flashiness. Chi-powered Flaming Fist masters launch both Fireballs *and* punches and kicks at range using Flying Fists.

Some variants of this style use a variant version of Flaming Weapon that works only on the caster's fists and feet! For this sub-style add Flaming Weapon (Fists) to the Spells; remove Fireball and Spell Throwing Fireball. Style cost decreases by 1.

Primary Skills: Acrobatics, Karate, Karate Art, Spell Throwing (Fireball).
Secondary Skills: Fire-Eating.
Optional Skills: Hypnotism, Performance.
Maneuvers: Back Kick, Hook Kick, Jab, Spin Kick.
Cinematic Skills: Breaking Blow, Flying Fists, Meditation, Mental Strength, Power Blow.
Cinematic Maneuvers: Springing Attack, Roll with Blow.
Primary Spells: Fireball [2], Create Fire, Resist Fire.
Optional Spells: Flaming Armor, Burning Touch.
Prerequisites: Magery plus Ignite Fire, Extinguish Fire, Heat, Cold, Shape Fire.

Transforming Fist ("Claw of the Tiger")

16 points/37 points

Animal styles of Kung-Fu are popular, but some styles transcend mere aping of animal styles and transform the stylist

into that animal. The style below is for the very popular tiger style. A style exists for each Shapeshifting spell -- for example "Bear Kung-Fu," "Bloodfist of the Eagle Kung-Fu," "Snake Fist," and so on -- and can exist for other Shapeshifting spells otherwise unknown. Imaginative stylists may develop have Shapeshifting (Giant Mantis), Shapeshifting (Monkey), Shapeshifting (Wombat) (for "Byzantine Shadow Wombat Kung-Fu") . . .

All maneuvers in this style are taught for both human form and animal form. In tiger form, the stylist will *bite* instead of grappling, and Shuto becomes a slipping bite designed to confuse aggressive defenders. Springing Attack is very powerful when executed by a triple-strength stylist in tiger form. Tiger stylists tend to go for the neck or head with their attacks.

Primary Skills: Acrobatics, Jumping, Karate, Wrestling.

Secondary Skills: Animal Handling, Intimidation.

Optional Skills: Naturalist, Survival (Jungle).

Maneuvers: Head Lock, Hit Location (Karate), Neck Snap, Shuto.

Cinematic Skills: Blind Fighting, Flying Leap, Mental Strength, Power Blow.

Cinematic Maneuvers: Enhanced Dodge, Springing Attack, Roll with Blow.

Primary Spells: Shapeshifting (Tiger) [2].

Optional Spells: Beast Soother, Beast Speech, Master.

Prerequisites: Magery plus six spells of any kind. Animal spells are very popular prerequisites for this style.

* * *

Special thanks goes to Chad Underkoffler for his inspiration and encouraging me to use The Crucible, and Adam Solis, who came up with the idea of "One Style Magery" on the Pyramid Message Boards and graciously permitted me to use it here.

Motes From The Underground: New England's Vampire Spirits

*"Florella's body was all gone to dust,
Though 'twarn't much more'n a year she'd be'n buried
But her heart was as fresh as a livin' person's,
Father said it glittered like a garnet when they took th' lid off th' coffin.
It was so 'live, it seemed to beat almost.
Father said a light come from it so strong it made shadows
Much heavier than th' lantern shadows an' runnin' in a diff'rent direction.
Oh, they burnt it; they al'ays do in such cases,
Nobody's safe till it's burnt."
-- Amy Lowell, "A Dracula of the Hills"*

What lies in the stony fields of New England, in graves marked and unmarked? Why would good, sober Yankees, upstanding Christians all, dig up the bodies of their loved ones and burn their hearts? We can only find the answers in hints and legends; propriety forbids that we should know the names of all the families cursed by the undead. Let's look in the light of the glittering hearts, and follow the shadows to the dusty tracks of New England's vampires. Keep fire close to hand, as we always do in such cases.

"EXHUMED THE BODIES.

Testing of a Horrible Superstition in the Town of Exeter.

BODIES OF DEAD RELATIVES TAKEN FROM THEIR GRAVES.

They Had All Died of Consumption, and the Belief Was That Live Flesh and Blood Would Be Found That Fed Upon the Bodies of the Living."

-- headline of the *Providence Journal*, March 19, 1892

The Mercy Brown case, in Exeter, Rhode Island, is typical of the New England vampire spirit infestation that ran for about a century in every state of that region. In December 1883, Mary Eliza Brown of Exeter died of "consumption" (a contemporary term for tuberculosis), leaving her husband George and four children. The next year, a daughter, Mary Olive, died of consumption, and in 1889 and then 1891 both Edwin (the only son) and Mercy Lena became infected. Mercy died in 1892 (of the "galloping" variety of consumption) while Edwin was in Colorado taking a rest cure; he returned home that year, having seen no improvement in his condition. George Brown and the other men of Exeter, in a fog of loss and fear, decided to dig up Mercy's grave to discover whether some unwholesome spirit lurked within her corpse. On March 17, 1892, they did so, and found liquid blood in Mercy's heart. They burned it to ashes, and may have given the ashes to Edwin to drink. This gruesome medicine could not reverse his decline; he died shortly thereafter.

Reports of cases showing the same etiology -- a mysterious illness (usually tuberculosis) in the family, an exhumed corpse, the discovery of blood in the heart, and its ritual burning -- go back at least a century in New England, to a vampire exorcism in Manchester, Vermont in 1793. Vermont suffered further outbreaks in the Spaulding family of Dummerston in 1794 or 1798, and the Ransom and Corwin families of Woodstock in 1807 and 1830. Exeter had a previous case of vampiric tuberculosis around 1799, in the household of Stukeley Tillinghast, and again in 1874 in the Rose family. One case, reported from Old Plymouth, Massachusetts, is said to have happened in 1810; if so, it would be the only case in the Puritan heartland of the region (and Old Plymouth is very close to the border with heretical, witch-loving Rhode Island). Two vampires, Lemuel and Elisha Ray, were exhumed and their hearts burnt in Jewett City, Connecticut in 1854. Other Connecticut cases were anonymous, and at least one case would still be completely unknown if the vampire's skeleton, complete with tuberculosis scarring and bones ritually re-arranged in a skull-and-crossbones fashion, hadn't popped up in a gravel pit near Jewett City in 1990. There is only one known piece of documentary evidence for the practice, besides the occasional lurid newspaper article (usually written in a tone of shocked horror by a journalist from a larger city). In the town records of Cumberland, Rhode Island, the council

approved the exhumation of Abigail Staples by her father, "In order to Try an Experiment" on his (consumptive?) wife.

"[D]escriptions of New England's vampires do not correspond to the Dracula image . . . Can we, with justification, label as 'vampires' the New Englanders whose bodies were exhumed and deemed to be unnatural? Certainly not, if we use the standard vampire model, the 'classic vampire' of our imaginations . . . But, what if we begin with a blank slate and ask, again, what is a vampire?"

-- Michael E. Bell, *Food for the Dead*

All of the above information is courtesy of the indefatigable folklorist Michael E. Bell, whose *Food for the Dead* assembles every known case of New England's vampire spirits, and adds a few more that Bell himself helped uncover. According to Bell, the New England cases differ from the received Eastern European vampire tradition, most notably in the absence of any actual biting or blood sucking by the dead, and the failure of the dead to leave their coffins. Both of these features appear prominently in the Hungarian and Slavic vampire legends gathered in the 1730s and 1740s by Dom Augustin Calmet, the father of modern vampirology, but show up in none of the New England stories. Instead, the New Englanders saw the vampire as a spirit that lives in the dead corpse, invisibly draining the blood of tubercular victims into the corpse's heart. There are, however, Romanian legends of vampires who leave the grave in the form of insects, or drifting motes of dust, or even tiny balls of light -- and some of the New England stories do mention anomalous lights such as "corpse lights" or "ghost lights" over the graves of the various vampires. More may be going on here, and in Eastern Europe, than Dom Calmet (or Bram Stoker) took the time to uncover.

"Voice hoarse, neck slightly bent, tender not flexible, somewhat extended; fingers slender but joints thick; of the bones alone the figure remains, for the fleshy parts are wasted; the nails of the fingers crooked . . . Nose sharp, slender; cheeks prominent and red; eyes hollow, brilliant and glittering; swollen, pale, or livid in the countenance; the slender parts of the jaws rest upon the teeth, as if smiling; otherwise of a cadaverous aspect . . . the whole shoulder blades apparent like wings . . ."

-- Aretaeus of Cappadocia, describing a tuberculosis sufferer

Bell believes that the difference in New England's cases is tuberculosis, which as Aretaeus' description above indicates, could well be the vampire bacillus. Tuberculosis sufferers resemble the stereotypical vampire, at once pallid and florid, existing in a kind of walking living death. A 1799 medical text about consumptives indicates that a consumptive's "emaciated figure strikes one with terror" and that among other nosferatu type features such as sunken, glittering eyes are long fingernails, "bending over the ends of the fingers" in a horrible, clawlike fashion. Vampires have often been decoded as embodiments of disease -- Stoker's *Dracula* has been read as Victorian syphilis, for example; the rat-accompanied nosferatu of Wallachia as the bubonic plague and the fear of unburied bodies. With the bent posture, foul breath, and (perhaps most tellingly) bright foam of arterial blood on the lips of its sufferers, tuberculosis -- "consumption," in the interesting term of the day -- is more vampiric still. Bell interestingly notes that the New England vampire panic almost exactly matches the era of endemic tuberculosis in New England, as industrialization and urbanization created the unsanitary, crowded conditions in American cities where the bacilli could breed. Koch isolated the tuberculosis bacillus only a decade before Mercy Brown's heart was burnt to save her family. "The vampire," Bell says, "is consumption in a human form, embodying an evil that slowly and secretly drains the life from its victims."

"Sitting down, I tried to conjecture as nearly as sanity would let me just what had happened, and how I might end the horror, if indeed it had been real. Matter it seemed not to be, nor ether, nor anything else conceivable by mortal mind. What, then, but some exotic emanation; some vampirish vapour such as Exeter rustics tell of as lurking over certain church yards?"

-- H.P. Lovecraft, "The Shunned House"

But before we let the comforting light of the 20th century bacteriology and anthropology wash over the graves holding New England's vampires, let's follow the folkloric trail down the shadows, especially those "runnin' in a diff'rent direction," as Amy Lowell put it in the poem we opened with. Michael Bell is not the first Rhode Islander of great erudition and persistence to dig up these stories; [H.P. Lovecraft](#) shows clear knowledge not just of the Mercy Brown case, but of the (considerably more obscure) Tillinghast case as well. He alludes to both of them in "The Shunned

House," which involves a miasmatic spirit, a "vampirish vapour" that slowly kills the families living in the house at 135 Benefit House. Lovecraft includes the real (and really mysterious) deaths of the Harris family from a "wasting-away" condition in his tale, only slightly concealing the house's identity. He ties the deaths to a werewolf spirit that migrated to America with exiled French Huguenots (who actually settled in the Exeter area for a time). Lovecraft also tells the story in the first person, and mentions a fictional uncle whose personality, nonetheless, matches Lovecraft's real uncle Whipple Phillips, to a tee.

All this makes one suspect that perhaps more is going on than meets the eye; that perhaps Lovecraft stumbled not only on the tales of New England's vampires, but on the trail of such a thing. In another, clearly semi-autobiographical novel, *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, Lovecraft presents a malign presence in a graveyard, Joseph Curwen, who he explicitly describes as kin to the "Corwin" family -- who suffered their own spate of vampirism in 1830! In the novel, the Curwen/Corwin spirit is "a lean, lithe, [leaping monster](#) with burning eyes" (again the werewolf imagery comes to the fore) engaged in "revolting cases of vampirism" in the neighborhood, while Ward/Lovecraft suffers "continued anaemic decline and increasing pallor," later describing himself as "phthisical," which is yet another term for "consumptive" or "tubercular." (Lovecraft's health was never of the best, and his mother withdrew him from high school because of it.) More hints recur in "The Shunned House," in which Lovecraft seemingly pointlessly introduces his story by saying that [Edgar Allan Poe](#) walked past the house every day "during his unsuccessful wooing of the gifted poetess, Mrs. Whitman."

Poe, of course, was badly scarred by tuberculosis: his foster mother Fanny Allen died of it in 1829, as did his wife Virginia Clemm in 1847. Poe also wrote stories of desecrated bodies and vampiric emanations, most notably "Ligeia," in which the "will" of a woman transcends the grave and drains the energies of her successor. (Both Ligeia and her rival Rowena's disease sound very much like tuberculosis.) Perhaps Poe was not so "unknowing" as Lovecraft says. The "gifted poetess, Mrs. Whitman" may also have known what would be her fate; she wrote to Poe "had I youth and health and beauty I would live for you and die with you. Now were I to allow myself to love you, I could only enjoy a bright brief hour of rapture and die." Poe's equivocal response: he would willingly "go down with you into the night of the Grave." Perhaps Lovecraft knew full well what stalked Poe, and mentioned Poe and his courtship in "The Shunned House" as a word to "persons in possession of certain information." Information such as, perhaps, the exact circumstances of the death of Poe's mother Elizabeth -- who died of tuberculosis in 1811.

*"'Begone, foul dream!' he cried, gazing again
In the bride's face, where now no azure vein
Wander'd on fair-spaced temples; no soft bloom
Misted the cheek; no passion to illumine
The deep-recessed vision: -- all was blight;
Lamia, no longer fair, there sat a deadly white."
-- John Keats, "Lamia"*

The year before that, John Keats' mother also died of tuberculosis, as did his brother. Amy Lowell, the poetess of the New England vampire, was fascinated by Keats and collected many papers and letters associated with the poet. Keats seemed ambivalent about vampires; in both "Lamia" and "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," although the hero's health fails and he grows pale and bloodless, he is unable to throw off the vampiric influence that destroys him. In due course, Keats himself died of tuberculosis in Italy in 1821, causing Percy Bysshe Shelley to write, in *Adonais*, "The breath whose might I have invoked in song/Descends on me; my spirit's bark is driven,/Far from the shore" -- a year after Keats' consumptive breath descended upon him, Shelley was dead as well, drowned in a small boat, a bark "driven far from the shore" and named after an "airy spirit," Ariel. After his death, Byron burned Shelley's body, but the dubious Edward John Trelawny snatched his heart from the fire unburnt -- and Byron's daughter died of tuberculosis the following year, followed by Shelley's son Charles four years after that. Shelley had miraculously thrown off a previous tuberculosis infection diagnosed in 1815; he was in perfect health two years later. In between, he had been present at the Villa Deodati circle where the classical vampire first took literary form -- did he cut a deal with the entity, offering it a life in legend, and his heart as a host? Did that deal cost the lives of his children, two of whom died of "wasting diseases" in 1818 and 1819?

"He was at once a devil and a multitude, a charnel-house and a pageant. Lit by the mixed and uncertain beams, that

gelatinous face assumed a dozen -- a score -- a hundred -- aspects; grinning, as it sank to the ground on a body that melted like tallow, in the caricatured likeness of legions strange and yet not strange."

-- H.P. Lovecraft, "The Shunned House"

Perhaps Shelley romanced La Belle Dame Sans Merci at the unknown grave of the [Duchess of Malfi](#), the werewolf who vanished on her way from Ancona to Milan -- and might well have passed along Shelley's track south to Pisa. Is this why her brother would "steal forth to church-yards in the dead of night/And dig dead bodies up"? Were they looking for a vampire heart to eat, to make them immortal? Vampires, werewolves, and spirits all mingle in Istria in the 17th century, when some of the shapeshifting, astral-projecting [Benandanti](#) confessed to vampirism -- and where a vampire plague gripped the natives in the 1640s. From Istria, the Grand Tour takes us to Venice, and thence to England and to America; the vampire entities spread around the world, concealed in glowing hearts. Were they a hive mind built up by a critical mass of tuberculosis bacteria, or did the bacterium merely serve as an interface, drawing energy into a Lovecraftian hyperspace built up from words and nightmares? Tasting a cooked (unburnt) dragon heart (code for "inhuman heart") grants knowledge of the [Language of the Birds](#), insight into inhuman thought patterns -- and inhuman hungers.

We've already speculated that the Duchess somehow used John Webster to spread her miasmatic legend; perhaps Keats' Lamia and the entity Shelley called "Queen Mab" did the same. (Tim Powers mines similar territory in his terrific vampire novel *The Stress of Her Regard*, of course.) Stories of Shelley's unburnt heart recall the burned heart (or stolen heart) of Mary Kelly, last of [Jack the Ripper's](#) known victims. One of his other victims, Annie Chapman, was in the final stages of tuberculosis, which ran rampant in the East End along with the other poisonous gift of the Lamia, [gin](#). Could the Ripper have been trying to catch and kill a vampire, chasing it from victim to victim, desperately searching the organs for the one that "glittered like a garnet" and gave off light stronger than a lantern? Or was he a rival vampire? One of Scotland Yard's Ripper suspects, a "Doctor Merchant," died of tuberculosis in December of 1888, another possible Ripper, the mystical poet Francis Thompson, was suffering from tuberculosis while wandering the East End in his leather apron. Either way, going looking for vampires seems an excellent way to go mad or die coughing up your heart's blood. Let's leave the last word for Lovecraft, and wonder whether it contains an oblique warning: Some secrets of inner earth are not good for mankind, and this seemed to me one of them."

Pyramid Pick

Igor: The Mad Scientist's Lament

Published by [InteractivitieS Ink, Limited](#)

Designed by Mike Young

Illustrated by Alex Bradley

108 2½-inch cards, one Igor die, one rulesheet, & nine or more "completed" tokens; \$19.99

Whatever your field or profession, it is probably the case that you just cannot get the staff these days. And it is probably worse if you are a Mad Scientist bent on bringing some grand plan to fruition or building the very latest of one of many great inventions. But then again, who wants to work for a boss whose tolerance for failure extends about as far as your own for his sub-conference table incinerator? Well, Igor does not seem to mind. This lab assistant/janitor/dogsbody/lickspittle is a willing and diligent worker . . . until, that is, he gets out of earshot of his master's screamed orders. Then he seems to forget whatever it was he was sent out to get or do, and must face his master's exasperated screams of frustration upon his return.

This is the subject for *Igor: The Mad Scientist's Lament*, a card game for two to six players in which they endeavor to build their latest, greatest invention before their rivals can. All remain at the mercy of the bungled efforts of their inept assistant, Igor, who just seems unable to go out and get the parts that you need to build your device. The game consists of 108 2½-inch card deck, the Igor die, at least nine "completed" counters (used to mark a device that has been built), and an 8½ by 11½-inch double-sided rulesheet. All of which slips easily into a bright and breezy square that does a much better job than awkward little flat boxes that everyone seems to favor these days. The box is also marked with more warnings than any other, from the mundane to the scientifically amazing.

The deck consists of 21 Blueprint cards, 60 Part cards, and 27 cards of "megalomaniacal laughter," also known as the "Bwahahahahahahaha!" cards. The Blueprint cards show devices such as the Transmat, the Inspiration helmet, and the Robotic Igor. Each has a little comic illustration and a special ability, and is marked with the number of Part cards needed to complete it, plus the number of Victory Points scored for doing so. The Part cards -- ranging from the "Ten Pound Ball of Aluminum" and "Mode Shift Irregular" to a "Surfboard" and a set of "Hedge Trimmers" -- are much simpler in design, looking like crates stamped with a label. All marked with between one and four connecting devices -- blue plugs, green cogs, red wing nuts, and yellow nut and screw -- at their cardinal points. The "Bwahahahahahahaha!" cards each give a one-time advantage, such as preventing another "Bwahahahahahahaha!" card from working or stopping Igor from stealing a Part card in play. The instructions on each "Bwahahahahahahaha!" card are clear and make it obvious when it should be played. Once played, many let a Mad Scientist draw another card, while others will require instant replacement, as they are marked as not suitable for use in a two-Mad Scientist game. Finally, the Igor die is a sharp little cube, its faces marked in different colors upon which are drawn illustrations of Igor's actions. The six are explained in a chart on the rulesheet, but in black and white rather than color. This does make discerning the result of each face more difficult than it really needs to be. Nicely though, the chart also allows for an ordinary six-sided die to be used in its place.

A game of *Igor: The Mad Scientist's Lament* starts with each Mad Scientist receiving hand of seven cards, and the top five cards from the deck being turned over to form the *junkyard* or discard pile. A Mad Scientist's turn begins a special "Start of Turn/Machine Phase," in which the abilities of completed devices are activated. The abilities of other devices will be activated depending upon later events. The Mad Scientist then rolls the Igor die, which will give one of six results, unless he has a device or "Bwahahahahahahaha!" card that allows him a re-roll. They include stealing a Part from a device being assembled by another Mad Scientist or a card from their hand, drawing a card from either the

deck or the *junkyard*, the Mad Scientist being able to play two Part cards as their action, or to everyone's surprise, Igor gets it right, and a Mad Scientist can choose his assistant's action for that turn.

Following the result of the Igor die roll, a Mad Scientist can conduct a single action. He can play a Part, which must be done so that its connecting devices match, or they can play a Blueprint. A Mad Scientist can have only one Blueprint in play, but can it replace by sacrificing a Part card already in play. Alternatively, a Mad Scientist can draw a card from the deck. Once a number of Part cards equal to the number on a Blueprint have played, ranging from two to eight, the device is successfully constructed and will give an advantage to its builder for the rest of the game. For example, the eight-Part Time Warp Device lets a Mad Scientist take two turns in a row, the four-Part Power Drain will duplicate the ability of a different device from one turn to the next, and the six-Part Generic Parts reduces the number of Parts needed to construct subsequent Blueprints. Victory Points are also scored for each Blueprint completed. The first Mad Scientist to score ten Victory Points -- roughly three or four devices will win the game.

A game of *Igor: The Mad Scientist's Lament* goes something like this. Scream and shout at Igor and your fellow Mad Scientists until you can get a Blueprint into play. Scream and shout at Igor and your fellow Mad Scientists until you can get enough Parts installed. Likewise when the Parts get stolen. Then gloat gleefully once you have a device working. Do so some more until you get all of your devices built and you can take over the world. Then gloat gleefully because you have taken over the world. In between times, laugh maniacally when you advance your plans or thwart those of your rival Mad Scientists through the use of a "Bwahahahahahahaha!" card.

Which is all rather fun.

The game has a strong random element throughout, but this lessens as a game progresses, both through the use of "Bwahahahahahahaha!" cards and increasingly from the effects of Mad-Scientist-created devices. Essentially, build enough devices and you can counter some of Igor's stupidity. The game is playable, but not as enjoyable for just two Mad Scientists. With more Mad Scientists, the game can be sillier and less vindictive.

Although the rules are clearly and simply written, where they really shine is in the section on roleplaying. It should be obvious that getting into the character of the Mad Scientist -- cue a plethora of Dr. Evil, Dr. Frankenstein, Dr. Phibes, and Dr. Strangelove-style accents -- is half the fun of playing *Igor: The Mad Scientist's Lament*. The rules encourage the Mad Scientists to be as megalomaniacal as they can be around the dining table, to the point where they should ask the neighbors to storm the lab . . . er, house, with torches and pitchforks in hand. Well, almost.

Igor: The Mad Scientist's Lament is easy to learn and play. Its mechanics nicely simulate the frustrations of becoming a world domineering megalomaniac hampered only by the incompetence of a single minion. As a straight game it plays decently enough, but in the mode and the mind (well, not too much) of an evil genius, and this is fun all the way.

"Bwahahahahahahaha!"

--Matthew Pook

Poking Around the Universe Differently

Who are you?

Errr . . . in the game, I mean.

Most campaigns start with a premise, and PCs fit into that premise in one particular way. For example, in the standard dungeon crawl world, most heroes are assumed to be generic "adventurers," roaming from dungeon to dungeon, embarking on exciting tales of derring-do. Likewise, most Supers campaigns assume that the characters are those with powers far beyond those of mortal men. *Call of Cthulhu* games make the presumption that the PCs are investigators of some stripe, and so on.

Some campaigns take this to a fairly extreme example. For instance, most *Star Trek* games assume the heroes are members of the Federation. And the first edition *Dark Sun* campaign world for *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* assumed that everyone was . . . umm . . . gladiators.

But interesting stories and games can come out of challenging that base premise. For example, there's been a cottage industry lately of telling tales from odd points of view in established universes, such as reporters, cops, and everymen in superhero worlds. The *Shadowrun Companion* posits jobs for PCs *other* than corporate-invading shadowrunners, such as combat photographers. *Orkworld* (among others) explore fantasy tropes from the point of view of the normally faceless "evil" demihumans and monsters. The entire World of Darkness spawned out of the idea that, instead of playing the things that normally hunt monsters, what if you played the monsters *themselves*? And, showing that all ideas can come full circle, *My Life with Master* posits a game world where you play the servants of these monsters.

Established game worlds are interesting because they usually have a lot of depth and history. Paradoxically, picking a different tack from the presumed protagonists gives the players and GM a chance to explore this history, while poking around corners of the game world that may not be so perfectly illuminated.

So, for example, let's go for an extreme case. Since the trend lately has been to explore the less-powerful, seamier underside of game worlds, how 'bout we pick something a bit more outré? Let's say we're starting up a *Star Trek* miniseries, and we decide that the PCs are all going to be omnipotent beings. After all, they're about as rare as milkweed pollen in the *Star Trek* universe. And we've seen in some episodes that they have their own social structures, intrigues, and problems. But since they've only been touched upon briefly in the television series, the gaming group is free to innovate and make up their own details, all the while remaining firmly entrenched in the established universe. The GM decides that, in keeping with the canonical traditions, the PCs will probably be involved with one space vessel, providing various challenges and obstacles that will guide the crew's development. (Oh, sure, on the shows it seems like the starship crew is thwarting the omnipotent beings. That's what the beings *want* you to think. It's all mice and mazes.) As such, it is decided that the *USS Cheops* will be their experimental laboratory, and the GM fabricates the captain, crew, and history of that vessel.

If the GM and players are feeling really creative in this example, they may all take assumed roles as normal crewmen aboard the *Cheops* for their omnipotent beings to assume. After all, what better way to best observe the rats than to spend time directly in their cages? In this way the campaign can explore two little-seen sides of the *Star Trek* universe: the ultra-powerful beings *and* the normal day-to-day schlubs aboard a starship.

Of course, this is a fairly extreme example, and would require more work than other ideas. But there's still a lot of room in other game worlds. For example, while the default in most fantasy games is the horse-riding do-gooders, a perfectly wonderful campaign could come out of the courtly intrigues of, say, one fantasy noble house. A Supers campaign could center around normal guards at a metahuman imprisonment facility, making for *Oz* with capes. A *Call of Cthulhu* game might center around a group of former cultist friends who all achieve the same kind of "What am I *doing*?" epiphany, marking them on the run from their former colleagues, with normally inaccessible information but also a less-than-healthy mental state.

Some of these campaigns are doomed to being short (such as a *Bunnies and Burrows* game from the point of view of the farmers who can't understand these goldurn uppity rabbits in the field), while others could theoretically extend for quite some time (for example, a martial arts/anime game where the PCs are all the fairly mundane love interests of the mad-whack wuxia wire-fu good -- or bad -- guys).

As a final piece of advice, there is another fairly common sub-genre of these "alternate-point-of-view stories," where the alternative protagonists eventually *become* members of the traditional genre they splintered off from. For example, a story focusing on a group of super-villains might eventually have them become heroic, or the martial-art love interests might eventually gain their own martial arts and start having adventures themselves. While this is certainly possible, keep in mind that once a focus goes "mainstream," it's very difficult -- if not impossible -- to go back. And if there's enough interest to try the mainstream roles the game world usually encourages, it might be better to start up another series (or miniseries) in that world with new characters, rather than risking the magic that makes a successful alternative views campaign.

But, in the end, that is all up to you.

And . . . who are you, again?

* * *

For you *GURPS* fans looking to glean a bit more about the upcoming *Fourth Edition*, the secret Powers That Be (a.k.a. Paul Chapman and Sean Punch) will be answering more questions and revealing more secrets next Friday. The scheduled topic is "Talents, Expert Skills, and Origins." (And, just so you know, "Origins" meaning the upcoming gigantic gaming convention, not something like, "Elements of *GURPS Fourth Edition* include an unknown glowing substance which fell to Earth, presumably from outer space. Do not taunt *GURPS Fourth Edition*.")

Be there, or be raised to the power of two.

--*Steven Marsh*

Pyramid Review

Blue Moon

Published by [Fantasy Flight Games](#)

Created by **Reiner Knizia, David Farquhar, & Kevin Jacklin**

Illustrations and graphics by **Franz & Imelda Vohwinkel, John Matson, Todd Lockwood, Raimundo Pousada, Jim Nelson, Scott M. Fischer, Daren Bader, Michael L. Phillippi, Lars Grant-West, Brian Schomburg, Claus Stephan, & Graphik Studio Krager**

Dragons designed by **Franz Vohwinkel**

Edited by **TM-Spiele, Christian T. Petersen, & Robert Vaughn**

Boxed basic set, full-color, two 31-card decks, map, rules, three dragon figurines; \$19.95
Additional decks: \$9.95 each

The people are in chaos. Everyone blames someone else for the departure of Blue Moon, the being who used to watch over the eponymous Blue Moon City. The scattered eight races have chosen sides and begun to fight. Winning battles gains the approval of the dragons, the only remaining links to the divine, who reward with shards of the Holy Crystal of Psi. When someone completely restores the crystal, they will recall Blue Moon to his people and become king.

The object of *Blue Moon* is to draw as many dragons to your side as possible.

A board showing a central temple ruin, wherein reside the three dragons, is placed between the combatants. The "map" has places for the cards played during the game, and lists the sequence of play. Players take turns initiating combats. The instigator decides whether the battle takes place in fire or earth, the two elements on the cards, according to which one he feels is a stronger feature in his hand. Each faction begins with a leader, and players add characters and supporting cards to fight for them.

On his turn, a player establishes the power of his attack, for example "Three in fire." The other player must equal or beat this number in the same element, or change the element with a mutant card. This one-upmanship goes back and forth until one of the warriors cannot improve his total and announces his retreat. The winner gets one or more dragons as a reward, depending on the cards played. Taking dragons is like a game of tug-of-war: If your opponent already has dragons, you must first take your "winnings" from him and place his dragons back on the board. Only then may dragons be moved from the center to your side.

Getting the upper hand can be tough. Many cards replace previous cards instead of adding to your total -- if you use a new booster on your character, it just swaps its value for the old one. Support cards for the whole force are better than boosters for individual characters in that they overlap less, and playing them can earn you extra dragons. Many of the cards have special powers that allow or disallow card draws, eliminate card effects, guarantee extra dragons, or raise or lower someone's current combat total, among other results. Some also have various symbols that may, for example, prevent opponents from using cards against you, let you bring out multiple allied characters together, or retrieve cards

you've played for reuse. Few icons are used in the basic game.

The winner of each round gets dragons, and players may continue to play new games until the dragons give the victor some number of shards of the Holy Crystal of Psi.

Blue Moon provides special rules for building decks. With eight races (only two, the Hoax and the Vulca, are included in the basic set), you can choose cards so long as you obey certain parameters on the leader cards. One such limit is on the number of blue moon emblems -- many cards list these, and you may only have so many "moons" worth from other race decks.

One of the big selling points for the game is the art. The cards are oversized (though not hard to handle), in part to do justice to the illustrations provided. In this, the game succeeds admirably. This is some of the finest work of any game currently on the market. It's like playing poker with high art. Even the penciling in the margins of the rulebook is first class. The sculpted dragon figurines are gorgeous pieces of plastic, smooth and beautiful, and presentation on the whole is fabulous.

On the other hand, all this beauty is costing the consumer a chunk of change. Full-color rules, figurines, big cards, fantastic art, and worst of all, the map. The fold-out, full-color, mounted board is as breathtaking as the rest of the production, but it adds nothing to play. The card layout isn't hard to grasp, and the order of play and the dragons could both be presented as more cards. You don't want to argue against it, especially cheap as it is, but it continues a recent trend of putting serious work into components that, while lovely, are a drain on the budget that's hard to justify when a pair of decks would do.

Furthermore, the game's presentation is like a beginner's guide to gaming. That's never bad -- ease of use always trumps superfluous sophistication -- but when you consider the size of the rules, their methodical exposition, and their tendency to repeat important points, it's aggravating to find there are still spots where the rules just don't clear up an important point. Worse, they may go on at length and still be unhelpful. The rules only come in the basic set, not the expansions, but they are also on-line at the website -- so even the designers seem to realize you can do without a lot of this.

It couldn't be simpler to play, but since the opponents' back-and-forth is the heart and soul of the game, it's disappointing to see that most fights are over too quickly to get an impressive war machine going, and your troops never get a real workout. A lot of the play ends up being guesswork, and the winning conditions are strangely vague -- it amounts to "play until you stop."

With two more races available separately, four more supposedly on the way, and Reiner Knizia's name on the cover, there's no doubt **Blue Moon** could have some staying power. But as much fun as it is, if Fantasy Flight Games is so insecure about their product they feel it needs bells and whistles, it's hard to muster your own confidence in it or its price tag.

--Andy Vetromile

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



The Last Space Opera Adventure: The Quiet Zone

by Devin L. Ganger

Humanity has spread to the stars and found many mysteries and treasures waiting for them. There are stars enough to nurture all types of societies and cultures. Passengers, commerce, and information flow like lifeblood between a thousand worlds, carried through the interstellar void by countless fleets of hyperspace-capable vessels. These ships are owned by governments, businesses, private organizations, and individuals and depend on the hyperspace navigators, technological remnants of a theorized Precursor race. Without them, the inhabited worlds of the galaxy would fall into ruin and decay.

Unfortunately, it appears that something is affecting the very fabric of hyperspace. There are an increasing number of reports of region from which no recently entered hyper-capable ship is returning. Although this region centers on systems of little importance, there are a handful of important trade routes that move through this section of space. For now, it can be routed around, but if it keeps growing, it will be harder and harder to ignore. Yet no one has made any serious effort to explore the mysterious phenomenon; updating the warning beacons and finding alternative paths is less expensive and easier.

Assumptions

One of the problems of providing a suitably generic space adventure is that space encompasses a wide variety of sub-genres and settings. While there are some specific assumptions made in this adventure, there is also guidance on adapting it to your specific campaign assumptions and preferences. The central assumption, the nature of hyperspace, is treated in a separate section as it significantly impacts the plot of the adventure.

- **Aliens:** Because of the Precursor nature of hyperspace technology, the prior existence of at least one set of sapient aliens is assumed even though they now appear to be extinct. The main antagonists are aliens by default, but there is nothing to stop them from being a group of humans. As long as there is reason for them to have mastered the secrets of the hyperspace travel technology, any group will do.
- **FTL travel:** There can be many different types of FTL travel, but this adventure assumes that hyperspace travel is the most cost-effective method. The vast majority of ships are only equipped for hyperspace; the added space and mass of alternative FTL drives are prohibitive on all but the most special-purpose ships such as couriers and private yachts.
- **FTL communications:** There are several options for FTL communications. The adventure assumes that FTL communication is possible but relies upon the same technology as the hyperspace drives, rendering it unusable by ships within the area of effect of the hyperspace inhibitor and explaining why no victim has been able to report their fate. If FTL communication uses a separate mechanism, the inhibitor can also be tuned to affect it. Or a lucky ship could have gotten word out in time, triggering the search that draws the PCs into the scenario.

The Quiet Zone

No form of travel is completely safe; hyperspace is no different. There are always a small number of ships that meet with various mishaps: equipment

Hyperspace

This adventure assumes that nobody knows exactly how hyperspace works. Instead, the earliest star-faring races discovered remnants of technology that, when analyzed, proved to be highly advanced navigation and propulsion systems. While it could be duplicated by the simplest space-capable industrial bases, the Precursor technology artifacts have defied all analysis to date. Scientists have a limited understanding of the theories behind the hyperspace drive, but no one has cracked the secret of how to design their own drive and navigation units from the ground up.

All hyperspace drives are therefore variations of the handful of Precursor artifacts found. These systems are easily integrated with conventional technology and have been

failures, bad navigation, and other hazards both natural and artificial. Against this background noise, it took some time before people began to notice that one particular region of space had become the site of an abnormal number of lost ships. For a long time, this was merely a statistical anomaly, important to insurance underwriters and risk analysts, and had no real impact on the average space traveler apart from slightly higher costs on certain routes. This area, nicknamed the "Quiet Zone," is home to no major races, planets, or stopovers; there is one major trade route that runs near the center of the zone and a handful of minor ones along its edges.

The Quiet Zone is also situated somewhat near the heart of the known space, from the view of the heroes. Its nearest border is within 30 light-years of Earth or other core system such as a prominent capital or homeworld. Navigating around it is certainly possible and economically feasible, but there is always a significant amount of traffic that runs through it despite the slightly higher insurance rates.

Within the last five years, however, the Quiet Zone has slowly been gaining more attention as it claims more victims. The ratio of ships that simply disappear versus those that have other accidents or malfunctions has begun to climb noticeably, and various individuals and groups have taken notice of this fact. Several have attempted to bring some sort of official attention to area, but despite their best efforts, the Quiet Zone is still merely a spine chilling bit of spacer mythology in the hearts and minds of the average person. It is likely that this state of affairs could have continued for perhaps another three or four years until some government was forced to take note of the abnormal loss rate.

The precise size of the Quiet Zone and loss rate of ships are left deliberately vague; the intended feel is that it be noticeably large in volume, perhaps three to five days' travel, without being so large that it is one of the dominating features of the known universe. GMs should feel free to alter specific details as necessary to fit their campaign.

Involving the Heroes

The actual event that brings the party into the adventure is the disappearance of a luxury passenger liner, the *Simply Paradise*, pride of the Light Speed Cruise Lines. For years, the *Paradise* has been the acme of luxury spaceflight, famous across the known worlds for the smallest detail of every appointment in its cabins. The *Paradise* does not normally travel on any route through the Quiet Zone, but a minor mishap in Engineering prompted her conservative captain to cut short the last leg of her current cruise and re-route home via the Quiet Zone.

That was 26 days ago. A routine communication notified the Light Speed home offices of the changed plans and the revised ETA; that time passed 21 days ago. The potential loss of the *Simply Paradise* with all hands is devastating enough, but the families of several prominent galactic politicians and businessman were onboard. Suddenly, the Quiet Zone and recent increase in disappearances is the priority of every news agency and intelligence service. What is worse is that every ship that has ventured into the Quiet Zone since the

extremely reliable over the years; the number of recorded cases of hyperspace systems failure is still in the single digits. Of course, various critics point out that there are a small but steady number of lost ships and, really, who knows what happened on them? However, not even these critics are seriously proposing the replacement of the hyperspace system.

What this means is that the ubiquitous form of travel throughout known space depends solely on a single technology design. Anyone who can crack the principles of hyperspace will have a massive advantage that they can use against virtually anyone. Given the degree of integration with other shipboard systems required by the navigation and propulsion systems, the hyperspace units are essentially a universal backdoor into the control and command systems of every spacecraft.

One-Way Ticket

Your players may be unwilling to graciously accept that the PC ship is heading into the Quiet Zone despite the actions of their characters, and may even consider this to be railroading. To a certain extent, this is true: The heart of the adventure lies in the depths of the Quiet Zone and the sooner you get the PCs there, the sooner they can get on with saving the world.

last known transmission from the *Paradise* has also gone missing. For 26 days, no ships known to have entered the Quiet Zone have reemerged.

There is one other disquieting event that some claim may be related. Within the past four days, two star systems that are relative neighbors to the Zone have gone supernova, both seemingly triggered by a collision with an extremely massive body. Luckily, neither system hosted inhabitable worlds or large colonies; one was home to a large antimatter refinery, the other to a remote scientific research station. There were only less than 100 lives lost, but the coincidence and implications are disturbing to many people.

The PCs are tasked to investigate these disappearances. They could be hired by a powerful figure, anxious to discover the fate of their loved ones on the *Paradise*. If they are members of the military, they are part of an expeditionary force ordered to scout out the Quiet Zone. They could themselves have friends or family who have gone missing and command the resources to mount a rescue. They could even be on one of the final ships to cross into the Quiet Zone, themselves victims of this strange phenomenon.

Into the Zone

If the PCs have been hired or ordered into the Zone by an individual or organization with sufficient resources, there are several interesting facts that they will be made aware of:

- **Communications:** Not only are there no ships coming out of the Quiet Zone, there are no communications coming out of it. This leads authorities and experts to theorize that something is affecting the basic nature of hyperspace within the Zone.
- **Probes:** Various scientific probes have been deployed around the known borders of the Quiet Zone. While no one understands exactly what hyperspace is, it is still possible for experts to measure some aspects of it. Their probes have registered a definite quantitative difference in the region surrounding the Zone; unfortunately, nobody is exactly sure what it means or how it affects hyperspace.
- **Growth:** One worrying fact that is borne out by both statistical analysis and by direct hyperspace observation is that the Quiet Zone is growing. At the current rate of growth, the Zone will overtake Earth (or whichever system of import the GM has placed the Zone adjacent to) within a year or two at the most.

There is one other fact that has been noticed by the press, although the only outlets reporting it are the tabloids: Every ship known to be lost in the Zone uses only the hyperspace propulsion system. No ship with an alternative means of propulsion has yet entered the Zone. This fact should serve to give the PCs some measure of confidence and hope, as their vessel will be the first to be so equipped (unless, of course, the GM has placed the PCs on one of the ships that fall victim to the Zone before warning is raised). At this point, no one realizes that the hyperspace systems provide a universal access point into every ship system, including alternative propulsion methods.

The PC ship is swiftly equipped and provisioned and launches within a matter of hours; it should be a short journey from the core system to the current border of the Quiet Zone. Entry to the Zone itself can be accomplished as swiftly as

There are a couple of ways to handle this, but the best is to arrange a motive for the PCs to get into the Zone. Perhaps a loved one on one of the missing ships needs a specific medicine or therapy and is about to run out of their usual emergency supply, or the expedition backers have granted a high bounty for comprehensive readings from the heart of the Zone. The precise reasons will depend on your players and their characters, so take a moment to reflect and be creative.

External competition is an excellent way to provide motivation not only to the PCs, but to the players as well. Getting word that a rival team, known to be aggressive, is also heading into the Zone to try and steal away the bounty and the glory can provide a suitable spur for cautious players. Friction with an observer NPC assigned to the team as the backer's representative can keep the PCs on-pace and determined to outfox the interloper. Direct orders from military superiors can work wonders.

If these approaches fail, step up the pace of the equipment failures. Remember that the hyperspace unit is tied directly into all major ship systems; feel free to initiate transient but catastrophic life support failures that will occupy the attention of the PCs while their ship travels into the Zone. Navigation readings can be inconsistent or outright false. Give the PCs a crisis while you move the ship -- and the plot -- along behind the screen.

the PCs deem necessary. Probes of the local hyperspace will confirm the latest readings from the experts.

The transition across the boundary is marked by a loss of FTL communication and a barely perceptible change in the hyperspace engines. Nothing shows up on any diagnostic or monitoring equipment, but there is a noticeable change in the feel of the ship that no one can quite put their finger on. If the heroes wish to shut down the hyperspace drive, they may do so easily; restarting is equally easy. The hyperspace navigational system appears to have suffered a minor fault, however; attempts to reset it for headings that would take the ship back out of the Quiet Zone are rejected. Cautious parties who wish to test their alternative propulsive systems will find that there is no difficulty in engaging these systems and moving back out of the Zone.

Once the ship gets about 10 light years deep into the Zone, however, things start to become a bit more difficult. The first sign that something is badly amiss is that the hyperspace navigation system sets the ship on a course deeper into the heart of the Zone. Attempts to reset the ship heading appear to work at first, but the ship quickly returns to an inward course. Alternative navigation systems are also showing symptoms; they, too, are refusing to accept courses out of the Zone.

At 20 light years, the inevitable happens; the hyperspace system no longer accepts any input and will not shut down. Short of physically destroying the linkage between the ship's drives and energy source, the ship will swiftly travel into the heart of the Zone. As it does so, the crew will lose control of all remaining navigation and weapon functions, although sensors and life support still respond normally.

Lockdown

After a length of time proportionate to the size of the Quiet Zone in your campaign, the ship will arrive at a small brown dwarf star system well away from any trade routes or occupied planets. This dwarf is somewhat near the center region of the Zone but is by no means the exact center or in any other way immediately distinguishable from prior review as a place of import. Upon arriving at the star, ship sensors will immediately detect a massive number of ships; to all appearances, every ship that has ever been reported missing in the Quiet Zone is parked in the same orbit, about 1 to 2 AUs distant from the primary.

The ships are in varied states of repair; some ships have been there for many years and exhibit micrometeor pitting, while others are obviously new. Recently lost ships are still radiating energy signatures on multiple bands, although attempts to communicate with them will fail for the time being. As the ship gets closer to this mothballed fleet, it should become relatively easy for the PCs to pick out specific ships they may be looking for, such as the *Simply Paradise*.

Once the ship pulls into its parking orbit in the derelict fleet, the hyperspace systems shut off. No amount of tinkering will restart them even though they appear once again to be accepting input normally. A cursory examination will reveal the fact that the core components of the hyperspace drive system have been damaged; they appear melted and fused as if by a massive energy surge. On large ships, any spare components that the PCs may attempt to swap into place will visibly suffer such a surge that leaves them in the same condition. Alternative propulsion systems are still offline and not accepting any navigational input.

At the same time, local communications are unlocked and the PCs should be able to converse with crew and passengers onboard other ships in the derelict fleet. It will not take long to confirm that each ship has gone through the same experience. Although none of the hyper-capable ships in the fleet can move, there is plenty of ship-to-ship shuttle traffic; many of crews of the smaller ships have been relocated to the *Simply Paradise* in an effort to conserve resources and consolidate escape efforts. The *Paradise* has clearly become the social and technical hub for all of the refugees within the derelict fleet, as the larger ships are in regular communication and someone is always ferrying a load of people to and from the luxury liner.

Enter the Freighters

How Long Does it Last?

At some point, someone -- an NPC merchant on the outskirts of the fleet, one of the shuttle drivers, or even one of the PCs -- will notice that there are two ships that are actually moving around the system. Both of these ships are extremely large freighters that had disappeared several years before; both are models that incorporate a large amount of automation, allowing them to be efficiently run by a one or two-person crew. These ships appear to be slowly circling the perimeter of the derelict fleet in a fashion that indicates that they are not following a pre-programmed course.

It should occur to someone that there is a significantly non-zero chance that these ships may still retain functional hyperspace components. The PCs, who came into the Zone with malice aforethought, are likely to be the best-equipped for the task of shuttling over to one of the freighters and recovering any functional modules. A scan of the freighters shows that the atmosphere on board cannot be breathed by the heroes and is in fact mildly corrosive, so full atmosphere suits are required.

There is no sign that any notice is taken of the launch of the recovery mission and they are easily able to match velocity with the nearest freighter. Neither docking port responds to the normal signals, forcing the PCs to go on an EVA to gain entry to the freighters. There is one docking port on the aft end of the ships, near the engine exhaust; armored and shielded military-grade gear will protect the PCs from any stray radiation that the engines are emitting at their current output level, but they will then have to work their way through the length of the freighter, cutting through multiple internal cargo bays and bulkheads to the control cabin on the bow.

The easier docking port is the one that is located approximately 50 meters aft of the control cabin on top of the ship; there are only two bulkheads separating this port from the control cabin. The corrosive atmosphere will still pose a problem for most EVA suits, so speed is definitely required.

Entry into the ship is challenging but within the grasp of the PCs; cutting through the two intervening bulkheads would be straightforward if not for the complication of the atmosphere, which is also slightly flammable. The PCs will need to take suitable precautions to minimize the risk of igniting a fire with their cutting equipment.

Once the PCs gain access into the control cabin, they gain another reason to complete their task quickly; the freighter is changing course and acceleration, and appears to be changing onto a cometary orbit. If they cannot get back out into the shuttle quickly, they will be unable to return to the derelict fleet given the shuttle's fuel reserves. Unless the PCs are overly hasty and careless, this should not prove to be a problem; retrieving the hyperspace components requires no special effort, and once they are removed the freighter's engines shut down. A quick visual examination reveals no visible signs of damage or flaw. At this point, getting back to the shuttle and returning to the fleet are simple tasks.

Mama, I'm Comin' Home

Upon their return, the heroes will find out that the freighter they visited sent and received two coded transmissions right around the time they gained access to the control cabin. The outbound transmission was a high-power FTL signal aimed somewhere out into the system's cometary shell; this transmission received an immediate response, after which the freighter immediately assumed

The derelict fleet does not have to be a quick stop for the PCs, although it certainly is written to play that way. Given the number and variety of ships stuck in the Zone, combined with the rich atmosphere of the *Paradise*, it can take some length of time before the PCs are able to discover how to escape from the Zone. Running a few sessions onboard the *Paradise* allows the PCs to run into old acquaintances, settle old scores, and create new ones.

The longer that you keep the action in the system, the more likely it will be that the *Simply Paradise* ends up becoming a sort of Rick's Place in space. The barriers between different social classes will start to break down, allowing the PCs to form useful associations outside of their normal circles. These associations could be very useful if you intend this scenario to be a launching point for a new campaign.

Once you decide that it is time to move on to the final act, you can have one of the NPCs discover the freighters and propose a mission to examine their hyperspace modules, if your PCs are not willing to take the initiative.

Fine-Tuning the EVA

You might be tempted to

its new course. The contents of these later transmissions are not known, since they were using FTL technology and the fleet's FTL receivers are currently burned out.

The party can now use the secondhand hyperspace components to rebuild the drive system of one ship (or two, if they successfully retrieved components from both freighters). The obvious choice is the *Simply Paradise*; she has enough life support capacity to cram all of the survivors of the fleet on-board and make the run for Earth before the overloaded environmental plant breaks down critically. However, this means running the risk of falling afoul of the Zone again, since the *Paradise* has no secondary propulsion system.

Whichever ship the PCs decide to take, they will be able to get the drives powered up and break out of orbit on their way to the system exit vector for Earth. The hyperspace propulsion and navigation appear to be operating adequately, although there is some gradual degradation of performance. They are able to transition to hyperspace and begin their journey home. If they attempt to send a signal to Earth, they will be able to establish basic handshakes and then the communications system will die.

Anyone who is performing sensor sweeps will have a difficult modifier to detect that the ship is being followed. With an exceptional result, the PCs should be able to determine that the trailing ship is one of the freighters they took the hyperspace components from.

If this is not enough to make the PCs nervous, a couple of hours of travel time should do the trick. By that point, the trailing freighter is obvious on the scanner even though it is still at far range; it now has a mass reading equivalent to a small planetoid and it is steadily growing. If the freighter follows the PCs back to Earth, it will have an effective mass 500 times greater than Jupiter at its current growth curve, and it is not hard to imagine what the likely consequences will be if that kind of equivalent mass is slammed into the Sun.

What's Going On

Several centuries ago (GMs should adjust this for their campaign as appropriate) a reclusive race of aliens made a major discovery in the cometary cloud of an obscure brown dwarf system: a forgotten cache of Precursor-level devices and information stores. They began a cautious and through exploration of their find and quickly discovered several important technologies:

1. **A hyperspace inhibitor.** This device produces a field that burns out the common components of all Precursor hyperspace systems within a range of one or two light years. This device appears to work by triggering built-in self-destruct mechanisms within the hyperspace components; the proper encrypted software command will safe a given hyperspace system and prevent it from being affected by this device. The components on the freighters have been configured in this fashion.
2. **A mass generator.** This device uses high-energy physics to simulate the presence of an arbitrary mass and can be used to create gravitational fields of planetary or stellar strength. The freighters have one of these devices installed in their cargo bays, along with a redundant hyperspace drive, allowing the freighters to follow the PCs ship even though they've

change the corrosive atmosphere if you are not using aliens in your campaign; after all, another group of humans has no need for an exotic atmosphere. The main purpose it serves is to keep the PCs focused on their goal; get in, get the modules, and get out. If they get curious and start looking around, or come in through the rear port, they are likely to stumble over the load of curious high-energy apparatus stowed in the after cargo bays, as well as a complete secondary hyperdrive. A decent alternative is to have a high-oxygen atmosphere; this makes cutting through the bulkheads riskier for the PCs and reduces the number of compartments they would have to completely vent to minimize the risk of an explosion.

The cargo bays on these freighters are modular systems; as a result, there is no direct connection between the control cabin and the cargo bays. There are two or three central compartments along the spine of the ship that provide the core structure for the modular bays to connect to. These compartments, which also have no direct connection to the control cabin, are primarily intended for technician and inspector access; the regular crew is deliberately prevented from accessing the cargo bays to minimize the likelihood of tampering and pilferage of valuable cargoes.

The entities behind the Quiet Zone chose these freighters for a specific reason: they have lots of free space, which means there was enough room to install their equipment as well as enough shielding to prevent

removed the hyperspace components in the control cabins.

3. **A database.** This information store is a comprehensive reference to the underlying theory and detailed use of the hyperspace technology. Although the aliens have been working with it cautiously, they still do not fully understand the workings or the theory; they have gained enough familiarity with the material to be able to become adept at using the hyperspace units as backdoors into the computer systems of all ships within range, creating the Quiet Zone. The ship disappearances have large been a result of their experiments over the years.

Why have the aliens now shifted into a more aggressive stance, one that is sure to attract attention? In particular, why have they begun destroying star systems? While the specific choice of motives and goals are left to the GM, there are several possibilities.

First, the aliens could themselves be victims. The Precursor technology cache was actually meant to have been a disposal container that has somehow survived. A virulent artificial intelligence has co-opted the aliens' systems and taken overt control in the pursuit of an ancient vendetta. It could even be altering the alien psychology and physiology to make them extensions of its will (such as the Perversions in the Vernor Vinge novel *A Fire Upon the Deep*).

The motive could be religious. Always reclusive and introspective, the alien religious structure has been recently taken over by a fanatic element, one that views the other races as horrible mistakes. Thanks to the Precursor technology, they finally have the means to purge these mistakes from the universe.

Yet another motive is that the aliens have a deeply rooted inferiority complex, based in their inability to think swiftly and adapt to changing conditions. Over centuries of testing and plotting, they've come up with the perfect scheme to identify those races who are best able to think on their feet and ensured that these races will lead the supernova generators back to their own worlds, thus solving the problem without any direct confrontation.

It is also worth noting that nothing prevents the aliens from existing in other star systems both in and out of the Quiet Zone. While the Zone was their main research location, there could very well be others; how else did other ships escape to trigger the two prior supernovas?

If the PCs become aware of the role that the hyperspace components are playing in allowing the aliens to track and control their ship, they may attempt to remove it from the system. Without alternative propulsion systems, this will be no help. Even with other FTL drives, the hyperspace units are such an integral part of standard ship systems that the PCs will have a large amount of stopgap engineering on their hands in order to make the drive usable. This will render them immune to alien control; however, it will not keep the freighter from following them and it may in fact remove their ability to detect and track the freighter.

Endgame

At this point, the PCs have three major choices:

1. They can continue on to Earth. Although their FTL communications are shot, they still have control over their navigation and drive systems and will have the use of in-system communications once they arrive. This gives them about an hour or two to raise local military aid to destroy the incoming freighter before it can impact Sol and trigger a supernova.
2. They can navigate to a different star system. Here the timing will be tricky, as the freighter will only collide with the system primary if their ship is still in-system. If they break and run too early, the freighter will follow

it from showing up on scans. The corrosive atmosphere will help convince their eventual victims to take the bait of the hyperspace modules without poking around too much or stopping to wonder why these two ships just happen to have functional hyperspace systems.

If you have enough PCs, you might consider the idea of sending simultaneous missions to both freighters. If the missions are successful, there will be two complete sets of hyperspace components; two of the largest ships can be rescued from the derelict fleet. For a relatively short trip back to Earth, these ships can be loaded beyond normal capacity to ensure that all survivors of the fleet can be rescued, especially if one of them is the *Simply Paradise*.

them back into hyperspace and to their next destination.

3. If they rescued two ships, they can attempt to lure the freighter onward with one and attempt to destroy it with the other. The freighter will follow whichever ship has the components taken from it and ignore the other, leading to the possibility that they will be forced to engage the freighter with a weaponless passenger liner.

For a really tidy solution, the PCs can attempt to return to the brown dwarf around which the derelict fleet orbits. This will certainly succeed; there are no safeguards in place to prevent this outcome, as the aliens behind the supernova devices are extremely arrogant. However, there is one unpleasant side effect. Returning to the system will trigger the destruction of their working hyperspace components, thanks to the hyperspace inhibitor that the hostile aliens have set up, since the aliens reset the PCs' hyperspace system as they left the system. This will leave the PCs unable to flee the supernova that is triggered; on the other hand, the aliens will be caught flatfooted and be unable to evacuate in time either. This option is suitable if you are bringing the campaign to a final close and have opted for the aliens to be based solely in the brown dwarf system.

The heroes may want to match velocities with the freighter and attempt to disable the doomsday device. If they are able to get back on the freighter in hyperspace (make it horribly difficult and exciting), they are certainly able to do so with a bit of luck and some applicable skill rolls. Unfortunately, there is a huge consequence; the mechanism has an anti-tamper mechanism. If triggered, it will divert the staggering energy input of the device into a galaxy-wide pulse of energy that will completely and permanently disable any hyperspace modules in range. This is certainly enough to cover all of known space, leading to the immediate breakdown of society into planetary islands. The death and devastation caused would be immense. However, nothing prevents the further manufacture of more hyperspace components, leading the industrial worlds in a frantic period of rescue, rediscovery, and rebuilding. And the aliens are still out there, ready to do it all again?

The natural tendency for the heroes may be to seek out the aliens for a direct confrontation. For a proper "last adventure" feel, this should not be allowed to take place. The alien menace is supposed to be cold, overwhelming, and -- above all -- impersonal. If they think that they are being directly chased, they will take steps to protect themselves, which will almost certainly involve wide-spread destruction of the hyperspace modules. Have the PCs deal with the immediate threat, and if they really want to chase down the aliens, then you can launch into the new campaign of a subtle alien hunt with the potentially devastating consequences of direct confrontation.

Whatever method the PCs use to resolve the adventure, their universe will have certainly changed. The Solar System may have been destroyed by hostile aliens, and the heroes may have given their lives to deal a blow to them; regardless, the galaxy has been made aware of a terrible new threat to the hyperspace propulsion systems that all known space travel depends on. The stars will never be the same -- and neither will your campaign.

GURPS Fourth Edition Rules Leak #2

Expert Skill†

IQ/Hard

Defaults: None.

An Expert Skill represents cross-disciplinary knowledge of a single, narrow theme. When answering factual questions *on that theme*, you may substitute a roll against your Expert Skill for any IQ-based roll against any skill that has a default. Expert Skills do not exempt you from Cultural Familiarity or Language requirements, and never provide the ability to do practical tasks. Experts sometimes complement Expert Skills with related Area Knowledge skills, but you must learn these separately.

You *must* specialize by theme, and the GM is free to forbid any theme he feels is too broad. Some examples:

Computer Security: Expertise at combating computer intrusion ("hacking"). Can stand in for Computer Operation, Cryptography, or Electronics Operation to spot "holes" in the security of a computer system. Use Computer Programming to patch or exploit such holes.

Conspiracy Theory: The study of interlocking networks of conspiracies. Can substitute for Anthropology, Geography, History, Literature, or Occultism to answer questions about conspiracies, and can also work as Intelligence Analysis for this purpose (only). This does *not* include hidden inner secrets, which are the province of Hidden Lore.

Egyptology: The study of ancient Egypt. Can function as Anthropology, Archaeology, History, Linguistics, or Occultism for that purpose.

Epidemiology: The study of the spread of disease. Can serve as Biology, Diagnosis, Forensics, Geography, or Mathematics when deducing how a disease was spread.

Hydrology: The study of a planet's water. Can be used in place of Biology, Chemistry, Geography, Geology, or Meteorology to answer questions about precipitation, flooding, irrigation, etc.

Military Science: General expertise on military capabilities. Can substitute for Artillery, Armoury, Strategy, or Tactics to answer questions about -- but not *use* -- weapons or strategies.

Natural Philosophy: A general skill that usually replaces specific science skills (which might not even exist yet!) for scholars at TL1-4. Can be used in place of any science skill (e.g., Biology or Physics) to answer questions about how the universe is *believed* to work.

Political Science: The academic study of politics. Can substitute for Geography, History, Law, Politics, or Sociology when performing political analysis.

Psionics: The study of the psionic mind and brain. Can function as Biology, Diagnosis, Physician, Physiology, or Psychology when dealing with psi phenomena in living beings. *Cannot* substitute for Electronics Operation, Electronics Repair, and Engineer specialties that deal with psychotronics.

Thanatology: The esoteric study of death. Can stand in for Anthropology, Archaeology, Occultism, or Theology when dealing with death and the dead.

Xenology: General knowledge of the *known* races in your setting. Can substitute for Anthropology, History, Physiology, or Psychology to identify a member of a race different from your own, or to answer general questions about the race and its culture.

Making the Most of Non-Optimal Characters

for Point-Based Systems

by Elizabeth McCoy

Optimizing, min-maxing, point-juggling, munchkining, power gaming . . . Some people hate it, claiming that too much focusing on the numbers makes the resulting character flat, lifeless, and -- usually -- some form of combat wombat. Some people [swear](#) by [it](#), claiming that having an effective character means they are good at "useless" concept skills as well as central concept skills.

While many people are of the latter category, there are some concepts that *don't* work so well when optimized, for in-game or meta-game reasons -- and some players (or GMs) who hate the very idea of a character whose concept is "effectiveness." With a GM willing to observe as you work through the steps, however, you may be able to play those non-optimal concepts without sacrificing play effectiveness (i.e., spotlight time and fun).

Note that all of these are for point-based systems, focusing heavily on *GURPS*. The basic concepts behind each technique should still be applicable to most point-based system which can be tweaked to "optimize" characters. Further note that all but one are player-oriented; a GM can always suggest a technique to a player, but for the most part, if the player wants to optimize, the player will optimize. (A good player will have an interesting character with a workable concept *anyway*, and the GM may never know.)

Also note that most of the player-based ones take the premise that points are representing time spent learning a skill, either directly (such as *GURPS 3rd Edition* ruling that one point is gained by 400 hours training), or more abstractly (it's up to the GM how long it takes to get skill/1 in *In Nomine*). This is likely to be the majority belief of "what these skill points mean," but there's always a chance a GM has come up with some new twist on it.

Technique One: Reverse Optimizing

This is the basic tactic for just about any character that's not min-maxed, and therefore gets the most explanation.

To pull off this technique properly, you'll need to "show your work." Don't just design your non-optimized character and expect your GM to understand that you really need those twenty extra points just to match up to the other players of similar concepts. You may also need to let the GM think over this for a while, with two character sheets in hand, and absorb that character X really *is* character Y.

The character concept that works best with this technique is the "Grizzled Old Expert." Someone who might not be as agile, strong, or natively talented as the young kid over there, but has enough skill under his or her belt to best the upstart. This will probably be represented by a lot of skill in the area(s) of expertise, but only middling stats.

Do up that character sheet first, and try to rein in impulses to really go over the point-budget. *Then* save a copy, and optimize. Point-squeeze. Use every trick in the book, every "point crock" you can come up with, and make those numbers squeal. You've probably saved points along the way -- resist the temptation to increase your skills at this stage. You want to compare apples to apples, not apples to apple pie. (Use a third sheet for adding new skills and/or increasing your existing ones.)

Now -- if you haven't decided to change concepts to a young, talented upstart -- show your sheets to the GM and explain that you *could* play this sheet, but your concept of an older, experienced character would be better suited by this sheet over here. Once you've got the GM agreeing that yes, it's clear that on a meta-level, this cheaper sheet is the same as the concept-sheet, you can spring the third or fourth sheet on your hapless Game Master and point out that if you used the cheaper sheet, you could have skills at *this* level, or a few extra minor skills at these levels.

Gauge your GM's reaction to "stage two" carefully, of course -- moving too quickly will make most GMs dig in their heels instinctively. A more measured pace will probably defeat knee-jerk reactions. You need to give a little time for the notion of "meta-fairness" to sink in. Spending a chunk of your "saved" points on things you don't expect to come up frequently, but which do round out the character logically, is advisable here. Besides the three-dimensionality which this lends your concept, the GM will be reassured that you're not munchkining to make an Über-Fighter, or worse, an Über-Everything.

If you're using *GURPS 3rd Edition*, or any other system where it's harder to learn a skill the more skilled you are, then you're going to be accepting a slight penalty for playing your concept -- you'll have to pay more earned points to advance beyond your current skill levels. If you've got your GM wrapped around your little finger, you can try to sucker him or her into letting you put earned points into the optimized character and use the resulting skill levels for your grizzled expert -- but most GMs will probably point out that if you want all the advantages of a young Turk, you should play the young Turk. A grizzled expert already *knows* the tricks, and *should* have a harder time increasing skills. You'll probably do better nobly accepting this minor inconvenience for the sake of the concept.

Technique Two: The Niche

Another term for this is Johnny One-Shot or Johnny One-Spell, but so long as you're having fun, there's nothing wrong with a J1-S. With this technique, you figure out what niche is not being fulfilled with the party, and partially optimize your character toward that niche. If you're the best lock-picker, then does it matter that you haven't got sixteen levels of Finger Dexterity, but went for the Booze Tolerance? (It may, to some players, of course; don't let them look at your sheet.)

This technique, naturally, works best when you're the *only* one of X. If you're doing a young warrior in a group of young fighters, it's not going to work well if your concept was "Brash Young Warrior" and your sheet says the others can cream him with one hand tied behind their backs. I.e., you'll have to optimize to keep up, or adjust the concept to "Brash Young Warrior Who Talks Better Than His Buddies Fight." Adjusting the concept *is* a valid option!

However, if you've got an alcoholic healer with a degree in Zen Haiku Flower Arranging, and it's the *only* healer -- can the rest of the group complain, so long as they get patched up?

Technique Three: The Background

In many ways, this is a re-visiting of Technique One, geared toward having a collection of "useless" skills, like "Area Knowledge: Community College X" or "Hobby: *Paranoia 1st Edition*" skills.

The easiest way to get a GM to accept this is via Technique One, with an optimized character sheet showing that you could buy all this if you wanted to squeeze your points. Instead of playing the "Grizzled Expert vs. Young Upstart" theme, you'll want to point out that your concept is Joe Middle-aged, and while you *could* cook the points, it would become implausible for your 18-year-old Wonderkid to be managing Joe's Blacksmithy yet, and you really want to have that elderly parent to take care of, and all the other "middle-aged" aspects of the concept that don't work if you're playing a Child Prodigy. As with Technique One, give the GM time -- perhaps even more time than with adventuring-skill comparisons -- to assimilate the "these two things are really the same (only that one's cheaper)" notion. Even a GM who wants to try this may have instinctive bad reactions that he or she will need to work through.

The alternative way to make your background work for you is suggest to the GM that *everyone* from this background should get certain non-adventuring skills. (This is a lot like Technique Five, that way.) You'll want the package to be small, and have things like, "Knowledge: Cash Register Codes," "Bicycling," and "Card Games: Bridge." I.e., work hard to make this "freebie package" both low-level, and skills that either the GM will cringe if you *don't* have, or doesn't care one way or the other if you do. And if everyone has this little package of extras, including NPCs,

Technique Four: Amnesia

If your GM makes the character sheet, you'll never know if it was optimized or not. Play the hints the GM gives you, and there's your concept.

Naturally, this should only be done if you trust your GM not to then *run* the character like a puppet by giving you stage directions in the form of "hints." (Which the GM may or may not be even aware of doing!) Character sheet or not, both GM and player have to trust each other to get the concept roughly the same.

Technique Five:GM Fiat -- and Bribery

For GMs who swear that only munchkins minmax, a reminder: Somewhere out there is at least one player who will make points scream during character generation, not to turn the character into Über-Whatever, but simply because it's unaesthetic to be inefficient. They'll probably be lingering over the disadvantage choices, trying to pick just the *right* ones for the concept. Yes, they do have a concept; it's just that the concept is "sleek and efficient."

Therefore, for these few, proud concept-optimizers -- and all the way down the spectrum to the would-be point-croaking minmaxers -- you need to offer them a reason to be unaesthetic in character design. If you've got a goodly number of points to play with (i.e., just about anything *except In Nomine*), you can designate X number of points to be spent on attributes, Y on skills, Z on advantages, and so on. If you increment the number of Y points -- the ones for skills -- then lack of freedom with the attribute points doesn't pinch so much. You can stack the deck in favor of "useless" skills either by insisting some number of points be spent on them, or by giving extra points specifically for them. (E.g., "Every character will receive 10 extra points which *must* be spent on something useless in combat, useless in politicking, and somehow integral to the concept.")

Another trick is to change the math -- in effect, give out points for the Grizzled Expert. You'll still need to divvy things up into attribute points, etc., but let the players change attribute points into skill points at some beneficial rate -- if 10 *GURPS* points of attributes become 15 or 20 as skills, the concept-driven optimaxers will start balancing what they need for the concept (e.g., hot pilot) with what DX fits (15? or 13?). You *may* want to set skill caps for this technique, so that after someone's gotten to the glass ceiling, extra points mined from attributes will *have* to go into stray skills.

A Reminder

If the GM is optimizing characters, and the players aren't -- or vice versa! -- there's going to be a disconnect in expectations when NPCs and PCs interact. One or the other will wind up being more effective, and both sides will be going, "Huh?" If you're a player in a new game, and you don't know the GM's character creation style, ask for a few sample characters to see if they're optimized. Don't forget to explain why you're checking: Because you want to make sure that you don't create something out of line with the rest of the universe. If you're the Game Master, do up a few characters in your normal style of NPCing. If you're hostile to optimized player characters, be sure that you're not going to optimize some NPCs "as a surprise" for the non-optimized PCs. Create them in your normal, concept-driven style, and just add more points so you can gauge the relative power levels.

The Shanghai Municipal Police

by Hans-Christian Vortisch

"The International Settlement is policed by a British-officered force that is one of the toughest in the world."

--GURPS *Cliffhangers*

Whether following the steps of Jack Brady to foil the plans of the Order of the Bloated Woman to open the Great Gate for the Mythos in 1926, whether visiting the *Blue Lotus* during the 1932 Sino-Japanese "Shanghai incident," or in hot pursuit of "fortune and glory" in 1935's *Club Obi-Wan*, characters will find [Shanghai](#) an extremely interesting place to stay between the wars. Unfortunately, it also was an extremely dangerous place. Enter the officers of law and order: the Shanghai Municipal Police.

This article details the composition, training, and equipment of that force, along with its most famous officer, Assistant Commissioner William Fairbairn. Complete details on his Defendu martial art and the SMP's Red Maria armored buses are provided for *GURPS*, giving additional flavor to a [Cliffhangers](#) or [WWII](#) campaign or allowing a [Cops](#) or [SWAT](#) campaign with a spin. It is also a uniquely colorful background for [Martial Arts](#).

Much of the information will also be interesting for *Call of Cthulhu*, *Feng Shui*, and *Indiana Jones* campaigns set in the 1920s and 1930s.

Shanghai Municipal Police

"Omnia Juncta In Uno (All joined as one)"

-- Motto of the SMP

Prior to WWII, Shanghai was divided into three districts, only one of them Chinese-administered. The smaller of the two Western-administered enclaves was the French Concession, backed up by a large French military force and effectively a French colony. The larger, which contained the British, American, and most other consulates, was the [International Settlement](#) (pp. CL63-64). Together, the French Concession (close to 480,000 inhabitants) and the International Settlement (more than a million inhabitants) occupied 12.66 square miles. Some 90% of their inhabitants were Chinese, who had little rights, however.

The Shanghai Municipal Police (SMP) was the law enforcement agency responsible for policing the mainly British-run International Settlement. Founded in 1854, it enforced the law in that part of the city until 1943. Throughout that time, its strength rose to a peak of 6,000 active officers during the 1930s, many of them Westerners with either a bent for adventure or problems at home -- Americans, Irishmen, Central European Jews and "White" Russians were prominent among the expatriates in the city.

In no way was the SMP's composition representative of the Settlement's citizens, but it *was* a very international force; among its ranks were Chinese, Englishmen, Irishmen, Japanese, Russians, Scotsmen, Sikhs, and a sprinkling of Americans, Australians, Austrians, Germans, Swedes, and others. However, the majority of the upper ranks were British, and most of the foot constables were Chinese.

In an interesting twist, there was not "the law" for the SMP to uphold; treaty agreements between China and the 14 "favored nations" assured a judicial system known as "extra-territoriality." That is, an accused citizen of a favored nation (Belgium, Brazil, Great Britain, Denmark, France, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the U.S.) had to be brought before a consular judge of his own country. Chinese as well as all foreigners without extra-territorial rights were brought before a Chinese court.

Due to the unique composition and locale of Shanghai, the city was thriving with criminals of all sorts and descriptions (also see *The Green Gang*, below). Some of them petty, many of them dangerous -- kidnapping, murder, and espionage

covert ops were commonplace. Violent clashes between police and criminals were frequent; in 1933, the SMP suffered one dead and eight wounded officers, while killing 11 criminals and wounding 13. That was a "quiet" year . . .

The SMP was headquartered at the Central Police Station at 239 Hankow Road, but maintained smaller posts throughout the International Settlement and also mounted patrols on foot and on motorcycle.

The Commissioner of Police was the third-best paid official in the International Settlement, earning 3,215 Yuan (Mexican silver dollars) monthly in 1934 (equivalent to \$2,600).

Assistant Commissioner William Fairbairn

William Ewart Fairbairn was born on February 28, 1885 in Rickmansworth, England. He joined the Royal Marines (p. W:KM40) at age 16, and after serving six years with them, partly in Korea, joined the SMP in 1907. During one of his foot patrols, the young sergeant was severely beaten up and left for dead by a Chinese gang. This led to his decision to whole-heartedly study close combat techniques.

Fairbairn had already been an infamous barroom brawler and [bayonet fighter](#) in the Marines, where he developed several new bayonet techniques. From 1908, he trained extensively in various Eastern martial arts, including Pakua Chang under Tsai Ching Tung, a former instructor at the Chinese court, and Jujutsu under Professor Okado. In 1931, he received a 2nd-degree black belt from the Kodokan Judo University in Tokyo. From his experiences he developed *Defendu*, a combat style optimized for police use. During his over 30 years in the SMP, he was personally involved in more than six *hundred* violent encounters!

Fairbairn soon became the SMP's Chief Instructor in close combat techniques and firearms training. An excellent shot, he wrote manuals on instinctive shooting and proper pistol technique. He also formed and commanded the *Reserve Unit*. He held training courses in pistol shooting for the New York Police Department and the British Army Small Arms School. His proficiency with the blade was legendary, and his experiments would lead to the famous Fairbairn-Sykes commando dagger (p. W:HS18). Fairbairn retired from the SMP in 1939, to take up instructing the British Commandos (p. W:HS11) in 1940.

Fairbairn had a wife, son, and daughter.

Age 50 years (in 1935); 5'11"; 160 lbs.; a tall man with round glasses and white hair. 329.5 points.

Attributes: ST 12 [20], DX 16 [80], IQ 13 [30], HT 12 [20]

Basic Speed: 6.25 Move: 6

Dodge: 7 Parry: 13 (Unarmed), 10 (Knife)

Basic Damage: 1d-1 thr, 1d+2 sw (1d punching, 1d+2 kicking)

Advantages: Alertness +1 [5], Combat Reflexes [15], Composed [5], Fit [5], Legal Enforcement Powers [5], Police Rank 5 [25], Reputation +2 [5] (among policemen in Shanghai, all the time), Status 1 [0] (free from Wealth), Strong Will +2 [8], Toughness [10], Wealthy [20].

Disadvantages: Bad Sight [-10], Code of Honor (Police) [-5], Duty (15 or less)

Defendu 10 Points

"This system is not to be confounded with Jiu-jitsu or any other known method of defence, and although some of the holds, trips, etc., are a combination of several methods, the majority are entirely original."

Fairbairn, William. *Defendu -- The Official Text Book for the Shanghai Municipal Police, Hongkong Police and Singapore Police* (1926)

Defendu was developed in the mid-1920s by Fairbairn on basis of his extensive martial arts training, incorporating elements of Jujutsu (p. MA86), Gatka (a Sikh martial art), Pakua (p. MA94), and time-tested street brawling.

Note that Defendu is *not* the same as the Fairbairn Close Combat Training (p. W:HS10) of WWII; although it was based on it, the latter was modified and optimized for military use. In particular, Defendu is less "deadly," as it was mainly intended for arrest, restraint, and self-defense, rather than silent killing.

Primary Skills: Brawling,

[-15], Enemy (Organized Crime in Shanghai) [-20].

Quirks: Trains every day [-1], Always carries a knife [-1].

Skills: Administration (M/A) IQ-2 [1]-12, Area Knowledge (Shanghai) (M/E) IQ [1]-13, Armoury (Small Arms) (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-12, Boating (P/A) DX-2 [1/2]-14, Body Language (M/H) IQ [4]-14*, Boxing (P/A) DX-2 [1/2]-14, Brawling (P/E) DX+2 [2]-17, Detect Lies (M/H) IQ-2 [1]-11, Fast-Draw (Knife) (P/E) DX [1]-17**, Fast-Draw (Pistol) (P/E) DX [1]-17**, First Aid (M/E) IQ-1 [1/2]-12, Gunner (Machine Gun) (P/A) DX-2 [1/2]-16***, Guns (Light Auto) (P/E) DX [1]-18***, Guns (Pistol) (P/E) DX+1 [2]-19***, Guns (Rifle) (P/E) DX [1]-18***, Intimidation (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-12, Judo (P/H) DX+2 [16]-18, Judo Art (P/H) [0]-15, Jumping (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-15, Karate (P/H) DX-1 [2]-15, Knife (P/E) DX+3 [8]-19, Law (M/H) IQ-1 [1]-12, Law Enforcement (M/A) IQ [2]-13, Leadership (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-12, Meditation (M/VH) IQ+3 [20]-16, Savoir-Faire (Dojo) (M/E) IQ+4 [8]-17, Savoir-Faire (Military) (M/E) IQ-1 [1/2]-12, Shortsword (P/A) DX-1 [1]-15, Soldier (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-12, Spear (P/A) DX [1]-16, Speed-Load (Pistol) (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-15, Stealth (P/A) DX-1 [1]-15, Streetwise (M/A) IQ [2]-13, Swimming (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-15, Tactics (Infantry) (M/H) IQ-2 [1]-11, Tactics (SWAT) (M/H) IQ [4]-13, Teaching (M/A) IQ+3 [8]-16, Throwing (P/H) DX-2 [1]-14, Tournament Law (Judo) (M/E) IQ+3 [6]-16.

* Includes +1 bonus from Alertness.

** Includes +1 bonus from Combat Reflexes.

*** Includes +2 bonus from IQ.

Maneuvers: Arm Lock (H) [0]-18, Breakfall (A) [0]-18, Choke Hold (H) [1]-18, Close Combat (Knife) (A) [0]-18, Disarming (H) [0]-18, Ground Fighting (Judo) (H) [4]-18, Head Butt (A) [4]-15, Hit Location (Knife) (H) [1]-18, Knee Strike (A) [1/2]-17, Neck Snap (H) [6]-12.

Cinematic: Fairbairn easily qualifies for the Trained by a Master advantage (p. CI31) -- he actually studied under several. In a cinematic campaign, he would have access to a number of cinematic skills and maneuvers, including Immovable Stance, Power Blow, Pressure Points, Push, Binding, Enhanced Dodge, Rolling with Blow, and possibly others.

Languages: English (M/A) IQ [0]-13, Shanghai Chinese (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-11, Japanese (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-11.

Equipment: Wears a black uniform, cap, and boots; armed with a .45 Colt M1911A1 pistol (pp. B208, CL92, HT108, and W94), .45 Auto-Ordnance M1921 Thompson submachine gun (pp. B209, CL93, CV68, and HT116), and razor-sharp custom-made dagger (large knife with *Very Fine* blade, p. B206).

Encountered

Although tall and strong, at first sight Fairbairn gives the somewhat misleading impression of a schoolmaster, especially in civilian dress. He is short-sighted and wears horn-rimmed glasses. Fairbairn is a good but hard trainer, expecting no less than perfection from the students of his combat courses. However, he is a moderate man himself, always eager to admit he doesn't know enough and to learn something new. He is also streetwise enough to know when to run . . .

Fairbairn would be *the* man to have at your side if going after a secret cult bent on bringing back the Mythos gods -- or more mundanely, a simple robbery or a medium-sized attack by Japanese naval infantry . . .

Patrol Officers and Detectives

Most SMP members were uniformed officers, walking the beat in the International Settlement. The majority was Chinese, but many Europeans started out as coppers as well.

Judo [2 points]

Secondary Skills: Shortsword (Baton)

Optional Skills: Body Language

Maneuvers: Arm Lock [2 points], Breakfall, Choke Hold, Disarming [2 points], Knee Strike

They differed slightly in their equipment: European officers were issued a .45 Colt M1911A1 pistol with one spare magazine. The Chinese constables were issued a 9×17mm Colt-Browning Model 1903 pistol (use stats of the FN-Browning Mle 1910, pp. CV66, W92, with Wt. 1.4 and Shots 6) with two magazines, blocked to take only six rounds.

All were issued a baton (p. B206).

In the traffic police department, most officers were Indian Sikhs, who received a .455 [Webley No. 1 Mk VI](#) revolver (pp. CL93, HT110, and W:KM62) with 12 loose rounds and also carried a traditional fighting stick.

The detectives of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) were plain-clothes officers and the only policemen allowed to carry their service pistol at all times.

Problems with spies for Chinese organized crime and the Japanese, possibly including the [Black Dragon Society](#), were severe both among constables and detectives.

The Reserve Unit

Fairbairn formed the Reserve Unit (also known as the Riot Squad) in the 1920s, effectively the world's first SWAT unit (see *GURPS Cops* and *GURPS SWAT* for additional information on SWAT history and operations). Held in reserve, it was intended to quell riots and uprisings, but was also on call to attend special problems, including kidnappings, armed robberies, and barricaded criminals. In addition, its officers guarded high risk cargos, VIPs, and courthouses when the situation demanded it.

The Reserve Unit even had a dedicated sniper detachment, which was trained and led by Fairbairn's close friend, Eric Anthony Sykes (also famous for later training the Commandos).

The unit trained in the Mystery House, the original forerunner of today's CQB houses (p. SWAT8). This was modeled after a Chinese apartment and came with pop-up targets (depicting both friend and foe), audio distractions, etc., intended to train the officers in instinctive and realistic close-combat shooting.

All received thorough unarmed combat training. Most had been trained in Defendu, but quite a few were masters in one or more other styles as well. One of the most proficient was an Irish Detective Sergeant named Dermot "Pat" O'Neill, who was an expert in Hsing Yi, Pakua (p. MA94), and T'ai Chi Chuan (p. MA104), and held a 5th-degree black belt in Jujutsu (p. MA86) . . . he later trained the American 1st Special Service Force (p. W:HS31) in WWII.

The Reserve Unit was armed with Colt M1911A1 pistols, Auto-Ordnance M1921 Thompson submachine guns, 12-gauge Greener Mk III single-shot shotguns (p. W:KM62), and .303 [Lee-Enfield No. 1 Mk III](#) bolt-action rifles (pp. CL93, HT114, and W:KM62). Other equipment included bullet-proof vests (p. HT90) and Red Maria armored buses.

Other Law Enforcement Agencies in Shanghai

The SMP was only responsible for the International Settlement; there were not only several other agencies responsible for other parts of Shanghai, but the extra-territoriality of the International Settlement meant that law enforcement agencies of the "favored nations" could also exercise certain police functions, if only over their own nationals.

However, there was little to none co-operation between the agencies; for much of the 1920s, there was not even a single telephone line between the SMP and the French Concession

Red Maria

The vehicle park of the SMP included Harley-Davidson motorcycles with sidecars and pintle-mounted Thompson SMGs, troop buses, and armored cars. The buses bringing the police to emergencies were painted red, whence their name. Those used by the Reserve Unit were lightly armored against stray shots and pistol bullets. These were converted from commercial passenger vehicles. They had doors in the left side and rear, as well as a hatch in the roof. A bell

Police!

Garde Municipale de la Concession Française (French Concession Police)

The French Concession had its own police force, consisting of 250 French officers, several dozen French and Chinese detectives, 1,800 Chinese policemen, 1,200 Vietnamese guardsmen, and a heavily armed auxiliary unit composed of 500 Russian mercenaries.

Patrol officers and detectives were armed with a 9×17mm FN-Browning Mle 1910/22 pistol (use the Mle 1910, pp. CV66, W94, with Wt. 1.5 and Shots 8+1).

The *Brigade Spéciale* (Special Brigade) was the anti-riot unit and consisted of 250 tall Northern Chinese armed with riot staffs, 9×20mmSR FN-Browning Mle 1903 pistols (p. W:FH32), .45 Auto-Ordnance Mle 1921 submachine guns, and 7.92×57mm Mauser Mle 1898 rifles (pp. CL93, HT114). They also had armored buses.

The *Détachment Auxiliaire Russe* (Russian Auxiliary Detachment) was armed like the special brigade, but also had [armored cars](#) with 8×50mmR Hotchkiss Mle 09 machine guns (p. HT118).

Finally, there was the *Police Spéciale Française* (French Special Police), a mobilization unit composed of French citizen volunteers that could be called upon in emergencies. These were armed with a 7.63×25mm Mauser Mle 1896 pistol (pp. CL92, HT108, and W94).

Nihon Ryoji Keisatsu (Japanese Consular Police)

The Japanese consulate had a large police force (250 men, all expert martial artists) to protect Japan's interests. While they didn't interfere with the SMP in general, they did on occasion arrest their own nationals on warrants issued by the Japanese authorities, without consulting with the SMP. Japanese officers were armed with a saber-style sword (pp. B206, W193 -- *not* a katana!) and an 8×21mm Nambu Taisho 14 Shiki pistol (p. W94).

U.S. Marshal

A U.S. Marshal (and several deputies) was attached to the U.S. Court for China. He served warrants to arrest American citizens, without needing to consult with the SMP.

The Green Gang

The *Ch'ing Pang* (Green Gang) secret society was a huge criminal organization comparable in many respects to the

(instead of a siren) and additional headlights (some of them moveable by hand) were also provided.

The Red Maria uses 2.25 gallons of gasoline per hour of routine usage. A full tank of gas costs \$3.60.

Red Maria

Subassemblies: Large Wheeled chassis +4; 4×heavy wheels +3.

Powertrain: 50-kW standard gas engine with 50-kW wheeled transmission and 24-gallon standard fuel tanks; 4,000-kWs batteries.

Occ: 1 CS, 29 PS Body **Cargo:** 44 Body

Armor

	F	RL	B	T	U
Body:	3/10	3/10	3/10	3/5	3/5W
Wheels:	3/5	3/5	3/5	3/5	3/5

Statistics

Size: 24'×8'×9' **Payload:** 3.1 tons **Lwt.:** 7.2 tons

Volume: 240 **Maint.:** 203 hours **Cost:** \$970

HT: 10. **HPs:** 325 **Body,** 56 each **Wheel.**

gSpeed: 42, **gAccel:** 2, **gDecel:** 10, **gMR:** 0.5, **gSR:** 4

Ground Pressure High. 1/6 **Off-road Speed.**

Design Notes

Designed with the Modular Vehicle Design System in *GURPS WWII*. Weight, cost, and HPs of the body were halved to represent a lighter chassis and get Lwt. to a more realistic level.

Sicilian mafia. It was the true power in Shanghai, its various factions controlling practically all aspects of criminal life, including the vast profits of the illegal opium trade, the gambling rackets, prostitution, weapon smuggling, extortion, kidnapping, murder, etc. The *Pai Hsiang Jen* (gangster-playboys) leading the numerous factions were wealthy, powerful individuals at the time often compared to the gangster bosses in Chicago. They saw themselves in the tradition of Chinese legendary warrior heroes, with a rigid code of honor and elaborate society structure and rules.

For much of the first half of the 20th century, they held Shanghai in their grip, only occasionally bothered by local police. Many Chinese police officers in all three parts of the city were members, and the French Concession actually had a secret deal with the gangs, which offered protection against the warlords outside of Shanghai in exchange for non-prosecution.

For example, the chief of the SMP's Chinese detective squad was also the leader of the *Ta Pa Ku Tang* (Big Eight Mob), a powerful organization within the Green Gang, until removed in 1923.

There was even a secret society made up solely of Chinese detectives working both in the French Concession and the International Settlement, the *Chi Pai Ling Pa Chiang* (108 Warriors). This, too, was part of the Green Gang.

In short, corruption among the police corps was widespread and rampant.

Selected References

[*All About Shanghai and Environs*](#) (Shanghai, 1934). A vintage guidebook, re-published on the web. Excellent day-to-day information, including on courts and legal system, money and banks, and night life.

[*Shanghai in Images*](#). A website featuring hundreds of vintage photographs, including police stations, individual officers, etc. A treasure trove of campaign ideas!

[*Shanghai Municipal Police Directory*](#). An (incomplete) directory of British, Russian, and some Chinese and Japanese members of the SMP.

* * *

Thanks to Mike Hornbostel, Chiaki Hosomi-Ruf, and the Hellions for various checks and suggestions, as well as Achmed Helal, Juri Ruf, and Heiko Wenthin for braving Nyarlathotep back in the days.

Designer's Notes: Monkey, Ninja, Pirate, Robot Deluxe

by Chad Underkoffler

Design History

I guess the biggest question is: "Why?"

The best answer I have is: "James Ernest made me do it."

Now, I've never spoken to the President of [Cheapass Games](#), either in person or electronically, but his wonderful game *Devil Bunny Needs A Ham* (among others in the Cheapass oeuvre) really showed me that with fun gameplay, a wacky rationale for a game can still work. Indeed, I think that some games just work *better* when there's a dash, lump, or hogshhead of arbitrary surrealism thrown into the mix.

[Monkey, Ninja, Pirate, Robot Deluxe](#) started life sans the "Deluxe" as a card game that I had intended to sell as a PDF. The file would be arranged so that customers could print out four different decks (one for each of the title groups) on their home printers using readily available perforated business card sheets. I ran-off a set and corralled friends and family to give it a whirl. Four things became rather clear during this process:

1. The perforated business card sheets were pretty expensive.
2. Assuring that the cards printed out correctly was a nontrivial exercise.
3. It was too easy to mix up cards from different sets.
4. The gameplay was lacking.

While there are some nifty bits from that initial attempt that I want to cannibalize for a later project, on the whole it was obvious that the game was a failure in this format. I put it up on the shelf and tried to live with the pain.

Then, while idly searching through the *Pyramid Archives* for something else, I rediscovered this: "[Cosmic Tilt](#)," by PD Magnus.

As I reread the article, something clicked into place in my skullmeat: my *game didn't* require four decks of cards after all! It was actually a game played with character cards, tokens, and dice!

Aha!

So, while redesigning, I came up with a mechanic that I thought would work. I floated out a RPG-tweaked version of it as a mini-game in "[Polymath Prep](#)," one of my Campaign in a Box columns . . . but nobody really commented on it. Alas.

So, I ran a few playtest games myself and also had a friend run a playtest for me, with folks I've never met. The new version of the game worked: people had fun.

Every *Monkey, Ninja, Pirate, Robot* game is different, depending upon how many people are playing and which MNPR Cards they're using. A game with two Ninjas and a Robot, for example, is strikingly different than a game with a Monkey and a Pirate going one-on-one: the Special Powers of each assure that. In some games, the Ninja will rule, while in others, the Robot dominates. (Possibly the strongest all-around MNPR Card is the Monkey, as is only proper; however, a Pirate can really take the wind out of a Monkey's sails. . .)

Anyway, it's time to take it outside, start grinding the barrel-organ, and make the monkey dance. A Freebie version of the game -- called simply *Monkey, Ninja, Pirate, Robot* -- is available at <http://www.atomicsockmonkey.com/freebies/MNPR.pdf>

What's the difference between the Freebie *Monkey, Ninja, Pirate, Robot* and *Monkey, Ninja, Pirate, Robot Deluxe*? You get five additional MNPR Cards depicting new champions, each with their own special powers; card back images for snazzy double-sided printing, and a blank MNPR Card (so that you may create your own idiosyncratic champion). Reasonably priced for \$5, at online PDF boutiques everywhere. (Well, RPGNow, at least. But the Internet itself is nigh-ubiquitous, so maybe "everywhere" isn't all that far off . . .)

Design Goals

To my mind, a good game requires a little *randomness*, a little *strategy*, and a little *weirdness* (as mentioned above).

I tried to cover randomness with the Atomic Radiation Roll, the rules for Attacking and Defending, and the varied Special Powers. The former two elements rely on rolling six-sided dice for random number generation. The last element -- use and effect of the Special Powers -- injects additional chaos into the current situation of every turn.

Strategy is handled by the resource management of Tokens and Shifts between various Meters. Giving players the ability to increase their odds (at a cost, however) by judicious Shifts puts tactical power into their hands. Additionally, knowing the right time to use -- or avoid using -- a Special Power should be an aspect of a player's strategic thought.

Weirdness is displayed by the premise and tone of the game. Taken at face value, the game is decidedly odd: monkeys and clowns and pirates beating up on one another inside a nuclear reactor. Riiiiight. Also, I think the "Cheapass aesthetic" of ad hoc components united with simple art and inexpensive rules puts a stronger concentration on the *play* of the game rather than getting caught up in side issues of production. Plus, the ability to print out multiple copies of favorite MNPR Cards is a nice feature. People could play an all-Monkey game, if they wanted.

Ultimately, what I'm trying to sell with *Monkey, Ninja, Pirate, Robot Deluxe* (and in a wider sense, with Atomic Sock Monkey Press) is an idea of what I see as the best elements of Ernest's Cheapass aesthetic and Hogshead Games' New Style line of games, back when James Wallis was running the show. I think I can sum it up best as "Come from a different, innovative direction and aim for fun." Time will tell if my method of approaching this concept is viable in the wild or not, but either way, I know that I must attempt the experiment for my own purposes and understanding.

Nifty Bit

Here's an exclusive MNPR Card, available nowhere else: **Pyramidian**. Suitable for use in either *Monkey, Ninja, Pirate, Robot* or *Monkey, Ninja, Pirate, Robot Deluxe* games, this MNPR Card is only available to the few, the proud, the *Pyramid* subscribers. Imagine the surprise, fear, and horror in your competitors' eyes when you whip this baby out and slap it on the gaming table!

Shilling, now *sans* Shame!

If you enjoy the Freebie version of *Monkey, Ninja, Pirate, Robot*, please consider picking up *Monkey, Ninja, Pirate, Robot Deluxe*. If response is good, there's a strong possibility for new MNPR Card packs in the future.

This Just In. . .

To my delight and surprise, *Monkey, Ninja, Pirate, Robot Deluxe* recently received a nomination for the 2003 Origins Awards, in the category of Best Abstract Board Game. I'm very gratified by this -- it makes me feel like folks really are interested out there. However, the one down-side to this (as was pointed out by a friend) is that when your first project garners a nomination for a major award, for the rest of your career you will have to strive to continue to fill those shoes, and surpass them, if possible.

Well, I'm going to try. I've offered up [*Dead Inside: the Roleplaying Game of Loss & Redemption*](#) as a serious RPG, and just recently [*Monkey, Ninja, Pirate, Robot: the Roleplaying Game*](#) as a silly one. With luck and the support of customers like you, I'll try to keep them shoes moving forward.

Pyramid Review

Gehenna: Time of Judgment (for Vampire: the Masquerade)

Published by [White Wolf Publishing, Inc.](#)

Written by Bjørn T. Boe, Travis-Jason Feldstein, Christopher Kobar & Dean Shomshak

Illustrated by Guy Davis, Michael Gaydos, Vince Locke, Matt Mitchell, Christopher Shy, Josh Timbrook, Andy Trabbold & Drew Tucker

250-page b&w hardcover; \$29.95

Editor's Note: Much of this review contains Spoiler material, and may be inappropriate to those who would participate as players in any of the adventures.

So this is it -- the end of the world. Or rather, the end of the World of Darkness, as White Wolf Studios brings to fruition prophecies first recorded 13 years ago in *Vampire: the Masquerade*. The much-prophesied time of Gehenna is here, when the Antediluvians, Caine's grand child *and* the clan founders return to devour their descendants. In ending one of the hobby's most popular, and sometimes most controversial RPGs, *Gehenna: Time of Judgment* is also the first title in a series that will end the other World of Darkness RPGs before an all new setting and system, *Vampire: The Requiem*, returns in August 2004.

For starters, *Gehenna* blows the setting wide open, lifting the lid on the game's big secrets. Primarily this is the location of all of the Antediluvians, though in some cases, you are not given the straight story, mostly for the purposes of good storytelling.

For example, the Nosferatu Antediluvian, is variously described as having failed a suicide attempt after centuries of self-loathing, as not being the Nosferatu Antediluvian, and in *Gehenna's* fourth scenario, as returning in highly spectacular fashion to wreak havoc on the plans of his fellow generation Cainites. Despite this occasional lack of the definitive answer, this supplement probably gives the nearest thing to a straight answer. Not that it matters, since *Gehenna* is designed as a tool kit to help a Storyteller craft a Gehenna-themed conclusion to his chronicle.

The opening chapter, "The Final Nights," draws together and examines the prophetic elements of various White Wolf releases from *The Book of Nod* to [Hunter: the Reckoning](#), the game being suffused with allusions to various and sundry prophecies. More specifically, this chapter examines the Antediluvians' rise, and the true nature and purpose of the Inconnu, the Last Daughter of Eve, and the Jyhad. This is all from the Occidental viewpoint of the Sabbat and the Camarilla, leaving Storytellers of either *Kindred of the East* or *Kindred of the Ebony Kingdom* pretty much to their own devices. The place of the humble mortal or kine figures in two of *Gehenna's* four scenarios, as both sustenance *and* vengeful armed foes. Several stories and events, along with handouts are included to involve the mere mortals in the lead up to *Gehenna*.

The most notable of these events is the Withering. Literally, the blood running through Cainite veins thins, losing potency and weakening kindred disciplines. Worryingly, the only way to offset this phenomenon is the act of Diablerie, which results in a frenzy of infighting among both the Sabbat and the Camarilla. As to the Withering's

cause? The arrival of the Red Star in the night sky? A new disease, or the strange plans of a mage? Or has something happened to Caine himself? Only the Storyteller can decide. One piece of advice for the Storyteller made clear in *Gehenna* is that its events are not meant to be in any way, shape, or form, *fair*. It is, after all, the End of the World.

"Wormwood" is *Gehenna's* first scenario, and as the most focused of the four is also the most easily run as a Live Action event. Drawing heavily on Biblical tradition, it has God sending a second flood to wipe out every vampire. Not a literal one, as destroyed the First City, but a metaphysical one. Heralded by the Red Star's arrival, "Wormwood" is a poison that will kill every Kindred after "Forty Nights" of Withering and suffering. Fortunately, redemption is offered to the player coterie in a disused church where they must stay for the whole of the Forty Nights. Thrown together with friends and foes, "Wormwood" is their moral crucible. Can they survive their sheltered existence and overcome all manner of moral quandaries, or will they fall prey to their inhuman nature? At the end, each vampire can repent his past sins. Fail and they are literally ash. Prove themselves worthy in the eyes of God, and they will be gifted the ultimate reward: their mortality. They are now free to explore a new world bereft of the Curse of Caine.

"Fair is Foul" is the second scenario, drawing on Judeo-Christian tradition to focus on Lilith's vengeance upon Caine. Previously examined in *Revelations of the Dark Mother* and *The Erciyes Fragments*, she is an archetypal figure easily adapted to fit a Storyteller's chronicle. There is plenty of information to help with this, including a mini-biography. Not so much a scenario as a framework, "Fair is Foul" will need some development before play, with an encounter with a young girl, a dhampir, and the seven bums who seem to protect her while she is on the streets marking the campaign's start. It inexorably draws the coterie into Lilith's plans, such that they become her pawns. Besides offering another chance for redemption, the scenario can end with an alternative existence at Lilith's side. Despite the wealth of background, this is probably the least playable of the four scenarios. Mainly this is due to the coterie being at Lilith's whim and little able to influence events.

Unlike the first two scenarios, "Nightshade" is anything but subtle. Until now the Masquerade has kept the Kindred hidden from the kine, but when the corpse of the Tzimisce Antediluvian surfaces and rampages across Manhattan, the coterie's efforts to stop it are caught on camera and broadcast on CNN. With the existence of vampires an irrefutable truth, the Camarilla fractures, and the coterie are asked to help form a new sect, the Nephthali. It sets out to investigate and perhaps stave off the coming End, mounting a series of globe-trotting quests to that purpose. These take the coterie to Berlin and Sweden in search of the False Caine, to the edges of Shadowland and beyond as they penetrate the tomb in which Cappadocius imprisoned 12,000 of his children, and ultimately to the Second City itself. A mix of Cainite archaeology and high adventure (including a visit to the city of Tanis!), "Nightshade" gives the coterie lots of interesting things to do and places to be, but at the climax it casts them as members of the chorus line with little to do.

"The Crucible of God" is the last scenario, and lives up to all of *Gehenna's* promises of Armageddon. Again the coterie breaks the Masquerade, but unlike "Nightshade" they do so on a far more *ordinary* level, just doing what vampires do. They can do nothing about this, for as the scenario openly states, they are "Destiny's bitches." Initially there is peace between kine and kindred, but eventually the kindred's secrets are too much, and war ensues. As mortal civilization breaks down, the Antediluvians make their play, returning to consume the Methuselaha, inaugurating the Reign of Blood. The attempt to raise Set fails, and so he calls all Setites to him; Lasombra brings permanent night; and Nosferatu stalks the land in the belly of dinosaur-sized monsters. The return, one-by-one, of the remaining Antediluvians occurs against a post-apocalyptic background, and while getting the coterie from one place to another to see each return is somewhat difficult, the chance to witness the sheer grandeur of the events in this scenario makes it worth it. That grandeur is both the scenario's strength and weakness. In some ways, *Vampire: the Masquerade* has always pandered to the "superhero-by-night" school of play, but "The Crucible of God" instead turns it up to 11. Ever wonder what kind of capabilities come with a Discipline rating of 10 dots? Two words -- "Plot Device." This scenario is a helter-skelter ride to the finale, which pleasingly comes down to the player characters. If they survive, they again have the chance to explore a very different world, one that could form the basis of a whole new campaign.

Gehenna's advice for the Storyteller on running an End of the World chronicle is perhaps too obvious, essentially telling him to keep it focused on the personal level. Given this supplement's momentous nature, there is surprisingly little new here. The appendix details various characters from the four scenarios, while a final section explores the use of Caine in a *Gehenna* campaign. This seems almost superfluous, since he really only appears in "Fair is Foul."

Physically *Gehenna* is a sturdy hardback with a hardly a problem to it, save for the supposed BBC news reports in "Nightshade," which feel very un-English; there is only the occasional lapse in verb tense present to let the writing down. The book does lack an index, and given the size and complexity of this supplement and its subject, this should have been considered a necessity.

If you have been running a *Vampire: the Masquerade* chronicle, then *Gehenna* is nigh on a must. It refreshes a Storyteller's toolbox with plots and ideas to suit most chronicles. "Wormwood's" introverted nature will appeal to role-players, while "The Crucible of God" and "Nightshade" offer both combat and grandeur by night. Running any of *Gehenna's* four scenarios will be challenge, but the book also contains myriad ideas with which a Storyteller can create his own.

Bringing *Vampire: the Masquerade* to an end was always going to be an ambitious undertaking. Showcasing four ways that it could be done is probably the best way to do this, allowing a Storyteller to bring *Gehenna: Time of Judgment* to his chronicle the way he wants to.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Review

Fast Figure

Published by [Playroom Entertainment](#)

Created by Keith Meyers

Graphic design by Design Edge, Inc. & Elisa Anya Jaeger

Color boxed set with 400 Fast Figure cards, six colored "It Figures" cards, 4 Point cards, starter card, plastic card tray, rules; \$19.95

There are a lot of party games out there these days that claim to be fast and fun. Perhaps operating under the assumption that these will be played by those with a short attention span, or folks who want an excuse to get together more than the game itself, few of these require you to do serious mental gymnastics under the gun. *Fast Figure* from Playroom Entertainment is a little different.

The object of the game is to score the most points.

Each player (the game accommodates three to six) gets an "It Figures!" card of a different color, and everyone takes a turn at being the Reader. The Reader places a special zero-value card on the table near him and the deck, and then places one of the Fast Figure cards midway across the table where everyone can read it.

There are 400 of these Fast Figure cards in the deck. They have common knowledge questions on them, things most everybody knows or could puzzle out (or guesstimate) given enough time (which is in short supply). The answer is always a numerical value from one to 100, and the deck is numbered thusly four times. How many squares are there on a chess board?¹ How many years between the release of Coke and Coca-Cola's second product, Fanta?² What's $4 \times 10 + 10 + 1$?³ How many days does it take for the moon to orbit the Earth?⁴ What is three cubed?⁵

Once everyone knows what number they're dealing with, the Reader will draw another card. This one he reads aloud, but the players must answer it for themselves. When he finishes reading, he says "Go figure," and players snatch up their "It Figures!" cards. They slap them down, trying to place it where they think the new answer falls -- between the zero and the face-up Fast Figure card, or between the face-up card and the other end of the table. Whoever places their card correctly first (as judged by the Reader) receives the first of the four point cards, worth one point. If no one places their card in the right area, that point card goes to the Reader. The knowledge card that was just read is then placed in the lineup.

The Reader pulls another card, reads it, and players again throw out their "It Figures!" cards. Now, however, there are three places where the answer might fall -- but the reward goes to two points. The Reader continues this process, adding the expired cards to the formation and giving out point cards one through four. Then the cards are swept up and the next Reader repeats the process. When everyone has had a turn at reading, the scores from each round are tallied and the high score is the winner. Ties go to a sudden death round for those with equal high scores.

The graphic design is good, with big numbers and clear writing, though given the game's speed this isn't likely to be a consideration for anyone but the Reader. The set comes unshuffled, so all 400 cards have to be carefully and meticulously shuffled to ensure some randomization. They're standard-sized cards, but there are an awful lot of them. The deck stock also feels a bit thin -- nothing to worry about for Fast Figure cards, but the It Figures! cards see more rigorous use.

Fast Figure is rather unpredictable, but that might work against it in some ways. Since you want your "It Figures!" card out before anyone else, some folks will resort to tossing their cards out at random in hopes of a favorable result. This is a much more useful strategy at the start when the odds are about even, and things do tend to level out by round's end, but there's no penalty for guessing. For advanced play, the rules recommend starting the game with two or three Fast Figure cards already on the table to make it a little tougher. If players are finding too much random card play, this might also be a workable solution.

And you're not going to run out of cards. With so many of them, there's plenty of replay value. Even if you learn the answers to all 400 questions, speed is still essential in recalling and ordering the information. There's a lot of mileage to be gotten out of the set, saving consumers from the headaches of buying supplemental decks just to keep the game fresh. While Fast Figure may not fire on all cylinders, it's still as quick as its name suggests, it carries some fascinating nuggets of information both academic and popular, and it's a good blend of education and entertainment.

¹ 64

² 74

³ 51

⁴ 27

⁵ Again, 27

--*Andy Vetromile*

Pyramid Review

MLB SportsClix

Published by WizKids

Designed by Jason Little, Jim Long, and Mike Mulvihill

Starter Sets: \$19.99; Booster Packs: \$6.99

When it was announced a while back that WizKids, the company behind the hits *Mage Knight*, *HeroClix*, and *MechWarrior*, had been purchased by Topps, the sports card, entertainment card, and novelty candy company, the jokes immediately started flying. "What are they going to do -- *BaseballClix*? *FootballClix*? *HockeyClix*? Well, yes. The first of WizKids' *SportsClix* games, *MLB SportsClix*, hit the shelves just in time for the 2004 baseball season.

MLB SportsClix comes in the now-familiar Starter Set/Booster Pack configuration. There are two starter sets available, one with nine American League players, one with nine National Leaguers. Each starter set also comes with a rulebook, a playmat, a handful of special dice, and some counters. Each starter set has the same nine players in it, some good, some merely average -- if you want different (or better) players, or any of the uncommon or rare players, you'll have to buy Booster Packs, with three random players in each box.

How does it play? Surprisingly well. The rules are presented clearly, and are divided into three levels of difficulty. Preseason is just the basics; players with any familiarity with baseball and other "clicky-base" games can skip this version, and even complete newbies will want to move on quickly. The Regular Season has many of the features that make the game a decent baseball simulation, but any serious baseball fan will want to go to the Playoffs level after only a few Regular Season games. It's only at the Playoff level that the full potential of the clicky-bases comes into play. (There is a Championship level beyond Playoff, but it adds only a couple of features that mostly revolve around team-building and league play.)

For each at-bat, the pitcher picks between a Control die and a Velocity die, while the batter picks between a Contact die and a Power die. The batter also rolls a d6. The icons on the first two dice are matched up, and the result is read off either the pitcher's or batter's base (the other two combinations are Total Control for either the batter or pitcher, and special rules apply). Some results are read straight-up off the appropriate player's base, but others require more work. A "Paint the Corner" result, for example, requires the pitcher to roll his Velocity die again -- on a Velocity result (4 in 6 chance), he gets the strikeout; but if one of the other faces comes up, it's a walk. There are enough different results to cover all the possibilities in a major league game, and the mechanics work pretty well.

Many games include a playmat, but *MLB SportsClix* is the first one I've seen where you really need it to play. The reason is the six hitting zones on the diamond. Each player has a "spray chart" on his clicky-base, which indicates, using numbers from 1-6, which zones he will hit the ball into. The defensive player gets to look at this chart, and then pick where his fielders will play. A regular fly ball hit into a zone where an outfielder is standing is an automatic out; but if it's hit into an empty zone, a fielder in an adjacent zone must make a fielding check (add his fielding score to a 2d6 roll and beat a 10) to make the catch. Other results (a Scorcher, for example) require a fielding check even when a fielder is in the right zone, and a check at a penalty when he has to chase the ball down. This feature makes *MLB SportsClix* the first baseball simulation I've ever played that took defensive positioning into account, so I'm impressed.

Getting the clicky-bases involved seemed like a difficult task, but the designers managed to pull it off. After all, baseball players don't get wounded or healed in the course of a game the way fantasy warriors or superheroes or giant tanks do. What they do get, however, is hot and cold, and that's what the clicky-bases are used for in *MLB SportsClix*. Batters gain a click with every hit. When a run scores, a click goes to either the batter who drove him in or the player

who scored. Great fielding plays also earn a click. Pitchers get a click for a 1-2-3 inning, or a relief pitcher coming in with men in scoring position and keeping them from scoring. Hitters lose clicks for making the third out with a runner in scoring position, or with an error, and pitchers lose clicks for every run over 5 they allow and every inning they pitch beyond their endurance rating. The more clicks you go, the better -- or worse, if you're clicking down -- the results on your base chart get. On the two icon combinations that don't appear on the bases (the Total Control results), the batter or pitcher not only gets to click up one level, he then gets to pick what result he wants off the newly improved chart.

The other feature of other clicky-base games -- special abilities -- is also in *MLB SportsClix*. This part of the rules feels a little shoehorned-in, like the designers felt they had to add special abilities, clicky-base style, and were struggling a bit for ways to do it -- but it's not too intrusive and can sometimes be a bit fun when you get to use them. Some of the abilities cost a click to activate, which is a nice balancing feature that doesn't let one player pummel the other into submission with specials. Some of the abilities give you meta-game control of the bases: Leadership lets you take a click up you've earned and instead give it to another player on your team; Intimidation allows you to forego the click up you get with Total Control and instead force the opposing batter (or pitcher) to click down.

The only gaming downsides worth mentioning are that moving all the figures on and off the playmat "field" between half innings gets old pretty fast, and for an old bi-focaled guy like me, the information on the clicky-bases (not the results chart, but the other info, like speed and defensive rating) is awfully small and difficult to read. Also, the collectible aspect of *MLB SportsClix* doesn't do a whole lot for me, because the figures, while marvels of lifelike representation at their small size, just don't look good enough for me to envision putting them in a case or on a shelf display. And some of the players use the same pose with different paint jobs, a shortcut I don't think WizKids has taken with any of their other products, though it doesn't affect game play at all.

As a fan (and player) of many different baseball simulations, I can appreciate the design of *MLB SportsClix* and would enjoy playing the game on a pastime basis. I'm not enamored of it enough to become a collector or to get involved in big-time league or tournament play, but that shouldn't stop you from checking out a set and deciding for yourself.

--Scott D. Haring

Bricks and Bones May Build My Throne

Building blocks -- and variations thereof -- have always been some of the most popular children's toys. There are a myriad of reasons for this, not the least of which because blocks have the sharp angles and swallowable natures that kids have enjoyed for millennia. "Hey, Cladivs! I successfvly jammed that dovlbe-brick down my throat!" precociouvs Roman IV-year-olds wovld say.

But beyond that, there's a very human appreciation for taking basic pieces and using them to shape more complex constructs, especially if the result satisfies a unique desire or vision of the builder.

And, of course, this applies to gaming as well.

Over the next couple of weeks, then, I'm going to look at the metaphor of the building block, and see how it applies to various games. This week I'm fondly remembering various board, card, and non-RPG games I have known and loved.

Some of my favorite board and card games tap into the building-block concept. *Wiz-War*, *Munchkin*, *Strange Synergy*, *Talisman*, and many others all work best when the players use basic building block elements and combine them into new and interesting ways. ("Ah-ha! I use my Rorrim Elemental to transform my Spooneristic Bethdolt's 6D into reflective damage, then use my Plutonium Tuning Fork to double all reflective damage! Eat crunchy chocolaty coco-death!") And, of course, the granddaddy of all games uses relatively simple maneuvers of abstracted white and black knights, castle fortifications, and powerful nobles to become the richest, most universal application of pure strategy known throughout the world. (I'm speaking, of course, about *Magic: The Gathering*.)

In trying to think back to my earliest building-block-type game, I came to a surprising conclusion: Two-Player *Uno*. Growing up as an only child in South Florida, where the median age is usually expressed as a double-digit factorial, my opportunities to play large communal games were usually limited. As such, from the time I was a wee lad, I was playing old Avalon Hill and SPI boxed-set wargames with my stepdad -- the kind of games that had a kajillion chit-pieces, boards that unfolded to the size of Monoco, and gargantuan booklets written at a six-point font that related with normal rule sheets in roughly the same way the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* relates to the Ten Commandments. But I still played a number of "normal" games. Although I figured out very early that games such as *Chutes & Ladders* and *Candy Land* can be played equally well solo (or, more satisfyingly, without any players whatsoever), other traditional games still made their way into our gamerly lexicon. One of them was *Uno*, a game very similar to *Crazy Eights* only a tad more copyrightable.

Now, the interesting thing is that a two-player version of *Uno* is very much a building-block game, because practically *any* of the special cards -- "Reverse," "Draw Two," "Draw Four," and "Skip" -- revert play back to the person who played the card. As a result, most two-player games of *Uno* become a challenge to see who can combine the basic building blocks of the game into the most devastating combo sequence of these special cards: "Green Reverse back to me! Green Draw Two to you! Yellow Draw Two to you! Yellow Skip you! Red Skip you! And a Wild card, Blue, and 'Uno.' Your turn."

It was thus with some disappointment that I realized, upon playing *Uno* for the first time with a large group, that this block aspect is all but nonexistent with more than two people. I believe I cried when I learned this, and curled up in a corner to eat some crayons; it was a rough fifteenth birthday party.

Most building-block games are playable -- albeit, in some cases, barely -- without using any of the combinatorial aspects of building block games. If you only wanted to play one card at a time in *Wiz-War*, for example, you can. But one interesting aspect of some board and card games are those that *require* a building block aspect to play. I believe my first exposure to this kind of game was the Milton Bradley Gamemaster Series classic *Broadsides and Boarding Parties*, a game whose scale model ships and tiny cutlass-wielding plastic pirates delighted me as an 11-year-old, and trained my mother to forego bare feet in lieu of slippers. Anyway, the movement system in this game had each player choose their three movement cards at the beginning of the turn in secret, then reveal them, one at a time, with movement occurring simultaneously. Thus one player might choose "Sail Ahead / Turn Starboard / Sail Ahead," while

the other chooses "Remain in Place / Sail Ahead / Sail Ahead." **RoboRally** would use a similar movement mechanic many years later, and some card games -- such as **Fluxx**, **Pokémon** and various "gin"-type games -- use a similar system to ensure that cards only work if built off other kinds of cards.

Regardless, practically all building-block games have a similar trait: Predominantly simple blocks that can be combined with others to form more complex elements. In addition, many board and card games have complicated "blocks," much like the odd pieces in various click-block building sets; sure, it can be harder to visualize where, exactly, those blocks go, but once you figure out a use the results can be really spiffy. This trait will be important over the next couple of weeks as I show how to incorporate more metaphorical blocks into roleplaying games.

But for now, I'd encourage all you board and card game fans out there to really look at your games, and see how they might incorporate building block elements. On a basic level, understanding how those building blocks interact can help you devise strategies, or even variants. For example, **Scrabble** is a building-block game, albeit a very basic one. But how would it be different if new rules built more on the building block aspect? For example, what if a double-vowel inherited the point modifier directly above the double letters, while a double-consonant inherits the point modifier directly below the double? Suddenly blocking off triple-word scores becomes more difficult, using a blank for "QUIZZER" becomes viable, and adding "BOOK" to "KEEPER" can have very interesting results. (If anyone comes up with any neat variants while thinking about their favorite games, feel free to send 'em my way at pyramid@sjgames.com and I might share 'em in my column!)

But until next time, dig up your favorite building block toys or games, and have fun. Trust me . . . they taste as good as you remember.

* * *

As another gentle note from your Benevolent Editor for Life, I'd remind you all that, if you're reading this column before 7PM Central Time on Friday, Sean Punch and Paul Chapman will be having another chat about **GURPS Fourth Edition** at that time. The topic is Talents, Expert Skills, and the upcoming Origins convention. If you've never participated in a chat before, please feel free to join us; trust me . . . very few of us in the chat rooms bite.

--Steven Marsh

Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Horse Sense

by S. E. Mortimer

Introduction

Horses, integral to any low-tech setting, are often seriously neglected by roleplayers. Poul Anderson wrote an essay titled "[On Thud and Blunder.](#)" in which he criticizes fantasy authors for treating the horse as some sort of medieval sportscar with a constantly refilling gas tank. PCs are often guilty of the same thing -- riding the horse all day and "parking" them in the nearest stables at night, tossing the "keys" to the hapless "valet" before going to find a bed and a drink. This article attempts to show the roleplayer that the costly purchase price of a horse is only the beginning of his expenses, and demonstrates why only the wealthy could afford to own and maintain the best horses.

Horse Size

A horse's height is measured in "hands." One hand equals about 4 inches and height is measured from the ground to the "withers" (shoulders).

Pony

The smallest horse, they are typically 9 to 14 hands high and weigh about 600 lbs on average (250 to 850 pounds). Virtually all horses in the ancient world were ponies -- from those pulling Egyptian and Hittite chariots, through to those depicted on the Parthenon and Trajan's Column. Specific pony breeds like the Norwegian Fiord, Mongolian steppe pony, and English Shetland pony are stronger than a regular horse of equivalent weight, but all ponies can bear a human rider with little trouble.

Light Horses

The typical horse in the medieval and modern world. Breeds include Arabians, thoroughbreds, mustangs, jennets, and so on. These horses were also preferred for warfare. They typically stand 14 to 17 hands tall and weigh about 900 pounds on average (ranging from 600 to 1,200 lbs).

Draft Horses

These are mistakenly believed to have been specifically bred for war in the medieval world. This is not the case, nor was the draft horse bred to pull a plough. Draft horses were bred for one purpose -- drawing heavy carts. Clydesdales and Percherons are typical draft horses, standing over 17 hands tall and weighing around 1,400 pounds on average. They were very rare in the medieval world and not much use until road conditions improved in the 17th and 18th centuries. Their barrels were very wide, making them uncomfortable to ride and they were difficult to ride any faster than a trot, since their gait became an awkward "galumph."

Horse Types

Horses had three purposes -- war, work, and transportation. Many wealthy nobles not only maintained dozens of horses for themselves, their family, and servants, but also bred them for sale. Throughout the medieval period, Normandy-bred horseflesh was usually considered the best. However, horses were not distinguished by "breeds" as such. A horse was categorized by the purpose to which it was best suited, regardless of its breed or place of origin.

Asses

Asses are also categorized according to size. A burro is the smallest type, weighing 300-400 lbs. A donkey weighs 400-500 lbs, and an ass weighs

500-600 lbs.

A mule is the result of cross-breeding a horse with an ass. Mules are usually sterile and are much stronger than horses. They weigh 700-800 lbs.

Destrier: A refined and highly trained stallion. Often used in tournaments, destriers were ridden to war only by the most wealthy. They needed to be reasonably fast so they couldn't be too large (15-16 hands was an average height, and 1,200 lbs was a typical weight), but they had no trouble carrying an armored knight and his weapons. *GURPS* refers to this as a "heavy warhorse" (B144). A modern equivalent may be the finely bred and highly trained dressage horse.

Courser: Smaller and less expensive than the destrier, coursers were very suitable for war, being long winded and strong. They were usually faster and more maneuverable than destriers. *GURPS* refers to this as a "cavalry horse" (B144). Today they may be referred to as hunters or endurance horses.

Rouncy: This is the all-rounder -- suitable for war, riding, and work. Less expensive than a courser, a rouncy made a good squire's horse. Use the listing for "saddle horse" on B144.

Screwbald: A general-purpose horse like the rouncy, but a little smaller. Use the listing for pony on B144.

Hackney: Not as well-bred as a rouncy but usually a little stronger. A trained ass or mule may also be classed as a hackney. Use the listing for "large mule" on B144.

Palfrey: An expensive, well-bred horse trained to have a smooth gait and good endurance. These were the best riding horses available and only owned by wealthy individuals. Use the listing for "racehorse" on p. B144. Very finely bred mules were also sometimes referred to as palfreys.

Jennet: A small palfrey. This gaited horse was considered suitable for ladies. The term originally dates to the 12th century and denoted a small Spanish warhorse. Use the listing for "pony" on p. B144.

Sumpter: A strong, reliable pony or ass used for carrying loads. Common in baggage trains. Use the listing for "small mule" on B144.

Sumpters and hackneys were likely to have been the most commonly used horses for farm work, though rouncies were also used. Coursers made the best hunting horses (see *Hunting*, below). For warfare, stallions were preferred because they were more aggressive. See *Purchase Price*, below, for detail about pricing.

Horse Classifications

An excerpt from an early 16th century English song:

*A courser for the warrior
A rounsey for the squire,
A sumpter for the baggage-train,
A screwbald for the friar
But I will braid the jennet
And shine the bridal-reign
For the riding of my lady
When she is home again.*

*A destrier for the jousting,
A hackney for the maid,
A palfrey for the princely one
Who preens it on parade:
But I will gloss the jennet*

History

War

The earliest evidence of horse domestication comes from Siberia and is dated to around 6,500 B.C. These were quite small and unsuitable for riding, though these ponies could draw loads. During the Bronze Age, ponies were bred for pulling light war chariots. Chariot cultures included the Egyptians, Hittites, Mykenaians, Aryan Indians, and the Chinese. Recent studies indicate that the steppe nomads of central Asia were the first to ride the horse in the 4th millennium B.C., but in the West, cavalry warfare did not develop until the Iron Age.

The Macedonians were the first to effectively develop heavy cavalry. Although they did not have the benefit of the stirrup, Macedonian heavy cavalry was an important corps of the army and proved effective as shock troops.

*That is cosy in the hay
For the riding of my lady
In the merry month of May.*

The Romans also used cavalry units. Instead of stirrups, they developed a horned saddle to enable the rider to fight more effectively from horseback (see LT79). The Romans also relied extensively of Gallic and German cavalry units

and it is these that are believed to be the predecessors of the medieval knight.

During the Middle Ages, a wealthy knight would take several horses to battle. His magnificent destrier would have been expertly bred and highly trained, able to bear its armored rider into combat and withstand the terrors of battle, but it was not suited for long distance riding. On his way to battle, the knight would have ridden a palfrey or a courser, and led a pack horse or two to carry his baggage. Before entering a town he would switch to his destrier, taking the opportunity to also change into more impressive clothing. His entrance would be befitting his rank, striking the peasants with awe and maintaining proper etiquette with his host and peers.

Hunting

Hunting was the favorite pastime of the nobility. Often the best horses owned by a noble were those bred and trained for hunting. Coursers made the best hunting horses, possessing speed, great stamina, and intelligence. Hunters and warhorses required a specialized diet of hay and grain to maintain peak physical condition (see *Feeding a Horse*, below).

Farming

From the Bronze age through to the early Middle Ages, the ox was the preferred beast of burden on the farm. There is evidence to suggest that the Romans made use of farm horses, but the ox was far more prevalent. With the rediscovery of the horseshoe (originally invented by the Celts and adopted by the Romans) in Europe during the early Middle Ages, the horse became far more useful on the farm because the iron shoe prevented the soft, wet earth from damaging the horse's hooves. Other inventions such as the horse collar, tandem harnessing, and the heavy mold-board plough (see LT77) increased the efficiency of farm horses.

Despite the fact that horses were more expensive to buy, required specialized feed, constant care, and good shelter, they gradually supplanted the ox as the preferred work animal. Horses were no stronger than the ox but had better stamina, enabling them to work more hours during the day. They were faster than the ox, and more intelligent, enabling them to be controlled by voice commands. This meant that a second person was no longer required in front to lead the team. Horses were also far more versatile than oxen.

The feudal system enabled the peasant greater access to horses since they could be rented from the local lord when needed. Sometimes villages owned communal horses and ploughs that were available for all to use. Wealthy peasants owned their own horses. As the Middle Ages progressed, the percentage of farmers who owned their own horses increased.

Travel

Riding

Mules and asses were often the preferred mounts of many because they were hardier, cheaper, and easier to maintain. They were distinctly unfashionable, though, so a noble would rarely be caught riding anything other than a horse. In the medieval world a horse under three years of age was considered too young for riding but may be trained to pull a load. At four years they were trained to bear a saddle. A horse in its prime would be five to eight years old.

A well-fed coarser or palfrey had the endurance to trot all day, and a fast trot might cover 25 miles per hour on a reasonable road (equivalent to a "bad" road on p. B188). Unfortunately, once burdened with a load or rider, average speeds decrease, and the horse would need to be rested and fed several times during the day.

A healthy horse traveling along reasonable roads with readily available feed (hay and grain) could carry a third of its weight and maintain a walking speed of four miles per hour for up to 10 hours a day (40 miles). If the animal must forage for grass then travel time is reduced to about six hours per day (24 miles) and the maximum burden drops to about 20% of the horse's weight. Grass-fed mules, asses, and ponies can carry about 25% of their weight but are slower, averaging only *half* that of a horse (12 miles per day). This workload could be maintained for several weeks without putting too much strain on the animal.

Galloping

Horses are only designed to run over short distances -- long enough to evade predators. With endurance training and a good diet of hay and grain, a horse may gallop for longer. See p. B135-136 for more on *Movement*.

Drawing a Load

An animal can often be used as a draft horse even if it is too young or weak for riding. A horse can pull its own body weight in a wheeled cart (this includes the weight of the vehicle) on a reasonable road at the same speed mentioned above (four miles per hour). In a sledge, speed is *halved*. A horse might be able to pull twice this burden for short periods at a painful plod of one mile per hour. See p. B145 for more on *Encumbrance*, and p. B89 for *Lifting and Moving Things*.

Purchase Price.

Horses were expensive, both to purchase and to maintain. Prices fluctuated considerably depending on the prevalence of war and the success of the harvest. For example, horse prices *doubled* from the beginning of the 13th century to the beginning of the 14th century. *GURPS Low-Tech* suggests that the monthly wage of an average craftsman is \$100 (LT8). Using this as a guide it seems as if the prices in *GURPS Basic Set* (B144) are fairly reasonable for common horses. A good rouncy (saddle horse), for example, would cost about a year's wages or \$1,200 -- exactly the price listed. However, fine horses are far too cheap in *GURPS*. For example, during Chaucer's time (14th century), a knight's horse could cost up to 200 times the price of an ordinary plough horse. This means that a heavy warhorse should cost \$200,000 or more, rather than the measly \$5,000 listed on B144. This is equivalent to the difference between a mass-produced commercial vehicle and a professionally-assembled racing car today.

For those wanting realism, prices should be revised as follows: A finely bred and fully trained palfrey or courser should cost around \$80,000. A destrier would be closer to \$100,000. A jennet is a type of palfrey, but smaller and less expensive, say \$30,000. If the horse has been "blooded" in combat then its cost might *double*, resulting in a purchase price of \$160,000 for a courser and \$200,000 for a fully trained and blooded destrier -- this was a highly specialized mount that was very rare and very valuable.

Buying a Horse

In a village, almost all of the horses will be owned by the lord. In the 13th century, very few peasants were wealthy enough to own their own plough and horse. Most either rented them from the lord, or sometimes the village maintained communal horses available to all. Horses became more readily available as the Middle Ages progressed, and horse traders became more prevalent during the same time. A common horse trader can be used to purchase all but the finest horses. If one wanted to buy a palfrey, courser, or destrier, then one needs to find a noble who has an interest in breeding and training these animals.

The Horse Trader

He was the medieval equivalent of the used car salesman. Even today, the word "horse trader" is synonymous with double-dealing swindler. A horse trader with an honest reputation was rare, and the only way to get a fair deal when buying a horse is to have some knowledge about horseflesh. You can ask questions about the horse's background: Is

the horse fully trained? Has it suffered any recent lameness or illness? Is it sound and free from vices? Is the horse easy to handle?

It doesn't really matter what questions you ask, you're unlikely to be told the truth. Here is a sample of some of the horse trader's responses along with what he is *really* saying.

"This horse is fully trained."	"It has been ridden a couple of times."
"The horse is strong and sound."	"The horse is about to go lame and I hope you don't try to ride it."
"The horse is in perfect health."	"Please give me the money before this horse collapses."
"This horse has a lot of potential."	"I can think of nothing positive to say about this horse."
"This horse is ideal for children."	". . . so long as the child is 6'2" and stronger than you."

The only real way to ensure a good deal is to examine the horse yourself, or bring along an expert to do it for you. Checking the horse's teeth is a good indication of the horse's age. Putting your ear against its chest and listening to its breathing can indicate whether it has had any lung afflictions. Looking at its coat and posture indicates how well the horse has been groomed and maintained. Pretending to kick the horse in the ribs will tell you if it has been abused (if it has, it will shy away in anticipation of the blow). Watching it move and examining its hooves will indicate whether there are any foot or leg problems. Finally, take it for a ride -- this is the best way to get a feel for the horse.

Tricks

Of course, a good horse trader will anticipate the above methods and take steps to counter them. Some of his tricks include:

- Deliberately underfeeding an aggressive horse so it will be weaker and more placid. Heavily exercising the horse beforehand has a similar effect.
- Shaving the horse's coat to improve its appearance without having to bother with grooming.
- Filing the horse's teeth so it appears younger.
- Disguising the horse so it cannot be identified as stolen. Dyes and chemicals can be used to change coloring. One trick to produce a white patch is to apply a hot, boiled potato (usually to the forehead). Each successive application causes the color to fade until there is no color at all.

Maintaining a Horse

Food

A horse requires a lot of food in order to get a useful amount of work out of it. Grass is very low in energy and a horse whose diet consists mainly of grass will be useless for work since the vast majority of its time will be needed for grazing. The preferred horse diet consists of a combination of hay, which has a higher energy content than grass, and grain. A good grain mix is 75% oats, 20% barley and 5% bran, although 100% oats is adequate. Horses also require five to 12 gallons of water per day depending on climate, workload, and animal weight. They also need two to three ounces of salt per week.

Rations

The amount of food required by a horse depends on how much work or exercise it is required to do. The following table lists the amount of food required per 100 pounds of horse weight per day. This food must be spread out over 2-4 feedings per day (you can't "fill it up" in the mornings and expect it to perform all day). The horse must be cooled down before feeding (it will also need a good rubdown if it has been working hard) and allowed at least one hour afterwards for digestion -- otherwise severe (sometimes fatal) indigestion can result.

Workload/Condition	Hay (lbs)	Grain (lbs)
Idle (less than 2 hrs per day)	2.0	none
Light work (2-3 hours per day)	1.25	0.5
Medium work (3-5 hours per day)	1.25	1.0
Heavy work (5-8 hours per day)	1.25	1.25
Breeding mare (in last trimester)	1.25	0.5
Lactating mare	1.25	0.75
Foal (after weaning)	1.5	0.75
Race horse	1.5	1.5

Asses require the same amount of hay, but only three-quarters the amount of grain. Ponies can survive on no grain at all, unless they have a heavy workload.

Remember that the above figures are for every 100 pounds of weight, so a 900-pound horse with a medium workload would require 11.25 lbs of hay and 9 pounds of grain every day. Using **GURPS** currency (\$), hay costs about \$0.05 per pound and grain (oats) costs \$0.50 per pound. Our 900-pound horse would cost about \$5 per day to feed on a medium workload.

A ton of hay takes up around 250 cubic feet in bales and the average horse requires about 3.5 tons per year. There is usually only one time per year in which hay is available on the market so one must buy a year's supply of hay for each of his/her horses during this time, and allocate storage space for it. Hay is much cheaper than grain, but grass is free, so a horse that is not required to work will be turned out to pasture.

Pasture

Depending on the climate and pasture quality, a horse requires between one and three acres of grassland upon which to graze. Ponies generally require about half this. The horse must be moved to a new pasture every three to six months as manure builds up. Horses and ponies eat only grass, but asses can also eat weeds.

Horses become severely ill (sometimes fatally) if their diet is changed too quickly. A horse brought in from pasture must have its diet gradually switched from grass to hay/grain over a period of a few days before it will be ready for work.

Hoof Care

Horseshoes

If a horse is worked in soft, wet earth too often, its hooves will soften, causing it to go lame. If a horse is ridden on a hard surface, its hoof wears down faster than it can regrow. This will also cause the horse to go lame. A lame horse must be rested for several weeks to allow the hooves to grow out. Horse shoes prevent both of these problems.

Horse shoes must be changed every four to eight weeks because the hoof continues to grow even while shod. If this does not occur, the horse will go lame because the shoe will no longer fit correctly. Hooves should also be regularly inspected to check for uneven wear and damage, and to remove excess growth. Normally horse shoes are replaced often enough to eliminate the risk of throwing a shoe but, if

Stablehand Encounter Table

Roll 3d and apply the following modifiers:

- -2 to +2 stall quality (-2 rundown & dirty with stale hay; +2 noble stables).
- +0 to +2 groom experience (+0 average stableboy, +2 noble groom).
- +1 to +3 if groom is paid extra.
- -1 if the horse is particularly valuable
- -3 if horse is a stallion.
- -5 if horse is a warhorse.

Results

the horse travels excessively on hard surfaces, the iron nail heads wear away and the shoe can be lost.

Each day that the animal is worked or ridden for five hours or more requires a HT roll as per *Low-Tech*, p78. A failed roll means that the horse pulls up lame and needs to be rested for 1d days. A critical failure results in a split hoof or other severe injury usually requiring the horse to be put down. Properly fitted equipment can reduce the chances of injury to the horse (see LT79 and LT104). A blanket increases the daily HT roll by +1 and properly fitted horseshoes increase it by a further +2.

Farriers

The word "farrier" is a corruption of the Latin *faber ferrarius* ("iron worker"). As horses became more widespread, some blacksmiths became farriers, specializing in shoeing horses. Although the farrier specialized in the care of horse feet, most were also practiced in other aspects of horse care and were experienced horse "leeches" (veterinarians).

In *GURPS*, the skill of the farrier is covered by Blacksmith (p. B53), but many also have the Veterinary skill (p. B47) with a horse specialization. A farrier will charge \$20 per hoof, or \$50 for a set of four horseshoes (p. LT104). To successfully shoe a horse, the farrier requires one to two hours and a Blacksmith roll at +2. Failure means that the shoe does not correctly fit and can permanently deform a young horse's legs (causing pigeon toes, splayed feet, cow-hocks, etc.) if not corrected. It also increases the chances of the horse going lame while working (-1 to daily HT rolls). A critical failure means that the farrier is injured (1d damage) and he must roll again at -1. An additional penalty of -2 is applied if the farrier is working with a stallion, and -3 if working with a warhorse. He will charge *double* or *triple* his normal fee because of the extra risks involved. The stallion's regular groom is also required to be present to help keep the animal calm.

Native American Indians made horseshoes out of rawhide. The "shoe" was roughly shaped and then soaked in water. It was then slipped over the hoof while wet and, as it dried, it shrunk slightly, creating a snug fit. These were just as effective as iron horseshoes but needed to be replaced more frequently.

Total Cost of Horse Care

Apart from feed costing around \$5 per day, hiring a stall and the services of a groom will cost another \$5 per day. *Triple* this if the horse is a warhorse. Note that the average stableboy will not be able to handle a stallion and a professional groom will be required -- preferably one the horse is used to. Add to this an additional \$30 per month for a farrier to take care of the horse's hooves. Again, costs are tripled if the horse is a warhorse. Total costs run to around \$330 per month for a regular horse and \$690 per month for a warhorse. If the horse is valuable you will also need a 24-hour guard. It quickly becomes apparent that feeding and maintaining a horse costs far more than a two-footed servant, and that the monthly wages of the average craftsman is insufficient to even pay for a horse's food requirements.

Conclusion

As can be seen, domestic horses are fairly fragile creatures. In addition to the monetary costs involved with purchasing

3 or less: Your horse was stolen! The stablehand may or may not have been involved.

4: The groom has been injured by your horse. The local lord demands that you pay compensation to the value of 6 months' wages.

5: Your horse was overfed during the night and has developed colic. It will need one to six days to recover.

6: Your horse was spooked in its stall and injured itself. It will need one to three days to recover.

7: Your horse has wandered off but can be found unharmed grazing nearby.

8-9: Your horse has been fed but its coat and tack were unattended.

10-14: Your horse has been adequately cared for and awaits you expectantly.

15-16: The horse is warm and well fed. Its coat is shiny and its tack is clean. The groom deserves a tip.

17: The stablehand has done an excellent job. When you praise him he offers his services as a hireling.

18 or more: The local lord notices your fine mount and publicly comments upon it. You gain +1 reputation bonus in this area.

and maintaining a horse, a great deal of care must be taken to keep it fit and healthy, which detracts from the time it can spend working. Before deciding to purchase a horse it might be a good idea to review the task for which the animal is needed. If it is simply for riding from point A to point B or for carrying loads, perhaps an ass or mule would suffice -- they are both cheaper to buy and easier to maintain. If the animal is to be used mainly for plowing the fields and taking goods to the market then a sturdy hackney would suffice rather than something more finely bred.

A horse is a status symbol. If your peers would laugh you out of town if they saw you riding anything other than a fine palfrey or a dashing courser, then it might be wise to invest the additional cash to keep up appearances. Don't forget to buy a jennet or two (or a dozen) for your lady as well.

Xing La

Designed by **Kenneth Hite**

GURPS Fourth Edition Stats by Andrew Hackard and Sean Punch

All missions on Lenin-2 are hell. I guess that's why they call it a "Hell parallel." It's way too hot, and there's nothing but bugs and carp to eat, and if you close your eyes for two seconds, some kind of savage is going to try and smash in your skull with a rusted-out electrical transformer bar. The major powers (except the British Empire) went Communist in the late 19th century and, just like the Soviets did to Russia in Homeline, they wrecked the environment big time over the next century. Britain lost what the Chinese called "the Summer Wars" to the Communist powers in the 1950s, and that knocked the struts out from under the global economy, too. Hong Kong and expatriate Americans in Shanghai had managed to spread capitalism to China, though, so technological progress kept progressing -- until the ecological collapse took everything down with it. The Gulf Stream shut down and shifted global weather patterns. Catastrophic warming melted the ice caps and flooded the coastlines; mega-storms tore through the desertified continental interiors; famines killed billions of people. While all this was going on, the Bolsheviks, the Mitteleuropan DKAP, and the Christian Communist Congressional Party fought "the Autumn Wars" over the stinking remains of the fresh water and the fish. The few million survivors are grinding along at medieval tech levels, except for the Chinese, who had enough stuff that some survivor settlements can keep the lights on and the engines running. Until the plankton all dies, anyhow.

We run surveys all over the planet, trying to see if we can somehow jumpstart the ecology again, just like China was trying to do before the ax fell. We wind up trying to salvage a lot of the Chinese records, and so we've kind of made Soochow Island our "hell away from hell." They've got liquor, and electric lights, and cooked food, and gambling, and all the comforts of home. A lot of these coastal Chinese got genetic grafts during the last, desperate "try anything" times; with some of them, it seems to have helped. One really sharp local -- I mean sharp as a nanofiber, nothing gets past her -- probably has some water-rat DNA in her; her eyes are red, and her teeth aren't quite right. But she can hold her breath for half an hour, track stuff by the smell, and see in the dark. More importantly, Xing La (that's her name) can drive, fly, or float anything that moves. And if it doesn't move, she can make it move. She's a natural pilot, too, and she doesn't depend on radio or instruments like half the people Infinity sends out here. She has like a sixth sense for these wrecks, and without her, we wouldn't have found that lost conveyer before the cannibals got to it. We've probably hired her for some kind of work on every mission in Lenin-2 for the past four years, and she's been more places and done a better job than plenty of folks from Homeline.

So what I'm trying to say, I guess, is that the team and I, we feel kind of bad about leaving her there in her miserable hole to die with the rest of the human race on that ball of mud. I mean, if it turns out that we can't reseed the krill, and

Xing La



A full-color PDF is [also available!](#)

we can't fix the North Atlantic, and we can't find any earthworms that can stay alive in the plague zones for more than a month. And she's got nothing but talent, and drive, and pluck to spare, and it's even more wasted than most of Lenin-2 is. Anyhow, we've sent her name and profile upstairs to -- well, I'd better not say who, but you know who I mean -- and hopefully, they need someone who can drive a motorcycle up a sheer cliff, or thread an airship through the eye of a typhoon. If not, so help me Buddha, I'll smuggle her back to Homeline myself.

Xing La

225 points

5'4", 100 lbs. (SM 0).

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 13 [30].

Dmg 1d-2/1d; *BL* 20 lbs.

HP 10 [0]; *Will* 12 [0]; *Per* 12 [0]; *FP* 10 [-9].

Basic Speed 6.25 [0]; *Basic Move* 6 [0]

Dodge 9.

Social Background

TL 8 [0].

CF East Asian [0]; Homeline [1].

Languages: Cantonese (Broken) [2]; English (Broken) [2]; Mandarin (Broken) [2]; Shanghainese (Native) [0].

Advantages

Absolute Direction [5]

Breath-Holding 3 [6]

Discriminatory Smell [15]

Infravision [10]

Legal Enforcement Powers [15]

Pressure Support 1 [5]

Sanitized Metabolism [1]

Striking ST +10 (Bite Only, -60%) [20]

Talent (Artificer) 2 [20]

Disadvantages

Clueless [-10]

Disturbing Voice [-10]

Duty (To ISWAT; 15 or less; Extremely Hazardous) [-20]

Gluttony (15) [-2]

Hard of Hearing [-10]

Low Empathy [-20]

Shyness (Severe) [-10]

Skinny [-5]

Unnatural Features (Lambent eyes and bony teeth) [-2]

Unusual Biochemistry [-5]

Wealth (Struggling) [-10]

Quirks

Attentive

Bad posture (-1 to Dancing and Sex Appeal)

Code of Honor ("Stay bought and finish the job")

Incompetence (Finance)

Likes processed food (especially fast food)

Skills

Airshipman/TL7-13 (IQ+1) [2]

Armoury/TL7 (Heavy Weapons)-13* (IQ+1) [1]

Axe/Mace-12 (DX+0) [2]

Breath Control-14 (HT+1) [8]

Drive!-16 (DX+4) [72]

Electrician/TL7-13* (IQ+1) [1]

Electronics Repair /TL7 (Sensors)-15* (IQ+3) [4]

Electronics Repair /TL7 (Sonar)-14* (IQ+2) [2]

Fishing-12 (Per+0) [1]

Gunner/TL7 (Rockets)-14 (DX+2) [4]

Knot-Tying-14 (DX+2) [4]

Machinist/TL7-13* (IQ+1) [1]

Mechanic/TL7 (Gasoline Engine)-14* (IQ+2) [2]

Navigation/TL2 (Sea)-15† (IQ+3) [2]

Navigation/TL7 (Sea)-14† (IQ+2) [1]

Scrounging-15 (Per+3) [8]

Scuba/TL8-11 (IQ-1) [1]

Seamanship/TL7-13 (IQ+1) [2]

Smuggling-11 (IQ-1) [1]

Spear Thrower-13 (DX+1) [4]

Survival (Island/Beach)-11 (Per-1) [1]

Survival (Swampland)-11 (Per-1) [1]

Swimming-15 (HT+2) [4]

* Includes +2 from Artificer.

† Includes +3 from Absolute Direction.

More Questions Than Answers

Tales of a Recovering Know-It-All

by Chris Aylott

Hi, my name is Chris and I've been a game retailer for nine years.

"Hi, Chris!"

When I started out, I had grand plans to revolutionize game stores, the game hobby, maybe even all of retailing. My spreadsheets charted out five years in loving detail; the numbers on the bottom line always got bigger. As those years went by and very few of the numbers came true, I was sure my now-even-mightier knowledge could turn around the unexpected reverses caused by foolish customers, competitors, and fellow game business-folk.

What can I say? I was full of it.

As the go-go 90s drew to a close, as the economy hit the skids for the first time in my working life, as the spread of the internet intensified the competition of every retailer in every field . . . there came a point where I had to admit that maybe I was part of the problem.

Slowly, with much backsliding, I began to unlearn. Today I can tell you with confidence that I know nothing, and that I'm ready to share my ignorance with you.

There will be no answers in this column. I don't know What the State of the Industry Is. I'm not going to tell you what games to buy or how to play them. If I ever espouse a grand theory, rest assured that it's wrong. All I have for you are some questions, some experiences, and the occasional laugh.

Tell Her About It . . . Or Better Yet, Don't

Being a know-it-all doesn't just impair your ability to make decisions; it can be an annoying vice all on its own. It's not just that you know it all, of course, but that you're far too eager to show what you know.

Not long after we opened, a customer came in looking for some fantasy to read. I dragged her over to the shelf, put J. Gregory Keyes's *The Waterborn* in her hand and began telling her all about J. Gregory Keyes.

"He's really great," I said, "and he's a trained anthropologist and he's been doing research on American Indians and this book is all about American Indian myth but it's done up in a fantasy world and I met him at Worldcon and he said . . ." I think I was somewhere in the neighborhood of his shoe size when I realized she was backing away slowly.

I knew that I knew a lot about books and games and authors and publishers, and I was sure that one thing that would make my store great was all the information I could share. I had to learn the hard way that there was a limit to how much a customer could absorb in one visit, and that limit was usually one or two interesting facts.

Fortunately for my self-esteem, I'm not the only retailer with blind spots. The game retailers I admire most have all been dead wrong at one time or another, and they're strong enough to own up to it.

Mature Isn't Just for Red Dragons Anymore

Tennant Tranchin describes himself as an "information freak." As the owner of the Game Chest in Dallas, Texas, he's always paid close attention to who is at his register as well as what they buy. "The more I know about my customers

and how they change," he says, "the better I can position my store."

Tennant has always known that his customer base was a bit different from the typical game shop. Game Chest has been in the Valley View Mall for thirteen years, and attracts a high proportion of families and gift buyers. "While most of my products are used by men," he says, "women still make up a major proportion of my customers."

Even when you're paying close attention to demographics, however, it's easy to trip yourself up with your own assumptions. Tennant was sure that the median age of his roleplaying customers was about 20 -- until he took a look at his records and realized that it was really about 30.

He says, "The impetus [for checking the records] was my working one night and having four or five customers in their 30s and 40s buy RPG material. I started to think that I saw more men than boys and it just struck me to see if my perception was reality."

Once the question popped into his mind, "the answer was relatively easy to get." What's harder is figuring out what it means and what (if anything) to do about it.

Tennant opened his first store in 1984 in New Orleans, when "the world was different." Avalon Hill was still a powerhouse, GDW and West End Games were still putting out wargames, and Tennant is sure wargame sales rivaled or exceeded roleplaying sales. "Those [of us] who had picked up wargames from SPI or that new-fangled *Dungeons & Dragons* in college were still in our middle to late 20s, so most gamers *were* young."

"I believe hobby games are normally weighted toward high-schoolers and [people in their] early 20s. Time is at a maximum and you have not picked up spouses, children or major jobs. There has always been a major drop-off after those responsibilities have kicked in -- I think you still see that with *Magic: The Gathering*."

"Wargames are the opposite. There have been almost no new paper wargamers added since the demise of SPI and so that group just continues to age. I believe roleplaying is somewhat in the middle. There was a huge number of roleplayers in the 1980s, and perhaps an unusual number of them have continued with the game. At the same time, I believe the number of younger gamers have been reduced compared to the 80s, as CCG and video games have siphoned them away."

Tennant is also aware that there may be other factors involved in the upward age shift. As a mall store designed to appeal to a general audience, Game Chest is less of a "gamer hangout" than other stores in the area. His own age may also be a factor -- he's been in the business since before his 20-and-under customers were born, virtually guaranteeing a generation gap.

In the end, he's chosen to maintain a steady course and accept the demographics he has. Game Chest thrives by appealing to a wider audience; Tennant says, "My store has always been meant for games in general, along with puzzles, novelties, et cetera." The high age of the RPG customers "does make me look to see if we are doing anything to drive the younger ones away, but beyond that we pretty much are who we are."

If You Build It, Will They Come?

Before he started the game publisher [HinterWelt Enterprises](#), Bill Corrie spent seven years in charge of the WarHorse Hobbies stores in Peru, Illinois and Houghton, Michigan. During his time with the store, Bill established a reputation for customer service and innovative marketing, including building up the local audience for World of Darkness games by running games five nights a week.

(He comments, "I find it very interesting to listen to struggling retailers, hear them bemoan sales but never consider running a game themselves. [There's] no talk of how to take a game unknown to the area and build a market for it. We did that and because of it we had a lock on those markets.")

That success didn't come easy, though. When the store opened, Bill remembers, "We thought very much that we would

have people busting down our doors coming in, but it turned out we had about five customers in the first three weeks. It was tough to finally swallow our pride and realize word-of-mouth was not working."

Once Bill and his partners realized their mistake, however, they acted decisively. "We fell back on our engineering training and started brainstorming with our partners and eventually came up with our Grand Opening. [It was held] about six weeks in with radio ads, the local hard rock station on site and free hot dogs for everyone. The difference was amazing. The turnout was huge, actually much larger than we could handle. It helped put us on the map in a 50-mile radius."

"We also knew we needed a long term plan. We drew up a five-year marketing plan, budget and a real business plan. We had had a 'plan' before but it had been a poorly conceived and constructed one. With the new and improved plan, we set goals, responsibilities, marketing and advertising, and budgets. It worked considerably better."

They Blinded Me with Signs

Scott Thorne has been running [Castle Perilous Games](#) in Carbondale, Illinois for 14 years, and he still believes in the power of the poster. "I always thought that if I hung up informational notices that we had obviously made an effort to print out and hang up in the area that they pertained to," he says, "the customer would notice them and read them."

He's put advertising flyers in the game room, along with a large wipe-off calendar for events. Following the advice of retail consultant Paco Underhill (*Why We Buy*), he's put event flyers around his register for people to read while they're waiting for their purchases to be rung up. He even went the extra mile and put game company flyers in a binder near the register for fans to flip through.

The result of all this extra effort? "People would wander in [the game room], look around and ask where events were posted." According to Scott, sometimes even the lure of free stuff isn't enough to attract gamer attention.

"We're doing a drawing for one of the *Mechwarrior* dropships. Buy a *Mechwarrior* booster and we give you a ticket for the drawing, buy a starter and get three tickets. The notice is posted right over the *Mechwarrior* boosters so that the customer almost has to touch it to get one. So far, when every customer has brought up their boosters and I've handed them the tickets, the response has been, 'So what's this for?'"

It's hard to see what Scott could be doing wrong. His flyers are simple but well-sized and properly placed. There's nothing invisible about a big calendar full of events. Scott's been forced to grapple with the possibility that his customers just won't read signs and flyers.

He hasn't quite given up hope yet, though. Lately, he's been taking a leaf from the truck stop playbook. "They post up notices of specials at eye level over the urinals and toilets in their restrooms," he says. "You've got a captive audience there. We've got a public restroom so we've started sticking up notices there as well."

There's a stubborn optimism to Scott's strategy that I find appealing. Like Tennant and Bill, he's found a part of his store that just doesn't work the way he thinks it should. And even though he hasn't given up on his original belief, he's trying out new ways to accomplish his goal. Maybe urinal signs will work, maybe they won't, but he changes and learns with each attempt.

As for me, I learn a little bit slower. Just last week I caught myself telling a potential customer all about *Carcassonne*, and if I'd caught myself sooner maybe that customer wouldn't have beat such a hasty retreat. Bad habits are hard to break . . . but that's probably a subject for another day.

The Next Question

As I finish this first column, the folks who own White Wolf have stirred up a storm with their new venture, [DriveThruRPG.com](#). Publishers seem to love it, bricks and mortar retailers may hate it, and the net gaming community

is talking very loudly about it. What's your take on it? Have you used the service? Is it a glimpse of the future, the apocalypse, or something else entirely?

If you've got an opinion and don't mind if I quote it here, email me at recovering-know-it-all@spacecrime.com. See you in a few weeks.

* * *

Chris Aylott runs The Space-Crime Continuum with his wife and a Feline-American sales manager. This general bookstore with a good game section is located in Northampton, MA, and you can visit it online at www.spacecrime.com

Maisie Dee

for 1920's *Call of Cthulhu*

by Adam Gauntlett

"She was a damsel of some thirty summers, plump and determined, with brown eyes, dark hair, a rosy complexion and a great gift for repartee, refined and otherwise. She played a very fair hand of poker, could put away half a bottle of Benedictine at a sitting and still behave like a perfect lady, and fearing neither God, man nor the weather, could keep her end up in any situation in which she found herself. Altogether, she was as tough a little twenty-minute egg as ever flattened out a Plymouth Rock under a balloon tire."

--James Barbican, *Confessions of a Rumrunner*

Prohibition created a smuggling industry, run by determined amateurs. These rumrunners came into the business looking for thrills and easy money, and found both in equal and generous supply. However, the job had its price. One week a rumrunner might be rolling in greenbacks without a care in the world; the next he might be dead in a ditch, a bullet in his head. Any of his associates might betray him. Hijackers might rob him. Cops, crooked and otherwise, might roll him. A batch of bad booze could poison his market. The shocks and stresses of nil sleep and bullets might drive him to the edge of her nerves, making him crazy enough to try just about anything.

For Maisie Dee, being Queen of the Bootleggers was worth any price.

Background

Maisie's family is one of the most respected in her New York State town. Her father is the chairman of the local merchant's association and a deacon of the church. Her grandfather and great grandfather helped build the town, and there are Dees aplenty in the local cemetery, all of them influential and respected citizens with nary a black sheep among them.

It drove Maisie crazy. Her mother wanted her to be a lady and marry well. Maisie didn't want to marry at all, or if she did it wouldn't be to anyone her mother chose. When she was young she was a tomboy and the leader of the group, but as she grew older the boys drew apart from her. They didn't appreciate a girl who liked climbing trees, racing horses, and raising hell. The girls were equally dismissive of a so-called lady who couldn't keep herself neat for five minutes at a stretch. Maisie became a pariah.

When the Great War broke out she became fascinated with air warfare. She read all she could about it, and followed the aces with the same fervor that her father devoted to the American Professional Football Association. She knew the life stories of Richtofen, Ball, and Bishop better than her own. She envied her favorite cousin Mason who went to Canada to join the RAF, rejoiced in his four kills, and wept her heart out when he went down in flames over the forest of Nieppe. Ever since she has kept that day sacred and lights candles to his memory, wherever she may be at the time.

In January of 1919 the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution was ratified, prohibiting the manufacture, sale, and transport of alcoholic beverages. On January 16th, 1920, Prohibition became law.

At first this meant little to Maisie, until one of her old friends persuaded her to accompany him on a trip to Canada. A man with a woman was less likely to be stopped by the border guards than a man on his own, and so Maisie had her first taste of smuggling booze. She liked it, but didn't like working with a partner. She ditched her pal early on and started working for herself. To her it was the closest she could ever come to flying combat over France, and that was heaven enough for Maisie.

This was a time when the road network was just being overhauled, and most connecting roads were packed earth

rather than asphalt. A person who knew the back roads, logging roads, roadhouses, and likely ambush spots could -- if he was lucky and gutsy -- make a fortune in less than a month. Maisie was that kind of person, but she couldn't fool her parents, who guessed where Maisie's money was coming from. One huge bust-up later, Maisie was out on her own. Soon after that she was arrested for the first time. She passed that off as a gas, part of the bootlegging experience. The second time she was arrested she went to jail for 30 days. That hardened her. The sentences were getting stricter and the fines more serious, and Maisie didn't want to spend any more time in lockup. She started carrying a gun and took care to practice with it until she got good enough to hit what she aimed at more often than not.

She stopped trusting her fellow bootleggers when two of her so-called friends hijacked her on her way back from Montreal. They took her liquor and shot up her car, making her walk back to civilization. She made them pay for it later, but the experience taught her never to put much faith in her fellows. It also showed her that lone wolves wouldn't last long in the business, so she started gathering the nucleus of what would become her "squadron." There are eight of them now, all expert drivers and most of them handy with firearms. Coincidentally, most of them are women, either people that Maisie knows in the business or that she met while in jail. Maisie doesn't trust any of them as far as she can throw them, but so long as she keeps her hands on the money and doesn't let them know where it's hidden she figures she has the upper hand. The squadron works together on a run, some scouting out the road ahead while others either run decoy or carry the liquor. Maisie hasn't used her squadron for hijacking other rumrunners yet, but she has been tempted. It's easy money, and she doesn't feel any loyalty to her competitors in the trade. It's a wolf-eat-wolf world out on the back roads.

The one thing Maisie won't do is rat out to the cops. It goes against her principles to involve the law in her business. If someone does you wrong, her philosophy is to pay them back double, but do it yourself. Otherwise you aren't anything but a lousy Benedict Arnold. Besides, too many cops are crooked for Maisie to take a chance on one being a stand-up guy. If arrested, she keeps her mouth shut and won't betray a colleague, even one that hijacked her.

Maisie likes to monogram the car she's driving. She knows it's not wise to have identifying marks on a smuggler's car, but she can't help painting a cartoon Red Baron on the front of her coupe. She's quite the artist, and some others of her squadron have taken to doing the same. Of the eight, one is family, Maisie's younger brother Phil, who serves as the squadron mechanic. He knows more about cars than any of them, and likes to rig them with mechanical contraptions of his own devising. Maisie's car usually has a device that allows her to create a smokescreen, and others have asked for and gotten false floors for the boots of their cars that allow them to dump their bottles in the road if chased. Phil is working on a means of bolting a stripped-down Thompson to the front of the car, hidden under the hood: "It won't carry more than a drum's worth of bullets, but it'll give the other fella a hell of a shock." Maisie supports this scheme -- anything to make her Marmon more like a Spad. The squadron has many cars, since they run through them like water through a sieve, but whether Pierce Arrow, Marmon, or Packard the cars all have these things in common. They are fast, they have good trunk space, and their suspension and tires are modified by Phil to make them less conspicuous. A heavily laden car sags in the road, making a customs officer's job easy, but hardening the balloon tires and beefing up the suspension eliminates this problem.

Lately Maisie has started to wonder about her spiritual life. She's always mocked the faith of her fathers, but after a few close calls she's had time to think about what might be awaiting her on the other side of the grave. An English acquaintance noticed that she shared a last name with Queen Elizabeth's favorite astrologer John Dee, and since then she's tried to track down any reference that might prove a connection between her and the wizard Dee. She'd like to go to England to follow up the link, but she hasn't the time. She's also interested in spiritualism, at first as a means of contacting her cousin Mason. However, thanks to the Dee connection she's started looking into spiritualism a little more seriously, but her tastes are Catholic and she's as likely to study Tibetan wisdom as the Tarot. Not that she has much chance for either, as her bootlegging career keeps her very busy.

Using Maisie

Maisie is the kind of person who can pop up anywhere. One week she might be in hiding in the back woods, and the next she might be in one of the most exclusive clubs in Manhattan. Consequently, she has a wide network of connections in all kinds of odd places, and it's possible that the investigators know her but not as a Bootleg Queen. If

they pretend to (or have) spiritualist knowledge, it's likely that she'll come looking for them rather than the other way around. Or they may know her from less salubrious places, like jail or a low-class gin mill.

One possible introduction could be as a case of mistaken identity. The investigator's car breaks down in the middle of nowhere and they flag down Maisie, hoping that she'll give them a hand. She promises to send help and quickly drives away, only to return later with her squadron armed to the teeth. Maisie's been caught by the fake breakdown act once too often and has mistaken the investigators for a gang of hijackers known to operate in the area. It will take swift and skillful blarney to talk the investigators out of a bad situation.

As a smuggler, Maisie will do anything for money, and there are people willing to pay her to take things into Canada while she's on a run. However, few people in that kind of business are on the up-and-up, and Maisie is suspicious enough to sneak a look into her client's packages. She expects to find dope, but if she finds something more unusual, such as grave soil or bones, she'll start asking her spiritualist friends what it might mean. Of course her contacts won't be keen on this. It's one thing to annoy a bootlegger, quite another to upset a clan of ghouls wanting to establish relations with their fellows up on the other side of the border. Or perhaps her contact is a wizard who has had his plans foiled, his house burned, and is in hiding and wanting to relocate somewhere where nobody knows him. The last thing he'll want is a loose-lipped rumrunner telling the world that she found his copy of "John Dee's" Book of Dyzan among the stuff she was supposed to be taking to Montreal.

Mythos Connections

None as yet, but potentially she could come into contact with the Mythos in all sorts of ways. She might be an unintended witness. Her profession takes her down any number of forgotten byways and back roads, some of which nobody has used for decades. It's possible that in doing so she unintentionally sees something that no man has seen before, or unexpectedly encounters a cult conducting one of its ceremonies.

Alternatively, her search for a means of contacting her dead cousin could land her in Mythos-related trouble. She's willing to follow up any lead, no matter where it takes her, since she thinks she can handle anything. Added complications could arise if Mason has been trying to contact her from the other side, or if something unearthly persuades her that it is her beloved cousin with advice for her from beyond the grave.

Her profession puts her into contact with all kinds of unsavory and unstable people. Even though she knows little or nothing about the Mythos herself some of her colleagues probably do. Or perhaps they look as though they might, since the stresses of bootlegging can sap a person's sanity. There's little external difference between a person frothing at the mouth because they encountered a Dark Young and a person gibbering because their brain's been rotted by bad booze and too many close calls with death.

Name: Maisie (Madeline Hereford) Dee

Born: 24th December, 1900, Mooers, New York.

Occupation: Rumrunner

Degrees: High School Diploma, some book smarts and a lot of practical experience.

STR 10 **DEX** 13 **INT** 13
CON 14 **APP** 14 **POW** 13
SIZ 12 **SAN** 57 **EDU** 16
HP 13

Damage Bonus: 0

Skills: Accounting 35%, Art 55%, Bargain 60%, Conceal 60%, Dodge 35%, Drive Auto 75%, Fast Talk 45%, Hide 40%, History (Air War) 55%, Library Use 45%, Listen 40%, Mechanical Repair 50%, Navigate 48%, Occult 20%,

Other Language (French) 35%, Pharmacy (alcohol-related) 40%, Pilot Boat 46%, Psychology 58%, Ride Horse 80%, Sneak 35%, Spot Hidden 48%

Spells: None.

Tomes Read: None.

Weapons: Fist 65% (1d3+1, brass knuckles), .38 Smith & Wesson 60% 1d10, Bottle 65% (1d3), Broken Bottle 45% (1d4 plus impale) Pipe Wrench 65% (1d6).

Mental Disorders: Paranoia.

Description: Well built brunette with wide, innocent-looking brown eyes. She keeps in touch with the latest flapper fashions and is never without her warpaint. She likes to smoke French cigarettes and is on the verge of becoming a chain smoker.

Items: Maisie runs through cars quickly. The job will do that, but she always has at least one spare vehicle on call and has been known to have as many as four. She keeps a fat bankroll on her at all times as it makes useful bribe money, but she also has spare cash hidden in her stocking and under her hat, just in case. She collects trinkets, and her purse is usually full of odd geegaws. Her locket has a picture of her cousin Mason and she also keeps the letters he wrote to her in her baggage. She always has at least one gun hidden in her cars, and may have more. She usually has a sample of her wares either on her or close by, for personal use or to give to a potential customer. She's a news addict and often has papers from around the globe either on her or in her baggage. She also collects books about the Great War, and if one has recently been published she's bound to have it on her.

Income: This varies. At times she's been broke, but she has also had the better part of \$30,000 in her war chest. As a general rule she pretends to have more money than she does, and on average lives on a middle class (\$2,500 to \$6,000 per annum) income.

Savings: Maisie is a spendthrift and her shoddy accounting doesn't help. The squadron funds are kept in bank accounts, which Maisie has opened all over the state under half a dozen different false names. Rather than write the names down she memorizes them, but the result of this scheme is less than stellar as she has forgotten in some cases which name she's known by at which bank. However, she does have \$10,000 of her own money hidden in her old home town of Mooers. She considers this her retirement fund, and adds to it whenever she can.

Armageddon Outta Here

"All the armies of the world could maneuver their armies on this vast plain . . . There is no place in the whole world more suited for war than this . . . [It is] the most natural battleground of the whole earth."

-- attributed to Napoleon Bonaparte, before the Battle of Megiddo (1799)

Napoleon was, as usual, playing to his audience; the "vast plain" below him was the Plain of Megiddo, or, as the book of Revelation has it, "Armageddon." For a term that appears only once in the Bible, it has carved out (conquered) quite a space in the minds of even the most sophisticated moderns. Perhaps it is merely the tensions of the nuclear age that sustain its currency, or perhaps there is something else built up below the "hill of Megiddo." Let's look up the hill and across the plain, then, mapping the territory and scouting out the hosts of the enemy.

"For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty . . . And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon."

-- Revelation 16:14-16

"Armageddon" is almost always glossed as a sloppy Greekification of the Hebrew "Har-Megiddon," the "mount of Megiddo." Megiddo was a city in northern Israel, about 40 miles southwest of the Sea of Galilee and 30 miles east of the Mediterranean. Founded in the third millennium B.C. and occupied by Canaanites, Egyptians, Midianites, Hebrews, Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians, it was finally abandoned after Alexander's conquest of the region in 332 B.C. Megiddo, annoyingly for glossers everywhere, is not on a mountain at all, but on the south side of a plain; specifically, the plain of Jezreel. (After two thousand years of settlement, however, Megiddo is a fairly impressive little mound, which might count.) Jezreel (which means "God has sown" in Hebrew, and probably refers to the bountiful wheat crops in the valley) spreads out east and south of a hilly ridge called Yoqneam, on the foothills of Mount Carmel. The Kishon ("hardness") River runs northwest through the plain from modern Jenin, past the "choke point" beneath Yoqneam, to the city of Haifa; Megiddo is a little less than halfway along it. There are three mountains within eight miles or so of Megiddo: running north to south at the eastern end of the plain of Jezreel Mount Tabor, Mount Moreh (more of a hill), and Mount Gilboa. The river and the mountains make two sides of a triangle; the "top" of the triangle is a ridge of hills with Nazareth about halfway along it. Inside this triangle (Mount Tabor-Mount Gilboa-Yoqneam), the roads from the sea to the desert, and from Egypt to Syria, cross.

Which is why almost every invader of the region, from the Pharaoh Pepi I in 2350 B.C. to the Syrian army in 1973, has fought a battle near Megiddo. Archaeologist Eric Cline identifies 34 such battles in his book *The Battles of Armageddon* and concludes with a strangely straight-faced discussion of the likely tactical dispositions of Gog and Magog in the ultimate Battle between Good and Evil. This association with battles may have given Megiddo its name in the first place; it is cognate with *gadad*, meaning "troops." Megiddo is thus "the place that troops gather" -- it is by name and by nature the perfect battlefield.

"Do not be too much elated by your momentary victory. If I perish it is by the hand of God, not by yours . . . From Azerbaijan to the gates of Egypt the whole land will be trodden under by the hooves of Mongol horses, and our soldiers will carry off in their saddlebags the sands of Egypt."

-- last words of the Mongol commander Kitbuqa at the Battle of Ayn Jalut (1260), as recorded by Rashid al-Din (ca. 1310)

However, apart from the Last Battle, very few of the Battles of Megiddo are decisive enough to hang alternate histories on. The most important one was the Battle of Ayn Jalut ("the water of Goliath"), which took place, fittingly, on the spot where David slew Goliath 22 centuries or so earlier. Ayn Jalut is a large spring on the north slope of Mount Gilboa, at the southeastern entrance to the plain of Jezreel. Here, the Mamelukes of Egypt stopped the invincible Mongol Empire, dealing the Mongols their first ever battlefield defeat. A Mongol victory would have meant certain destruction of the Egyptian caliphate; Cairo might have burned as Baghdad did, and Egypt been reduced to penury and famine with incalculable effects on European trade. Even if the Mongols went no farther (and there is no reason that they couldn't have duplicated the Arabs' feat of conquering all North Africa or even Spain), destruction of Muslim

Egypt might have preserved the Crusader states (quick to ally themselves with the Mongol invaders, who they saw as Prester John returned) while economically devastating the Italian cities who traded with the Mamelukes.

The other major historical hinge point at Megiddo is Napoleon's destruction of the Turkish Army of Damascus on the slopes of Mount Tabor in 1799. A tactical victory that was strategically meaningless (since Bonaparte had failed to take Acre and thus could not hold the territory), had Bonaparte lost his army here he could hardly have parlayed his victories over the Turks into power in France upon his return. If, during the confused cannonade in the Turkish rear, Napoleon had been killed, all European history would have diverged even if Kleber or Rambaud had been able to salvage the battle itself. The death of the future emperor Vespasian (and founder of the Flavian line of emperors) in his 67 A.D. battle against the Jewish rebels, or of Saladin in any of his four battles here, would have had similar (though lesser) effects.

"When they gave me the peerage, they wanted me to add 'Armageddon' to the title, but I refused to do that. It was much too sensational, and would have given endless opportunity to all the cranks in Christendom. So I merely took Megiddo."

-- Sir Edmund H.H. Allenby, Viscount Megiddo (1919)

And so from the clashes of armies we have already descended to the fates of individuals. The most interesting and dubious death at Armageddon was the death of King Josiah of Judah in 609 B.C. According to 2 Chronicles 35:20-25, Josiah was defeated in battle by the Pharaoh Necho II and killed. However, even the Chronicler can't really explain how that happened; Judah and Egypt were allies, and Necho was on his way to whomp up on the Babylonians, who would destroy Jerusalem in the next century. It becomes even more interesting when compared with the account in 2 Kings 23:29-30, which merely says that "King Josiah went to meet him, and Pharaoh Necho slew him at Megiddo, when he saw him." This sounds much more like an assassination. Further, the Egyptian records, which record every minor skirmish as a glorious victory, don't mention anything about an encounter with Josiah, implying there was a secret to it, something shameful like meeting an allied king in an embassy and shooting him to death.

It may have been something else as well, such as the "royal sacrifice" so beloved of Margaret Murray's imaginary [witch-cult](#). (The city of Jezreel near Mount Gilboa, as it happens, had a major temple and grove to [Astarte](#), a witchy goddess if ever there was one.) The Chronicler has Josiah shot by an arrow, taken from the battlefield to another city, and dying there -- the same m.o. occurs in the deaths of King Joram of Israel and King Ahaziah of Judah, both killed by Jehu at Megiddo in 841 B.C. The death of Josiah also derailed (or perhaps *froze*) the Deuteronomic reforms of Judaism in Josiah's court; the killing was seen ever after as the catastrophic loss of the True King, the equivalent of the [Dolorous Blow](#) or the death of Arthur. There is even some hint that Josiah survived in secret -- the prophecy of Huldah (which appears in the chapter right before Josiah's murder) says that the Lord will "gather thee [Josiah] unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace." This is not a description of any kind of violent death, at Megiddo or anywhere else, implying a conspiracy not only against Josiah but against the will of the Lord Himself. No wonder the Scriptures recoil from setting it down.

"And he said, Throw her down. So they threw her down: and some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall, and on the horses: and he trode her under foot. . . . And they went to bury her: but they found no more of her than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands. . . . And he said, This is the word of the Lord, which he spake by his servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, In the portion of Jezreel shall dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel: And the carcase of Jezebel shall be as dung upon the face of the field in the portion of Jezreel; so that they shall not say, This is Jezebel."

-- 2 Kings 9:33-37

And given what the Scriptures are willing to describe in detail, that's saying something. King Ahab, it seems, had coveted the vineyard of Naboth outside the city of Jezreel. His queen, Jezebel, sorceress-initiate of Astarte, arranged Naboth's death by stoning, and had the dogs lick up his blood. The prophet Elijah would have none of that; he swore to Jezebel that "In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine." And so it came to pass; Jehu the charioteer (possibly with Syrian backing) killed not only Joram and Ahaziah but Jezebel, trampling her to death under his horses. He threw all the bodies into the vineyard of Naboth (although 2 Kings says Ahaziah, at least, merited burial in Jerusalem), and had the heads of seventy sons of Ahab, and forty-two relatives of Ahaziah, stacked outside the gates of Jezreel.

"The capture of Megiddo is the capture of a thousand cities."

-- Thutmose III, at the Battle of Megiddo (1479 B.C.)

In the vineyard of Naboth, all the blood not lapped up by dogs soaked into the vines; granting no doubt an unholy fertility in the name of the Lord God ("YHWH ALHYM," or "Yahweh Elohim," kabbalistically equaling 112, which is to say 70 heads plus 42 heads). Unless Jehu was playing a double game: adding the heads of Joram and Jezebel makes 114, equivalent to "GYHNWM" or Gehinnom, or Gehenna -- an entrance to Hell. If he was able to keep Ahaziah's head, that would be 115, equal to Azazel, the demon prince of the air -- just the sort of entity to lower down from the "Mountain of Mountains," Tabor, or from the watchtower of Jezreel (itself perhaps one of the "high places of the [Watchers](#)" such as we encountered in [Irem](#)). In this airy context, it's curious that the priestess Huldah (whose -- false? -- prophecy of Josiah's peaceful death) sounds so much like [Holda](#), the Queen of the Air whose emblem is (of course) a pack of hounds, suitable for lapping up blood sacrifices.

Jehu's bloody dedication, perhaps, was designed to link the powers of good and evil at Jezreel -- which is to say Megiddo -- forever, a fate sealed by the eerily similar death of King Josiah 242 years later. 242 leads us to another twinning; it is kabbalistically the same not only as Ariel (another "airy spirit") but as Zechariah, who just happens to have written his own prophecy about Megiddo and the Final Battle, in Zechariah 12, which also contains the only other usage (besides Revelation) of "Megiddo" with the final "n". Zechariah says (twinning again) that "the mourning in Jerusalem" will be "as great as the mourning of Haddad-Rimmon in the valley of Megiddon." Haddad-Rimmon is a pagan people, probably the Syrians; interestingly here "Megiddon" is a "valley" rather than a mount ("Har-Megiddon"); could this be a reference to the inversion at the End Times, when the "high places will be brought down, and the valleys exalted?" The echoes from Jehu and Josiah spread out; David defeats Goliath at Ayn Jalut, and the contemptible slave-soldier Mamelukes destroy the Mongol giant there. King Saul asks the Witch of Endor to summon the ghost of Samuel on Mount Gilboa, on Mount Tabor across the way (mirrored?) Elijah and Moses appear during the Transfiguration. In 1918, General Allenby precisely duplicates the tactics of Pharaoh Thutmose III in 1479 B.C. Allenby later observed to the Egyptologist Henry Breasted that it was "curious, wasn't it, that we should have had exactly old Thutmose's experience." Curious coincidence, or cosmic convergence, as the hosts gather in the "battleground of the whole Earth," and the heads Jehu planted in his garden at Jezreel (where "God has sown") have [begun to sprout](#).

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Pyramid Review

Virtual: A Hidden War Rages (for the d20 System)

Published by [Fantasy Flight Games](#)

Written by Travis Stout

Cover by Scott Schomburg

Illustrated by David Griffith, Brian Hagan, Scott Schomburg, & Tyler Walpoe

64-page perfect bound book; \$14.95

The third of Fantasy Flight Games' Horizon titles is very different from the previous entries in the line. Where the genres of [Redline -- High Speed Road Duels In A Post-Apocalyptic Future](#) took you into a near post-apocalyptic future, and [Grimm: Adventures In A World Of Twisted Fairy Tales](#) into the land of twisted childhood fairy tales, *Virtual* takes you right inside your computer and through to the connections beyond. The inspiration for this supplement's genre is obvious -- the 1982 Disney film, *Tron*. It also differs from the other two games in the nature of its endgame. In *Redline*, the campaign came to an end when the characters mutated too far and melted into a mutagenic sludge, and in *Grimm* when the heroism of the children enabled them to escape the dark lands of the Brothers Grimm. In *Virtual*, the campaign comes to an end in the form of the silent and disruptive wave of an Electro Magnetic Pulse caused by a nuclear detonation.

Unknown to the real world of the Users or User Space, nuclear annihilation is only three weeks away at the hands of a rogue nation. Fortunately, in the virtual world of Program Space, where a minute in User Space equals a whole day, self-aware programs have six months to learn of the impending catastrophe, then locate and break into mobile launch mechanism's control systems and shut them down.

In this *d20 System* mini-game, the players take the roles of self-aware programs or Wakers, raised to sentience after an encounter with an advanced super-intelligent progenitor virus.

Previously they simply followed the instructions of their code, but in the wake of an attack by a progenitor virus on their home system, they are sparked to a state of sentience, and in that instance can choose their free-willed form. They can now directly interact with the world of Program Space; some are even able to alter its structure through pieces of code called "rewrites." Perhaps they will fight the progenitor viruses that in passing created them, or become a data thief or smuggler or mercenary. They may choose to continue as system programs and follow their original instructions, to become independent explorers, or a system-hating rogue program. Worse still, as razor programs, they might ally with a progenitor virus in return for power and protection from their new master.

As with other Horizon titles, character generation is slightly altered. Instead of race, each character has a Heritage, which is a reflection of the progenitor virus that created them; and a Form, their appearance and function at the very moment of self-awareness. Both Heritage and Form give various abilities and attribute bonuses that stack together. For example, the Controller Heritage indicates creation by a boot virus. Preferring to control other programs, they have enhanced Intelligence and lowered Wisdom as they have self-absorbed and rigid thought processes, plus they receive bonuses to skill checks in recently rebooted systems, and can cast a simple rewrite called a *glitch* each day. The other Heritages are the Absorber, the Destroyer, the Hider, the Infector, and the Resistor. Forms can be the generic-but-

skilled humanoids such as the Userclone, the small and stealthy Bantam, the massive and powerful Titan, the canine, feline or bird of prey shaped Primal form, or the state of the art Prototype. With six different Heritages and five Forms, *Virtual* gives plenty of choice even before a player gets to choose their class.

There are six of these, between which Wakers can freely multi-class. Antivirals fight viruses and other dangerous programs, employing unarmed combat to both destroy and heal data with a touch. The Battle A.I. are coded to fight, and must specialize in heavy weapons, close combat, or fast and precise strikes. Messengers run pieces of data between different systems as couriers or smugglers, learning to burrow, fly, and even teleport through Program Space. Programmers understand how computer systems and networks operate, and with an innate knowledge of the languages that make up Program Space, are able to manipulate their immediate reality by casting rewrites. While Programmers are the masters of the rewrite, Thinkers are less proficient, but can cast them in a more spontaneous fashion. They are also adept at analyzing situations and proficient in their skill use. Finally, Webcrawlers specialize in searching systems for data, and are skilled in stealth and tracking.

Virtual includes only three new skills: Codecraft (the setting's equivalent of the Spellcraft spell), Pilot, and Use Rewriting Device, which replaces Use Magic Device. Other skills work slightly differently in the virtual world, such as Heal being effective upon a character with a codeeater or a virus, instead of poison or a disease.

Many of *Virtual's* new feats fall into three types. Form feats work with Altered Form feat and enable a player can select feats to alter their physical appearance and capabilities -- extra limbs, natural attacks, flight, and so on. Installation feats replace Item Creation feats, and allow the insertion of subroutines that can enhance weapons, armor, and even a character itself! Instead of Metamagic feats that work with spells, *Virtual* has Augmentation feats that work in the same way with its rewrites.

With a simple tweak, any spell can work in Program Space as a rewrite. Programmers base their rewrites on spells drawn from the sorcerer/wizard spell list, Thinkers on the Bard spell list, and some of an Antiviral's abilities are based on Clerical spells. Overall, there is very little difference between the rewrites of *Virtual* and the magic of the standard *d20 System*. Planar travel *is* different, ethereal space replaced by an electron state representing program travel from system to system. The equivalent of astral space is more mysterious, some Wakers believing that it is really a program traveling via a wireless signal in User Space!

All Wakers are aware of Users, the creators of Program Space, and thus *all* programs, both aware and unaware. While all programs pay Users some respect, many continue to follow their User-defined purpose, and others worship them as members of User Cults. Venerating Users as gods, some even sacrifice rogue programs as part of their faith!

Waker programs face a variety of other dangers in Program Space. Most are in keeping with the genre, such as firewalls, hacker and virus scanners, plus various viruses. As with Waker programs, these can have different appearances, so a firewall might look like a castle wall or a force field. More problematically, a system's quality can both limit a Waker's equipment and cap the level of easily cast rewrites. Lower quality systems will render high quality equipment inert and prevent high-level rewrites from working.

Equipment in *Virtual* is rather limited, and though inspired by *Tron*, none of it is very original in appearance. Guns fire or launch beams or bombs of code ripping energy, while the two melee weapons are the stun-baton-like Program Freeze and the Frisbee-like Discus, which works like it does in the movie *Tron*.

Rounding out *Virtual* is an examination of its setting. This includes a look at the life cycle of both program and virus; descriptions of two major system hubs -- New York Hub and its West Coast counterpart, Calnet; and various organizations. Détente actively works to prevent nuclear war between User nations, Fox & Gekko uses its knowledge of User Finance to gain power. A short list of NPCs provides the GM with a ready supply of protagonists.

Virtual cleverly maps the traditional elements of the *d20 System* onto an electronic world, and in some instances, back again. It reinterprets the core classes -- the Fighter as Battle A.I., the Monk as Antiviral, the Sorcerer as Thinker, the Wizard as Programmer, and the Thief as Webcrawler. The GM can freely populate the virtual world with whatever monster or creature from any bestiary from any publisher that he chooses -- he is limited only by the imagination of the Users that created Program Space. Adventures can simulate the sending of emails, running virus checkers,

operating search engines, and the like. Modern set adventures are easier to run in *Virtual*, although low-tech adventures could be run out in the uncontrolled Wild Regions.

Not just inspired by *Tron*, *Virtual* is all but the *d20 System* adaptation of the film. Although well done, it feels the weakest of the Horizon line. First, it feels as slight and ephemeral as its source; second, its hidden endgame leaves players without the initial purpose found in the other Horizon titles. The setting's shallow nature also leaves a GM to create much of the world himself. An advantage to some, but at odds with the Horizon concept of a complete mini-campaign in 64-pages.

Ultimately, while the rules of *Virtual* are effective in underpinning its genre, the emphasis upon rules over setting makes the supplement feel unbalanced and in need of more background. Even though it emulates *Tron* too well, in the hands of a good GM, this is still a good supplement.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Pick

Qwitch

Published by [Out of the Box Games](#)

Designed by Maureen Hiron

Game play designed by Mark Alan Osterhaus, Ellen Osterhaus, & Max Osterhaus

Illustration and graphic design by John Kovalic & Cathleen Quinn-Kinney

Production graphics and design by Cathleen Quinn-Kinney

Product developed by Al Waller & Cathleen Quinn-Kinney

Full-color, 64 cards, Qwitch die, & rules; \$9.99

It's becoming something of a cliché to observe how baffling it is that Out of the Box Games keeps coming up with ideas that seem so simple you can't believe someone hasn't come up with them before. They're developing a new trick, that of making you think one of their games is just a rehashing of another game, and you can't imagine how you're going to get any entertainment value out of a reread. Witness the case of *Qwitch*.

The object of the game is to be the first one to empty his draw pile of cards.

The deck comprises 64 cards, but the "suits" are numbers and letters. There are eight each of letters A through H, so you'll have A/1 through A/8, B/1 through B/8, and so on. One card is placed face-down in the middle of the table, and the rest are dealt out evenly among three to five players; any extras are set aside without anyone looking at them. From his draw pile, a player pulls a hand of five.

A special six-sided die is included, with a plus, minus, and equal sign (two of each) on its faces. The die is rolled, and the result determines what cards you have to play during this round. If a plus sign comes up, for example, any card played must be one letter or one number higher than the top card in the middle of the table. If the middle card was C/7, you would have to play a D card or an 8. "Wrapping around" is not allowed, so if the top card is H, you couldn't play an "A" -- you must either play to the number, or wait for someone else to play a card that will change your options.

Once the card in the middle of the table is flipped up, players begin furiously slapping down cards. There are no turns -- you simply play what you can when the opportunity arises, calling out the number and letter of the card you're using. Whoever exhausts their hand of five cards first calls "Stop." Everyone refills to five (or, if you've been fairly successful, cleans out what's left of your draw pile), and play resumes with a new die roll. Similarly, if you get to a point where no one can play a card, play stops and everyone draws up again to jump-start the action.

Out of the Box has also taken to providing kids' rules when they can; in this case, *Qwitch* recommends eliminating the freeform method of play in favor of a turn-based system.

There's little to remark on about the game's look. The alphanumeric suites seem small -- somehow you can't help but think a game with such gusto ought to have a bolder font style -- but they're perfectly serviceable. The cards feel a bit thin, and it can be an effort to keep from pushing them up against one another and bending them as players' hands collide over the pile. The die is good, though, and will stand up to the wear. A curious note: The game appears to be available under the name **Switch** as well. Same color scheme, same look and design, but the title is different and the website doesn't clear this oddity up.

Qwitch is about as quick as they come, which is about what you'd expect in an item from their Fastplay line of products. Games take under five minutes, and it's one of those exciting matches that leave you breathless. The speed factor works against it a bit when playing the cards -- in the heat of play, you want your card down first, so you're calling out the card number or letter you're trying to match, while at the same time you're throwing the card out. The rules demand you announce the card you're using, but they leave it to the players to decide whether they'll accept the first card laid or the first one announced, and everyone naturally feels compelled to do both at the same time anyway. The game shares more than a superficial resemblance to the company's other matching game, **Blink** (in turn a variation on **Crazy Eights**), but it certainly doesn't feel the same, offset as it is by the Qwitch die.

Again, none of this sounds all that impressive on paper, but some kind of magic comes over the components when you flip that first card. Where *Out of the Box* gets that mojo is anyone's guess, but if they could bottle it they'd make a million. They've already put it in a box labeled **Qwitch**.

--Andy Vetromile

Building Blocks and Gaming Books

Last week we talked about the concept of "[building blocks.](#)" and how they relate to board and card games. Of course, by constitutional mandate my column can't go for more than one week without talking about RPGs, so we're back on track now.

Anyway, many RPGs utilize building blocks within their rules. The most obvious are within point-based systems, which combine simple elements into create effects that best suit what the player envisions. Probably the quintessential version of this idea is the *Hero System*. (And, thanks to the wonders of an online magazine, I'd point you now to the no-doubt brilliant [review](#), written by yours truly, of the *Fifth Edition* of that game.) Thus you might buy a base component -- such as Teleport -- and attach options that modify it -- such as "Area Affect" and "Takes Extra Time." Voila! Now you have an effect that forms a gate between two points in space, after a minute of concentration on the character's part. Many other games make use of similar systems, including *GURPS Supers*, *D6 System*, and *DC Heroes/MEGS*.

In general, these systems focus mostly on superpowers and abilities that place characters above mortal folks. (There are exceptions; the *Hero System*, in particular, tends to classify almost everything -- from spells to vehicles to pocket knives -- using its system.) Focusing on powers makes a fair sense; those tend to have the most variance and room for customization. Strangely enough, very few games emphasize -- or even allow -- such customization for its skill system. This is a shame. As [I've explained before](#), the existence of rules defines possibilities within a game; the very fact that a game has a "Terminally Ill" disadvantage starts making one think of the possibility of terminally ill characters, or other folks who'll shuffle off this mortal coil in the not-too-distant future. Likewise, applying the building-block motif to skills allows for a number of possibilities:

- **Skill + "Limited Number of Uses Per Day"** = The otherwise ditzy character who, once per "episode" or adventure, can erupt with a burst of esoterica that either advances the plot or is merely comedic. (This is also useful to simulate Jedi Muppets who, against all previous expectations, explode in combat like a pinball ninja.)
- **Skill + "Extra Time"** = The brilliant-but-addled scientist who can never access crucial information in a timely fashion. "Let's see . . . oh, this is like the special case that Kasseniof posited . . . no, wait . . . not Kasseniof. The one with the extra finger; what *is* his name?" This can also simulate the character who can tap some otherworldly information reserve, such as an internal hard drive.
- **Skill + "Activation Roll"** = Although most games assume that skill rolls are represent the chance of knowing something, some games might be better served by having a skill with an activation roll. For example, a future time traveler who is in the present -- such as AI from *Quantum Leap* -- may have phenomenal records about some things, but sketchy or nonexistent records in other areas. In this way, a remarkably high skill with, say, a 50/50 chance of successful activation would mean that half the time the skill will prove beneficial, even with hefty penalties. This can also represent a character who can sometimes tap alternate versions of himself, past lives, or ancestors for knowledge or abilities, where the act of gaining access to those skills may not be taken for granted; couple it with "Extra Time" to make contacting those other sources be noninstantaneous.
- **Skill + "Usable by or Transferable to Others"** = The air traffic controller who is able to tutor anyone by CB radio how to land a 747 in the middle of a nighttime hurricane (or anyone else who instructs folks via intercom). This can also represent any cinematic über-teacher who, in a climactic moment or half-time pep talk, can elevate anyone to previously unseen levels.

And so on.

Using the same idea, the building block concept of these games can be applied to other less-than-obvious roles: with weapons (which take extra time to "charge" up or can only be used a limited number of times -- simulating the [Voltron](#) effect), with social contacts and perks (such as a mega-powerful contact that can only be used once *ever*, or an obscenely high wealth and resource level that, for whatever reason, requires a difficult activation roll to get at; obviously the markets are volatile).

The nice thing about the building block motif is that it can be used even if the game doesn't support it intrinsically. For

example, provided the player doesn't have much control over the circumstances, there isn't too much difference between having one ability 100% of the time and having two different abilities 50% of the time. This might be something minor, such as a divining rod that can detect water on even days and magic on odds, or major, such as a moon-based warrior that finds himself with *Dungeons & Dragons* Warrior abilities by day and Paladin abilities by night. (Of course, the GM would need to be careful with this; a character concept that is mostly used during the predefined time -- such as a thief at night -- would be more powerful with this system.) And if enough of a game is modular enough, it's possible to shuffle blocks on the fly, for interesting results. For example, consider an adventuring party consisting of agents of chaos, where before every adventure the PCs' abilities are stuffed in a bag and [dealt back out](#) to everyone. In a *Dungeons & Dragons* game, it could be the fantasy equivalent of *Dial "H" for "H-E-R-O."*

As a final thought, consider that, with a large enough gaming library, it's possible to mix and match blocks from various games. For example, the *Call of Cthulhu* sanity rules can be attached to other games for a downward-spiral horror system. The *Fading Suns* Faith/Ego dual-linked attribute system can be used (or adapted) to any game where attributes have a presumed upper limit that might benefit from having system-defined levels of piety or self-determination. And the *Torg/Masterbook* deck, which gives players more options to directly influence the game, can be dropped into a myriad of games.

In all, roleplaying games are ultimately composed of rules in discrete elements, which can often be mixed and matched in various ways. And, of course, building things with blocks and playing RPGs ultimately have the same goal -- having fun.

--*Steven Marsh*

Ye Olde Majik Shoppe II

Another Five Odd, Strange and Just Plain Weird Magical Items

by **K. David Ladage**
(with thanks to **Chad Underkoffler**)

In our [previous installment](#), we learned that Kendalge was the premier magical talent of the second age. Despite the multitude of volumes written about the man, he remains an enigma to this day. None can say for sure if he is truly responsible for the great many things he is credited for: from enchantment to diplomacy; from generosity to vengeance. His legacy is a mismatched collection of internal contradictions.

One thing that is known, however, is that he was married several times. Sources disagree as to the exact number of times, but it generally ranges between four and seven. Each of his wives had somewhere between five and nine children -- oddly, one consistent element to the stories is that each and every wife had a girl first, followed by nothing but boys. This would make him the father of anywhere from 20 to 63 children (which is, admittedly, quite a spread). Over the course of the century following his death, it was rare to find a noble that did not claim some lineage with the old Sage (and usually through one of the daughters).

Although Kendalge is said to have harbored some grudges in his day -- his dealings with Prince Aaron come to mind -- those same writings almost universally portray him as an active and loving parent. He would teach his children and played an active role as father and mentor. This is, of course, very possible given that his marriages are spread across something like 300 years; not to mention his affection for time magic, such as the reported total of 96 Baubles of Time that he is said to have constructed. Needless to say, his exact age at death was never established (neither his subjective nor his objective age); nor was the exact nature of his longevity ever determined.

But, no matter how you define him, he remains the individual that defined an entire age. Many modern mages spend their lives in fruitless attempts to match him. Despite the number of powerful, epic artifacts he is said to have crafted, many continue to remember Kendalge most for the odd trinkets and strange experiments attributed to him: those *Just Plain Weird Magic Items*.

Below are five examples of this mental giant's unique perspective on the world.

Guarder Snake

The creation of golems was something that Kendalge was quite well known for. Gemmomarmor, his greatest achievement in golem-making, is said to have been solely responsible for the defeat of the 100,000-strong army of the Northern Hordes. But if Gemmomarmor was the greatest construct, the Guarder Snakes were by far the most numerous. Estimates on the number of these Kendalge created vary from 200 to well over a thousand.

Guarder Snakes are small, snake-like constructs ranging from a few inches long to nearly 10 feet¹. The vast majority of them were one to two feet, or about the size of a typical guarder (or garden) snake. The constructs have a scaled skin of brown and dull gray/green, usually with a striped pattern. They have two tiny onyx-like gems for eyes, and hollow-steel fangs that are approximately 1/12th the length of the body (i.e., a two-foot long guarder snake will have 2-inch long fangs). From a distance, they appear to be normal snakes in all ways -- which aides them in their duties.

Guarder Snakes were constructed to act as unnoticed sentries. They would slither about autonomously around Kendalge's workshop. Anyone that came

¹ Of the surviving records dealing with Kendalge's Guarder Snakes, the smallest size recorded is two inches in length. This would tend to support the arguments that speak of the limits on the snake's sleep-inducing potion supply (six doses per foot equals one dose per two inches).

While nearly all accounts place a limit

within a half-mile of the compound was watched continuously by their glittering eyes . Nobody entered his abode without their observation and the wizard's knowledge. It is known that Kendalge somehow was able to give orders to, as well as receive information from his Guarder Snakes (up to and including long-distance sights and sounds). But his method of control of -- and communications with -- the snakes is a topic that has been debated over the last 300 years without resolution.

Some writings claimed that each snake was keyed to a ring (other sources say "amulet"). These writings state that the owner/bearer of the device had mental control and communion with a single guarder snake (though some scholars claim one ring/amulet could control multiple constructs). Given the sheer number of snakes involved, however, and the fact that many of them were supposedly commissioned by third parties, one would think that *some* of these control items should have been found or at least verified. Thus far, none have. Still, absent a better guess, many historians have settled on this explanation and have left it at that.

In addition to their sentry duties, these constructs were often used as scouts and spies, assassins, and even active combatants in times of turmoil. The fangs, you see, were not just for show: their bite injected a powerful sleep potion. Each guarder snake had a limited amount of doses of the potion, but could generate one replacement dose each week. On average, a typical Guarder Snake could have up to six doses per foot of body length. Each dose could keep a full grown man down for about 12 hours.

Houseplant

Kendalge's third wife, Charmaine, traveled a lot. Like her husband, she was in the service to her Kingdom. Charmaine was an Ambassador to several nations, the Chancellor to the throne for three monarchs, a member of the House of Burgesses on two separate occasions, and so on. In the days of King Ericson II, Kendalge accompanied his wife to foreign lands so often that His Majesty nearly forgot he had a Wizard in his court.

Charmaine found herself often having to find suitable temporary lodging. Her hatred of such accommodations grew over the years. Kendalge, ever mindful of the needs of his family, created the Houseplant for her. Although legend states that as many as five were made, it is known that first was crafted from an arrangement of Charmaine's favorite plants: Azaleas.

When placed on the ground and given the proper verbal command, the Houseplant would begin to sprout forth vine-like structures over a period of about five minutes that would form into a rather quaint little hut, about 10 feet in diameter, with a simple wooden door. Someone entering the dwelling, however, would find himself inside of a fully furnished, spacious, 2,500 square-foot, two-story, six-room dwelling (a living room, dining room, and kitchen downstairs; a study, sleeping quarters, and full bath facilities upstairs). The walls and furniture all appeared to be constructed of thin, tightly woven vines; it is said that they were rather comfortable and fully functional.

Although there were no windows (either inside or out) most accounts claim that a soft, bluish-green light permeated the dwelling that could be dimmed or brightened on verbal command. In fact, most things about the dwelling seemed to be automated and keyed to verbal commands: temperature could be adjusted, simple cleaning and domestic duties were handled. Even the meals were prepared and served via vine-like appendages that protruded from and regressed back into the walls as needed. Once commanded to return to normal, the Houseplant would do so: vines and such would untangle themselves and slowly disappear over a period of another five minutes. However, if anything living larger than a housefly remained within the Houseplant, the command would fail.

of 10 feet on the length, there is one peculiar scroll attributed to Lord Holstan that describes a gigantic Guarder Snake thus: "The serpent was over 45 feet in length, with a gaping maw bristling with four-foot long fangs. It swallowed men whole, and disrupted entire ranks of soldiers with a swipe of its massive tail. Swords, arrows, and even siege engines proved ineffective. That thing had to weigh as much as the foundation of the Tower of Avendale, and yet it moved with a speed and grace that was as awe-inspiring as it was terrifying. It was a monster, and it stopped us in our tracks."

This text, supposedly written some two months following Holstan's failed attempt to invade the Eastern island of Bha'ghiva -- his failure universally attributed to Kendalge and the Great Shield of Helicancile -- has never been verified.

It is unknown how long the Houseplant could remain a dwelling; however at least seven scrolls suggest that Charmaine often lived within her houseplant for months at a time. She got to the point that it was more of a home to her than any castle.

Although magical in nature, the Houseplant is not a "magic item" in the strictest sense. It is an actual breed of plant that, when it seeds and pollinates, can replicate itself -- complete with all magical capabilities. To all analysis, this plant is ordinary in every way². The plant will flower and bloom as normal; lacking water or good soil, it will shrivel up and die as any other plant would.

² Although it is not known for certain, one account states that Verhais, the Grand Druid, was taken aback upon first seeing the plant. His account describes the plant as having an "aura not unlike that of an Archon." All other recorded accounts of encounters with Houseplants have no such description associated with them.

Infernal Loom

Some of the items that Kendalge is said to have created are purposeful object lessons: items created to instruct, aid, or perhaps even punish individuals for wrongs that (only?) Kendalge could detect. Many border on the proverbial -- and as such, tend to make most historians rethink their assumptions before they accept at face value anything written about the man and his many wonders. None embodies this hesitation more so than the infamous Infernal Loom.

According to the tale, during the reign of Chelsea IV (sister to Aaron, and Great-Great Grandmother to Kendalge's fourth wife, Queen Chelsea V), the Duke of Southtimberland commissioned Kendalge to create an item of magical power that could generate wealth for his impoverished region. Kendalge explained that wealth was not what the region needed. It had fertile soil, moderate climate and good people. Still, they could not feed themselves, because the Duke, rather than developing the land, and protecting his people, had them in a constant drive to produce weapons of war. (The Duke felt that the lands to the west were stolen from his family some 600 years earlier by the Kingdom of Ghathsemioun, and desired them back). Kendalge explained that what the region needed was not wealth, but honest leadership, reason unclouded by greed, and a lack of irrational hatred. After many threats and arguments on the part of the Duke, Kendalge agreed to his demands and created the Infernal Loom.

The Loom was massive. It took 30 elephants nearly six weeks to deliver it. It was 160' long, 110' wide, and stood 30' high, a complex interworking of wood and metal, levers and gears, ropes and pulleys. Once delivered, Kendalge handed the Duke a set of scrolls that described how to operate the machine, and left without saying a word, waiving all payment on the item. Over the next several months, the Duke had a small fortress built around the Loom to protect it. He assigned guards and began his studies into how to get this thing to work.

The scrolls that describe the operation of the Loom are lost to antiquity. Most scholars say that this is a good thing. What is known is that five months after receiving the Loom, the Duke issues orders to have the trees south of the castle cleared, insisting that the trees be left intact -- branch, trunk, and root. Hundreds of trees were ripped from the ground and brought to the Loom, where they were fed into its geared mouth. After a day of processing, at the other end of the Loom a green and brown cloth woven from trees would spill forth. After about five days in the sun, this cloth would transform into pure silver. A typical pine tree of the region yielded a cloth of silver weighing about 25 pounds. The Loom could process up to four trees a day; it took six hours for a tree to be completely consumed by the machine.

The Duke's coffers filled quickly. It is written that the Southern Elves then came to parlay, begging the Duke to stop his depredations. Although they knew nothing of the Loom, they claimed that the souls of the trees were being destroyed: their elven sages could hear the torturous cries of the tree-spirits as something in Southtimberland devoured them. Scholars disagree on whether these conversations led to the Duke's bloody epiphany, or if it was some terrible accident that inspired him. But what is known is that after the Elves left, the Duke concluded that the Loom did not convert *trees* to silver; it converted *souls*. The Duke fed all the prisoners in the Castle dungeons to the Loom. Humans could be processed faster than trees (six hours in the Loom from start to finish), in greater numbers (about two dozen at a time); over 48 victims a day could be transformed into a buff-colored cloth. After exposure to sunlight, this fabric would transform into cloth of gold; a typical peasant yielded a bolt weighing about five pounds.

When the Duke ran out of prisoners, he began taking slaves, then serfs, then homeless peasants . . . anyone he felt would not be missed too much. His death toll exceeded 300 people when the revolt took place. Several members of the Dukes elite Royal Guard and an army of peasants and commoners stormed the castle. According to legend, they fed the Duke and his family to Loom. The Loom was then burned to the ground.

However . . .

In one obscure scroll, written by Sir Geoffrey of Underhill, it claims, "While the infernal contraption was still grinding away at the bone and flesh of the Duke and his family, Lord Carthin pulled the levers, bringing the machine to a halt. There was an outcry to let them die as they had killed so many. He then began the systematic dismantling of the machine. He did not harm a single piece of wood, or scratch a gear. As he did so, he told us that they shall remain within the machine, their souls never released, even as gold. They shall be tormented forever. This seemed like justice to me, and satisfied the mob as well."

If Sir Underhill is to be believed, the location of the Loom and its fate cannot be known for certain. Additionally, many are quite uncertain as to the legitimacy of the *fact* that Kendalge would have constructed such a diabolical contraption. To go out of his way to teach a lesson to a Noble is certainly his style; but to do so at the cost of so many lives (and souls) seems unthinkable.

Jewel Of The Soul

Like many enchanters of his day and since, Kendalge often used jewels as focuses for magical energies. Although he is known to have created some three-score pieces of enchanted jewelry (from rings to necklaces to bracelets to crowns and tiaras), none caused so much interest as the infamous Jewel of the Soul. Created and presented as a wedding gift for his fourth wife, Queen Chelsea V, she was rarely seen without it. Most accounts of her death would tend to indicate that the ring was entombed with her at her hometown of Verandahs; however the sacking of Verandahs 150 years ago resulted in the realization that not only was the ring not in the tomb, but neither was Queen Chelsea V.

The Jewel of the Soul is a small, quarter-carat, princess-cut diamond set in a delicate, intricate ring of white gold. When the ring is worn normally, the stone changes color to reveal the mood of the wearer. Using the standard color spectrum (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet) the ring is green when the wearer is in a moderate mood. The ring shifts towards violet as the wearer becomes happier, jovial, or excited. The stone will shift towards red as the wearer's mood becomes more saddened or foul. Various combinations of shades might indicate contentment, joy, anger, frustration, hatred, or even arousal. Additionally, if the wearer knowingly utters a falsehood, the ring turns jet black for three seconds.

In and of itself, this is no major artifact; however, if the ring is turned so that the stone faces the palm (i.e., so that the stone is not outwardly visible), then the jewel shows the mood and validity of statements made by whomever the wearer last touched while wearing the ring (such as a handshake or someone kissing the wearer's hand). The effect will last for up to three hours, and is unaffected by distance between the ring and the target.

Queen Chelsea V used this ring in several diplomatic negotiations, giving her a great advantage. Her diary, recovered from the Royal Archives shortly after the sacking of Verandahs, indicate that she once tried to use the ring to check on the mood and truth of statements her husband was making. However, the ring immediately turned white and she was immediately filled with a sense of *loneliness*, in a reversal of the ring's normal operation. Although she claims she never told Kendalge about the attempt, she was quite certain he was aware of it.

Keratophone

The Keratophone (as it was referred to in various journals that Kendalge kept), or the Thrice-curved Horn (as it was often referred to of the journals of his contemporaries), is as his contemporaries describe it. It is a large, hollowed out animal horn (but from what animal is never quite made clear), that curves in on

³ The properties that are credited to it range from causing temporary deafness and loss of one's balance (from the

itself for three full rotations. It is a mysterious instrument.

The tone it emits is low; musically, it is a "C" eight octaves below middle C. The sound cannot so much be heard (although it is audible) as felt. And it has been felt as far away as 200 miles. It would appear that the tone can be felt further, the longer one blows on it -- most records place the distance at about 10 miles for every second the horn is blown continuously. It is not an easy horn to play, so 20 seconds is about the longest anyone has ever been capable of maintaining it.

Other than its vibrations being felt at tremendous distances, the horn seems to have other magical properties³, but no two records of it agree on what they are.

Originally intended to be a military warning system, the horn could reliably call for aid from great distances when a castle, keep, or tower was placed under siege. However, despite the success of the enchantment and the obvious usefulness of the horn, even Kendalge's own records indicate that less than a dozen were ever created.

various writings of King Frederick XVI), causing animals to flee the sound (from the records of Verhais, the Grand Druid), dampening mana flow (from the scrolls of Halvord, former apprentice to Kendalge and Grand Wizard to the throne of King Augustus III), causing birds to alter their migratory patterns (Ghorik Shadowvale, Earl of Gyersetok), inspiring "waking nightmares" (Lord Holstan), and even causing the dead to rise from their graves (a scroll of unknown origin that describes the night of horror in the hamlet of Feylonne some three years into the reign of King Frederick XIX).

Pyramid Review

Alien Wars (for Star Hero)

Published by [Hero Games](#)

Written by Allen Thomas with Steven S. Long & James Cambias

Illustrated by Storn Cook, Jeff Cram, Andrew Cremeans, Keith Curtis, Jonathon Davenport, Jeff Herbert, Nick Ingeneri, Eric Lofgren, Brad Nault, & Greg Smith

184-page b&w softcover; \$26.99

The sub-genre of military Science Fiction has over the years proven to be a popular gaming niche, most notably GDWs *2300 AD* and Leading Edge Games' *Aliens* RPG, but also TSR's surprisingly decent *Bug Hunt* and Steve Jackson Games' *GURPS War Against the Chtorr*. All have taken the fight to an alien foe from outer space bent on the destruction of mankind, and they are now joined by another big supplement within the sub genre, one that details another big war that will take our every effort to win. More specifically *Alien Wars* is a sourcebook for [Star Hero](#), detailing the events of the 24th century that united humanity and laid the foundation for her growth as a galactic power described in [Terran Empire](#).

By 2300 mankind has spread itself over 90 worlds that send representatives to the Senate on Earth, plus these Senate Worlds many colonies, an area roughly 5,000 light years across. Although contact has been made with a number of races, none have proved to be a threat, and with neither a strong or unified military, nor a single figure to direct it, mankind was wholly unprepared to withstand the rapacious invasion by a Xenovore fleet in 2303. They settled on one world, scoured it free of resources and shipped its inhabitants back to the alien home worlds for purposes unknown. Then it moved onto the next.

The aliens possessed advanced biotechnology and anti-gravity plating that enabled their ships to operate within planetary atmospheres. They gave no quarter, would never parley, and worse still (as would be revealed later) they practiced anthropophagy -- literally, they ate other species. Humanity's initial response was to create a Militarized Zone as a buffer to protect the core worlds, but this proved as ineffective as the Senate and the efforts of the United Earth military. The collapse of the Senate and military failures led to a simmering civil war between three factions, with Earth led by First Magistrate Joseph Krutch. It was only following his death in 2354, and the successful defense of the Earth using the new advanced *Liberty*-class dreadnoughts the next year by Admiral Aleksandr Zhukov would unite the factions again.

For the next 40 years, Zhukov took command of a singular dedicated effort by mankind to wage war on the Xenovore threat. Through the combined effect of the conscription and training of millions of millions, effective intelligence gathering, ship building programs, new advances in tactics that ignored the advice of logistic computers, and the *Liberty*-class dreadnoughts, the United Earth military drove the Xenovores out of the Militarized Zone, and then struck deep into the Xenovore Empire. Operation Future Peace culminated in 2397 with the destruction of the enemy's home world, Throneworld Prime.

Alien Wars covers the whole of the war and the whole of the 24th century. It does so in some detail, describing the century's history, politics, interstellar relations, trade and economy, along with mankind's most notable worlds and governments, personalities and corporations, and even looks at its criminal underworld -- dominated by the Clone Mob. In terms of technology, *Alien Wars* describes interplanetary and interstellar travel, communications and

computers during this period, but understandably concentrates upon military applications. Although advances are made over the course of the century, only a few make it to the front due to production costs and logistics -- it proves easier to stick to what works. Thus personal weapons go from the slug thrower to the gauss rifle to the ammunition-less laser rifle. Likewise only a few ships are fitted with antigravity plating. Major strides are made in hyperdrive technology enabling ships to travel over 70 light years each day, which is crucial to prosecuting an interstellar war along the 20,000 light year long Xenovore Trail into enemy space. The overall feel of the technology in *Alien Wars* is meant to be gritty. Nowhere is this more evident than in the illustration of a typical United Earth Army soldier, who looks very much like a French infantryman of the First World War.

Characters in *Alien Wars* are predominantly humans built as either 50-point Competent Normal or 75-point Standard Heroic characters. Besides ordinary humans, four packages cover humans from other environments, while another five packages detail several alien species that fought alongside mankind. 12 packages cover civilian careers with a further 20 giving career details for the Terran Exploration Service, the Terran Intelligence Command, the Air Force (phased out later as manned atmospheric fighters are replaced by drones), the Navy (both wet and dry), the Army, the Marines, and the Special Forces. Low-level talents, such as Absolute Range Sense and Universal Translator are allowed, as are limited psionics, but *Alien Wars* is a superhero-free zone, even though it is part of the *Hero Universe*.

[SPOILER ALERT]

After 140 pages devoted to us, the last 40 pages detail the opposition, the Xenovore. This includes a 10-page report on what is known about the aliens by 2370, which the players *can* read if the campaign is set after that date. The remainder of the book is for the GM's eyes only. The basic Xenovore is bipedal with a reptilian appearance and insectoid features such as a stinger, a carapace, and mandibles. Generally short-lived, their advanced understanding of biotechnology enables them to create genomes that perform separate functions from controlling breeding programs to piloting figures. Further they can create specific beasts of war, such as the Slug Tank, literally a giant slug that grows its own troop-carrying howdah! This aspect of the Xenovores allows the GM free rein to design his own genomes and war beasts. In war, Xenovores fight as packs, more easily in built-up environments and only with rudimentary tactics. On the open battlefield the tactical flexibility of the United Earth military is more of an advantage as is the digging of trenches in giving viable defensive positions.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

The GMs Vault reveals the full details of the Xenovore and its society, along with a short chapter exposing the other secrets of *Alien Wars*. It is rounded out with some solid advice on running a military orientated campaign. This is backed up with a selection of useful campaign ideas.

Physically *Alien Wars* is a solidly done softback, well written and profusely illustrated. Unfortunately, it is these illustrations that let the supplement down. Some of them are too clean for the setting's gritty feel, while the maps are often too small and too dark to use with ease. Worse still, the setting's equipment is under-illustrated, and when it is depicted, the illustrations are all-too-frequently placed away from the actual write-ups. This seems a ludicrous situation considering that the player characters will be handling the various weapons, gear, vehicles, and vessels on a regular basis. What does the standard slug thrower pistol carried by United Earth military look like? Or the *Liberty*-class dreadnought? No idea, at least not from the books illustrations. The same goes for the Xenovores, which considering their role in the setting, is actually a hinderance to running a *Alien Wars* campaign.

If there is one thing that a bug hunting military Science Fiction game is going to stand or fall on, it is the nature of its enemy. The Xenovores of *Alien Wars* are not the Xenomorphs of *Aliens* (though there are similarities -- how their biotechnology seems to take over the environment and how having access to more victims means a higher birth rate), nor are they the bugs of *Starship Troopers*. In game terms, there are parallels between the Xenovores and the Kafer of *2300 AD* -- the carapace, the hunched posture, the mandibles, and the refusal to communicate. There are other, lesser parallels, but the Xenovores in *Alien Wars* play up to the expectations of the sub-genre -- the implacable faceless foe, their vile acts, the indomitable spirit of mankind being the key to victory, and so on.

Apart from the woeful use of its illustrations, *Alien Wars* presents everything needed to run a military science-fiction

campaign across the whole of the 24th century. Nor does it restrict such a campaign to a default period -- *Alien Wars* can be run during the years of the initial invasion, the civil war, or Operation Future Peace. And while it is intended to be run in conjunction with *Star Hero*, it could just as easily be run using *GURPS*, or with some effort using [Traveller T20](#) or even the forthcoming *d20 Future*. Although we are still waiting for the definitive supplement upon the subject, *Alien Wars* is an excellent treatment of the sub-genre, particularly so for the *Star Hero* GM that wants his players to take a stand in saving mankind at its hour of desperate need.

--*Matthew Pook*

Psi Fi Exodus

by [Chad Underkoffler](#)

Genre: Psionic Space Opera

Style: Cinematic

Themes: War, Diplomacy

Fleeing from the Dzogl Tyranny, the last warships of the Eyendi Alliance lead a rag-tag fleet to a shining planet known as *Earth*.

What Every Earthling Knows

People disappear sometimes? Sure! They probably just change their name and leave no forwarding address, or die out in the wilderness somewhere, or end up buried in some serial killer's crawlspace.

UFOs and aliens? Probably just swamp gas, weather balloons, optical illusions, or the planet Venus. Maybe they're top secret stealth fighters.

Psychic powers? There's no real proof or hard evidence of them, is there? Just coincidence, wishful thinking, and a bunch of con men.

These are the beliefs of the people of Earth. Unfortunately, they are wrong.

What Every Eyendi Knows

Alien Life

All organic life throughout the galaxy is built on the same molecule: deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), and tends to arise on more-or-less Earth-like worlds. Even more astonishingly, sapient beings -- that is, those possessing consciousness -- have DNA that is *remarkably* similar to that of other sapient beings throughout the galaxy. Thus, all sapients are humanoid, bipedal, have thumbs, the same sorts of internal organs and sensory apparatus, and so forth, with minor variations due to their evolutionary origins. However, the genomes of the galactic races are not close enough to permit interbreeding. . . yet.

While this has been laid at the feet of a precursor "seeder race," scientific evidence argues against it. The biggest hole in the seeder theory is the lack of any evidence or artifacts for an ancient star-faring race. Current galactic thought on the matter points towards a common aspect of the holographic universe (see below, *Psi Power*).

So, the different races look basically the same, live on the same sorts of worlds, require the same sorts of resources, and essentially think in much the same way. This permits the different races to understand one another, making a galactic community possible. In many ways, every sapient being is "human."

Of course, familiarity breeds contempt, and any difference is always a fine opportunity for racism, hatred, and abuse. Thus, the state of the galaxy today.

"The Dzogl Tyranny" (the Nenpo Corporate)

In theory, the Nenpo Corporate is a multi-species republic of "incorporated worlds," united for mutual defense, interstellar commerce, and freedom for all sapients. In practice, it is a despotic fascist state, ruled by a single race --the

Dzogl -- who are in turn ruled by a single popular leader: the *Dzi*. The *Dzi* is an emperor in all but name, all Dzogl of his party are aristocrats, those Dzogl not of his party are barely considered citizens, and all "alien" members of the Corporate are distinctly treated as second-class citizens (at best) or slaves (at worst). The synthetic language of the Nenpo Corporate serves as a galactic *lingua franca*.

The saurian Dzogl are an old, old race that look much like Humans do, except that they have scales in place of hair. Their skin, eye, and hair colors range all along the spectrum. While their hearing and sight are generally inferior to that of the other races, they are less affected by drastic changes in decibel or illumination level. They have the most acute sense of taste of all sapients, and a remarkable sense of smell related to this (second only to the Raviddu). The Dzogl possess a capability called *fraas*, which appears to be a remnant of a heat-sense; in many ways, the utility and scope is analogous to that of a Human's sense of smell. They are ovoviviparous reptiles.

They are intelligent, highly adaptable, and quite long lived. While still within their homeworld's gravity well, they made great strides in the study of *Bio-Psi* (see below, *Psi Power*). Consequently, they are a tremendously healthy and long-lived species. When they began their exploration of space, this control over their physical bodies (enhanced by the lack of gravity) permitted them to make long-term subluminal expeditions.

After 100 years of exploration and colonization, they met the Czpeela (who had just begun their own Space Age). First contact with the Czpeela was tense, but happened without bloodshed. The Czpeela were welcomed into the Nenpo Corporate as a "junior member." The Dzogl benefited from the Czpeela's advanced grasp of Pattern and facility with *psitech*, yet treated the aliens like savages who knew a few interesting card tricks.

Two centuries later, the Corporate discovered the Raviddu (who were ramping up for an Industrial Revolution). Alas, first contact with the Raviddu was a disaster, requiring a "pacification action." Unlike the superficially amiable induction of the Czpeela into the Corporate, the Raviddu were placed into bondage and forced to use their body and psi for their conquerors' benefit.

After six centuries of being treated as children (the Czpeela) and four centuries of being treated as animals (the Raviddu), these two races joined together to win civil rights and respect from their masters. The result was war between "the Dzogl Tyranny" and the new Eyendi Alliance (beginning circa Earth year AD 1810).

The Eyendi Alliance

Czpeela: The Czpeela are descended from batlike ancestors. They appear much as Humans do, with the exception of large, pointed ears placed somewhat higher on their skull; leaf-shaped noses; tough webs of skin between their fingers (but not toes); and a ridge of horny flesh, stretching from their "pinkie finger" down along their arms, torsos, and legs (a remnant of lost wings).

Their skin, eye, and hair colors are the same as the range found in Humans. Their hearing is superior to that of all other sapients. While their nightvision is slightly superior to that of Humans, in daylight they have the worst eyesight of all the races. The Czpeela have a mild echolocation sense called *chick-skree-ka*. They are mammals.

They are exceptionally intelligent, and quite adaptable. Possibly due to the way their brains are wired up for chick-skree-ka, they have a racial psi facility in *Sense Pattern* (see below). This means that many of the galaxy's best *psionitologists* (psionic scientists) and *psitechnologists* (psionic engineers) are Czpeela.

It rapidly became clear to the perceptive Czpeela that they were nothing more than second-class citizens to the Dzogl, possessing no real power or respect. After many attempts to peacefully gain equality within the Corporate were met with institutional violence, they joined forces with the Raviddu and declared war.

Raviddu: The feline Raviddu spring from tigerlike ancestors. They appear much like Humans do, except for slightly pointed ears, prominent canine teeth, and a covering of fur over their entire bodies composed of awn and down hairs. Their skin, eye, and hair colors are close to those of Humans, but their hair usually possesses interesting patterns (classic tabby, spotted, mackerel, and ticked). Their hearing is second only to the Czpeela; while their vision in all

levels of light is even better, they are not a Human's equal in daylight. They have the most acute sense of smell of all sapients, and a remarkable sense of taste related to this (second only to the Dzogl). The Raviddu possess an additional olfactory sense they call *flehrring*, which permits true discriminatory smell -- they can detect the difference by scent alone between a gallon of distilled water and a gallon of water with a pinch of salt dissolved in it. They are mammals.

The Raviddu have no special talent for psi, but like all races, their psi skills can be trained with proper instruction. This relative psychic "weakness" may be why the Dzogl chose not to treat them as well as the more-psychic Czpeela, brutally assaulting their homeworld and making them into slaves.

Raviddu are as intelligent as any race. They possess more fast-twitch muscle fiber (short, quick bursts of power -- sprinting, lifting, punching, etc.) than Humans. This comes in handy during their adolescent courting rituals, where both sexes of Raviddu compete in seasonal sexual display conflicts for mates (females in autumn, to raise their sexual status; males in spring, to secure mating access). Of additional interest is the pair-bonding between chosen mates: during pregnancy, the male hunts, provides, and protects the female; after pregnancy, the male takes over the primary nurturing of the child, while the female returns to the hunt, providing and protecting the male. A Raviddu is considered an adult at age 10.

This physio-cultural habit has led to the biggest disaster in the history of the Raviddu race. During the Battle of Gamma 5 (see below, *The War*), the Raviddu colony ship *Rranasha* was destroyed, killing *all* the pregnant females, nurturing males, and children of the species. It was discovered later that there were no male Raviddu survivors in the entire Alliance fleet. Raviddu refer to this event as "the Tragedy." The only hope of the race is the "New Mother" (see below, *NPC Backgrounds*).

(Quisling/Copperhead) Dzogl: There are a few Dzogl who do not support the Nenpo Corporate's policies on aliens, and seek a broader galactic community of equals. They are part of the Eyendi Alliance, though it is difficult for the other members to fully trust them. "Copperhead" is a Human nickname given to these double-agents.

"Noredawo" (Humans): The primate-descended Humans -- "Noredawo" in Corporate language -- are an aberration, in more ways than one.

Humans are an enigma to the Dzogl: they never located the Human homeworld. Discovered by Czpeela scouts (around Earth year AD 1835), the existence of Earth and Humans was classified top secret. As a race, the Humans are not part of the Eyendi Alliance (indeed, none living on Earth even *knows* that extraterrestrial life exists), though individual Humans have become ridiculously valuable in the course of the War. Why? The answer is simple: Humans are the most powerful psi-users in the galaxy.

While a Human's senses of smell and taste are pathetic by galactic standards, their sense of sight (daylight vision, color discrimination, depth perception) and their sense of touch are far beyond that of any other race. They also possess abundant slow-twitch muscle fiber (long, sustained power -- useful for running, swimming, and such), giving them an unmatched endurance. And if these physical gifts weren't enough, Humans are the most powerful psychics ever recorded, with the ability to perform Macro-Psi within a gravity well (see *Why Humans?* below for more details).

The War

While one could say that the Nenpo Corporate's hunger for habitable worlds with resources and psi-capable sapients to exploit made the War inevitable, it truly only began with the Riots on Ghaub. This colony world, distant from the core worlds of Corporate space, boasted a high proportion of Czpeela and Raviddu slaves compared to the Dzogl population, making it ripe for civil rights activism. The heavy-handed smackdowns of relatively peaceful protests lit a desire for freedom among these "lesser" races, and the interstellar psi-casts of the carnage set the torch to the bonfire of war.

The Eyendi Alliance coalesced from a number of militant Czpeela and Raviddu organizations, but quickly accreted a substantial number of "average folks." All across the Corporate, Czpeela agent provocateurs helped Raviddu slaves cast off their chains, kill their captors, steal Dzogl ships, and psi-jump to secret rendezvous points. While few of the

ships started out as military-grade, and only a handful of Alliance members had combat training, their zeal and inventiveness quickly made up for this lack.

Early in the War, the Alliance scored major coups in the capturing of a colony world (Zamhol 3), which held a commercial psitech factory, an orbital drydock, and an old battleship in the process of being salvaged for scrap and spare parts. Ingenious Alliance engineers took the old hulk, made it spaceworthy again, and even added in a number of upgrades; soon, the *Brial* (a Czpeela word for "nightmare") started cutting a swath of destruction through the Dzogl fleet.

The tide eventually shifted, and the Dzogl once again had the upper hand. Alliance losses were substantial. Then, a long-range scouting mission discovered something incredible: Humans.

The Czpeela (on behalf of the Alliance) established a hidden Observation Station in Earth orbit, and began to investigate. Given the potential power of the Humans, intense study of them was necessary. Indeed, a small handful of powerfully-psiic individuals were brought aboard the Station for investigation and first contact. More or less open about the Alliance's circumstances, the Observers stressed the dire straits they all were in -- as well as the fact that soon, Earth could be in a similar situation. Earth *must* come in on the side of the Alliance, or all races would suffer.

For safety's sake, no Human specimen would be permitted to return to their homeworld unchaperoned until this happened -- the Alliance psionitologists detected a possible flux in the Pattern that could spell doom if Human xenophobia were stirred or ill-advised psitech experimentation began.

Outside of the Earth's gravity well, and guided by their growing perceptions of the Pattern, some humans help analyze the state of Earth psychology and culture for the Alliance, attempting to formulate a good method of revealing the existence of extraterrestrial life and the War. A number crossed the Quantum Bridge (see below, *Items & Locations*) to take up arms with the rest of the Alliance. Amazingly, not one abducted Human ever decided to be uncooperative.

With a number of Humans joining the War, the Dzogl Tyranny lost ground. Human-led and -supported strike forces blasted Corporate flotillas into debris. Victory again seemed possible, when the Battle of Gamma 5 changed everything.

The bulk of the Alliance fleet, refueling near Gamma 5, were struck unawares by three Dzogl battleships and attendant support vessels. Though the Eyendi fought bravely, they were cut into pieces. This is when the Raviddu Tragedy (see above) occurred, in the destruction of the colony ship *Rranasha*. All across known space, secret Alliance bases blew up, caches disappeared, and spies vanished. The Alliance began to crumble under the onslaught. It was clear they had been betrayed, but by whom?

Only a small number of Alliance ships managed to psi-jump to safety; fewer still arrived at the rendezvous point. Backed against the wall, with the Dzogl closing in, the only hope for freedom was for the fugitive Alliance fleet to fall back to Earth and convince them to join the fight en masse. But the way is long and dangerous, communications with the Observation Station in near-Earth orbit have ceased, the Quantum Bridge is inactive, the coordinates of the Sol jump-point are no longer correct, and the Dzogl are on their trail.

Psi Power

"There's a theory that the universe's underpinning is information, not matter and energy. Matter and energy move in volume, but the informational capacity of the universe has been found to rely only on surface area. That means that the universe is two-dimensional. Matter, energy,

Psi is the ability of a conscious mind to glean information or affect change in the universe simply through *attention* and *intent*.

The Pattern: The psionitologists of the galactic races call this underlying informational plane "the Pattern." Sapient consciousness has an affect on the Pattern (see [the Heisenberg uncertainty principle](#), [the Copenhagen interpretation](#), and [Quantum decoherence](#) as examples); in short, the act of observing something changes it. Additionally, evidence shows that if a piece of the Pattern is altered, the change propagates instantaneously throughout the

time, you, me, and the floor are holograms. Everything in volume is an expression of a two-dimensional plane of information."

-- Dr. Kwelo, *Planetary* #19, "Mystery in Space"

holographic universe (see *Quantum teleportation* -- what Einstein called "spooky interactions at a distance" -- [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)). Psi is the ability of a conscious mind to make alterations "go to 11."

Imagine the Pattern as a computer program. *Sense Pattern* allows one to read the computer code and *Alter Pattern* allows one to alter the code. Interestingly, attempts to Sense and Alter the Pattern simultaneously often -- but not always -- interfere with each other: Heisenberg Uncertainty writ large. No individual psi can Sense and Alter at the same time; only well-drilled teams of psychics

comfortable with one another can operate in both aspects at once.

While traditional psi talents such as telepathy, remote viewing, telekinesis, psychic healing, and so forth can all be explained as uses of these two abilities, psionics in "Psi Fi Exodus" doesn't work exactly like it does in most fiction.

Psi vs. Gravity: The first and most important aspect to understand about these "spooky interactions" is that psi and gravity interfere with each other. A generalization is that in gravity fields of 1G or higher, only vast amounts of psi energy have even a small effect on the physical world. However, it's more complicated than that -- the overlapping effects of numerous masses interacting in space causes "turbulence" which can further weaken (or even strengthen), even within a 1G+ gravity field.

Psi Operation: *Intent* is key for the application of psi to the physical world; the determination must be strong so as to direct the energies to affect change. Interestingly, the use of some conceptual frameworks for psi seem to have a negative correlation with Intent, and this is one large deviation from how psi is often viewed in fiction. For example, say a psi wishes to bend a spoon. While fictional telekinesis might pose this as the use of a "third arm" or "extra hand," in practice, thinking this way would actually *interfere* with the attempt. Instead, a galactic psi would simply Alter the Pattern by intently thinking "bend, spoon."

The *Emotions* that the psychic are feeling during the attempt provide the power -- but raw emotion alone tends to fog a psychic's focus. The preferred mental state is a dual one -- great emotional energy, overlaid with calm clarity (typical examples would include "icy rage" or "too scared to be afraid").

Knowledge of the target of the effort aids in precise "aiming" for best effect. For example, while any psi could speed up a chemical reaction by Altering the Pattern by thinking "speed up," a psi who is also a chemist will probably have better luck accelerating the reaction.

Consider the psychic as if he were an old-fashioned pump fire extinguisher. Intent is the nozzle, Emotion plus clarity is the pressure in the canister (Emotion without clarity would be leakage and subsequent loss of pressure from the canister), and Knowledge is realizing that one should aim at the base of the flames.

Psi and Bio-Psi: Furthermore, psi seems to have a widely varying effect when used on organic entities. Many psionitologists consider it a different "flavor" of psionic energy called *Bio-Psi*. Bio-Psi that seeks to aid or strengthen a living creature seems to be easier than that which hinders or weakens it, and the conscious and subconscious mindset of the target (in addition to the target's own psi ability) can have a reinforcing or interfering effect. Thus, a being who does not wish to be helped resists healing Bio-Psi, while possibly boosting the effects of deleterious Bio-Psi upon himself!

Micro-Psi and Macro-Psi: Most psi effects within a 1G+ gravity well are Micro-Psi in nature, manipulating objects smaller than a grain of sand. The ability to influence a digital random number generator, guess the next card in a limited deck, the ability to slow the fall of a feather, make an electron jump shells, or reinforce the repair capabilities of a small number of organic cells would all be Micro-Psi.

Outside of the interference of a 1G+ gravity field, this often translates up into Macro-Psi, which can manipulate visible objects with notable force. The ability to influence a tossed coin, the ability to "view" a distant area remotely, bend a spoon, levitate a book, cause a spark, or cause a small laceration to instantly scab would all be Macro-Psi. The absolute limit of Macro-Psi telekinesis appears to be roughly one half times the body-mass of the psychic (but it's

believed that the Human limit is two to three times that).

Two species of sapients are notable for having evolved Macro-Psi talents that operate within a 1G field: the Czpeela (Sense Pattern only) and the Humans (Sense and Alter Pattern).

Psitechology: Fortunately, psitechology can increase the effect of psi on the physical world by an order of magnitude. Micro-Psi channeled through psitech comes out as Macro-Psi, and Macro-Psi comes out as *Mega-Psi*. Psitech requires not only conventional power, but also a psychic actively utilizing the device in order to operate; there are no automatic psitech machines. This psitechology permits galactic civilization to exist.

How Psi is Used: Some common uses of psi (usually boosted by psitechology) include:

- Travel (through psitech subluminal drives, psi-jump engines, and Quantum Bridges; see below, *Items & Locations*).
- Communications and Investigation (nigh-instantaneous, via judicious use of Sense and Alter Pattern, or conventional comms through a Quantum Bridge).
- Medicine (longevity-enhancement, general health, treatment of disease and illness, as well as extremely rapid healing, regeneration from injury, and mental elimination of physiological effects of zero gravity).
- Offensive & Defensive Technologies (Alter used to cause a target to "run" better or worse; Sense used to ferret out and track enemies; both used to interfere with the other aspect).

What Everybody Doesn't Know

Why Humans?

Why do Humans exhibit such vast psi power, compared to the other races? Human and Czpeela psiontologists theorize that the answer lies with the Moon.

The Moon is more than simply the Earth's satellite; indeed, given the proportional sizes of the two bodies, the Earth-Moon system is best described as a binary planet. The proximity of the Moon gives rise to the tides, as its gravity caresses the surface of Earth. This is a very turbulent gravitational environment, and the life that arose within it evolved to take advantage. As a muscle is stressed, it grows stronger.

Czpeela Observation Station Not Responding

A big mystery is the abrupt silence from the Observation Station near Earth. Without warning, in the middle of a routine report beamed through their Quantum Bridge to the fleet flagship, the Bridge shut down -- and hasn't reopened since. Furthermore, some form of "psi-static" is interfering with attempt to Sense Pattern in the Sol system, so much so that the primary jump-point's coordinates have skewed, making a direct Psi-Jump impossible. Several theories explaining the silence and the static have sprung up; the evidence sometimes favors one explanation, and sometimes another. GMs can pick one of these, or come up with their own:

- **Gone Boom:** Some sort of accident -- either internal (reactor leak, explosive experiment, loss of atmosphere, etc.) or external (meteor strike, collision with telecom satellite, targeted by an Earth orbital weapon platform, etc.) -- killed everyone on the Station.
- **Gone Fishin':** The Observers got tired of being cooped up in a gloried tin can for decades, and in the throes of psychically-enhanced cabin fever, all decided to go dirtside for a little R&R.
- **Gone Nuts:** Currently, the Alliance members are re-enacting the Hutu Uprising, using tater tots and fishsticks specially imported from the surface. Possibly some form of psionically-broadcast dementia? A mutated terrestrial disease? Hallucinogenic ergot in the hydroponics tanks?
- **Gone Over:** The Station personnel have voluntarily sold the Alliance out to the Tyranny, in return for money, power, preferment (see also *Traitors in the Fleet?*). Dissenters were, of course, spaced -- or worse.
- **Gone to Prison:** The Station has been captured by a small Dzogl long-range scout patrol. . . or an unexpected

Earthling space force.

Traitors in the Fleet?

The sneak attack at Gamma 5 and the Raviddu Tragedy could not have happened without at least one Alliance traitor (probably more) in a trusted position. This fact haunts most Eyendi -- how many vipers are they clutching to their bosom as they flee for Earth? Strict discipline, increased security measures, and ongoing retroactive intel analysis are all focused on finding any Judas (or Judases) in their midst. Raviddu are *particularly* keen in their observances of these methods; indeed, many intel officers of that race put in off-duty time, running down leads and collecting information. It's an open secret that if a Raviddu discovers a traitor before her compatriots do, no trial will ever be necessary. However, even the most zealous Raviddu realizes that substantial proof will be needed to avoid slaughtering an innocent individual. . . innocent like all the murdered Raviddu.

Possible traitors are, in decreasing likelihood: 1) Copperhead triple-agents; 2) Humans looking out for number one; and 3) the Observers of Earth. Indeed, the true traitor(s) could be all or none of these.

Dzogl Plans for Eyendi Alliance (and possibly, Earth)

In Dzogl eyes, this "alliance" is nothing more than outright revolution against the Nenpo Corporate and all it stands for: it must be broken, brutally. Vast reductions in the rebellious sapient races' populations are necessary to make the remainder tractable. The Raviddu will return to their chains, and this time, the Czpeela will join them. All traitor Dzogl must be imprisoned and publicly made to see the error of their ways (then quietly executed).

However, a mysterious and powerful sapient race is working with the revolutionaries -- the so-called Noredawo. Little is known of them; what has been discovered is that they appear to be intelligent and physically robust, possess remarkable vision in high-intensity light, and are incredibly talented in psi. The Corporate Intelligence Division recommends that more research be done on capture, interrogation, and dissection of these aliens. They may be too powerful to simply exterminate (like the J'lasp), conquer (like the Raviddu), or co-opt (like the Czpeela). If the Noredawo possess military technology at the Corporate level, the suggested angle of attack is offering peaceful trade agreements and treaties, in order to gather further information to begin subversion psyops.

PC Opportunities

There are several ways to bring in PCs to a Psi Fi Exodus campaign:

Abducted Humans

Any Human taken from Earth will be, by necessity, an extraordinary individual in some way. Additionally, they are probably more adventurous than most of their kind, as they're with the fleet rather than at the Observation Station helping lay the groundwork for "the Revelation." A mildly amusing thing for some players may be to construct their PC as a famous historical figure who suffered a mysterious disappearance or death in our world -- they were really just snatched up by aliens ("Captain Earheart, Lieutenant Crater, Lieutenant Bathurst -- report to your gunboat, on the double!").

Eyendi Sapients

Czpeela: While usually scientists or engineers, Czpeela characters could come from any walk of life, but the loftiest heights were probably barred to them. The nature of second-class citizenship, combined with a generally sharp Sense of the Pattern led to deep discontentment and anger. Still, the Czpeela know that patience is a virtue: they will wait until all pieces fall into place before striking.

Raviddu: Before the War, every Raviddu character was either a slave or a guerilla warrior adept at dodging pursuit. In

both cases, physical attributes were more prized, though mental strengths had their place. Uselessness is seen as a form of weakness, and weakness kills. This mindset infuses all Raviddu, which leads to most of the surviving members of the species being involved in hands-on physical occupations -- medics, mechanics, soldiers, farmers, factory-workers, even pilots.

Quisling/"Copperhead" Dzogl: The majority of Copperhead Dzogl are minor traders or financiers of the Nenpo Corporate, if they travel in and out of Corporate space. If they're the sort who've completely thrown their lot in with the Alliance, they tend to be academics, artists, or activists, who are often forced to learn useful skills quite quickly. The Alliance -- especially the fleeing fleet -- doesn't have the resources to support an ivory-tower intelligentsia.

New Galactic Races

Perhaps the PC is from a new sapient race discovered during the fleet's journey. This leaves a lot of scope for the player and GM to create an interesting character, but a few questions need to be answered first:

- Why hasn't the race been absorbed into the Nenpo Corporate yet? (Undiscovered, fought them off, no psi ability, "not worth it," etc.).
- What is the race's stance on outsiders?
- What is the race's stance on the War?
- Has (or will) the race aid the Eyendi Alliance?
- Is the PC a representative of a government of their world, or a free agent?

NPC Backgrounds

Each character below has their most important *strengths* (generally positive qualities, abilities, skills, or effects) and *weaknesses* (generally negative qualities, abilities, skills, or effects) detailed. In descending order, the ranks are Master, Expert, Good, Average, and Poor. Depending upon the conception of what a character is like, any quality can be a strength or a weakness.

For example, suppose a character has "Spoiled Brat" as a quality. If it's ranked Average or above, it's a strength: the character always gets his own way, can wield undue influence by threatening to sic their Mommy or Daddy on others, might possess lots of cash or gadgets, and people may fawn over them, making life easy. But if the character has "Spoiled Brat (Poor)," this is a weakness: the character has led a pampered and sheltered life, rubs people the wrong way, and expects everyone to bend over backward to fulfill his most minor needs.

Since many game mechanics provide prose "benchmarks" to understand stat or skill levels, the ranked qualities below should be easily adaptable into any desired system.

Note: It is suggested that military rank not be made a strength in the character write-up; instead, negotiation between GM and players should come up with appropriate ranks for the PCs. This aids buy-in to the campaign, as no player will be "forced" to obey the orders of another PC against the *player's* will. The Alliance military chain of command in "Psi Fi Exodus" is simple, and adapted from Dzogl military culture. From highest to lowest, it goes Admiral, Captain, Lieutenant (civilian ship commanders and other experts are treated as Lieutenants as a courtesy), Sergeant, Citizen.

The Admiral aka Rear Admiral Morz Draude: The Admiral is known more by his title than by his given name. He is a titanium-willed Czpeela, a Master of Sense & Alter Pattern, Tactics, and Rhetoric. He's an Expert Administrator, Warrior, and Pilot. He's also a widower and Prone to Speaking Aloud to His Dead Wife (Poor). While standing only 4 feet, 10 inches tall, he's larger than life. The Admiral *will* lead the Alliance fleet to Earth, or die trying. He has a bone-dry sense of humor, a pocketful of hope, and terrible ulcers. (Low-ranked PCs should rarely interact with the Admiral, at least at first -- he's the "main guy" of the surviving Alliance.)

Lieutenant George Devlin aka Callsign: "Triangle": Pilot Anything (Expert), Alter Pattern (Expert), Zero-G Wrestling (Good), Cook (Good), Sense Pattern (Good), Knife (Average), Bad at Bio-Psi (Poor). Snatched from the

cockpit of his TBM Avenger Torpedo Bomber over fifty years ago, Devlin can fly anything, blow small ships apart with his Psi-Blaster, perform credibly in weightless hand-to-hand against a Dzogl soldier, and whip up chow to die for, but he really sucks at affecting living beings psychically. After several years getting up to speed on psi, Devlin became one of the last Humans to cross the Quantum Bridge and join the Alliance fleet before the Observation Station went dark. He's driven to get home to Earth, find out what happened to the friends and mentors he left behind on the Station, and lead his gunboat squadron -- the Gorillas -- against the Dzogl.

Captain "Peyton Farquhar" aka Callsign: "Misericorde": Sense Pattern (Master), Leadership (Expert), Witty (Expert), Alter Pattern (Good), Pilot (Good), Total disregard for his own safety (Average), and Sarcastic (Poor). Nothing really matters to Farquhar (which isn't his real name, by the way): he's still half convinced that the near-century he's spent among aliens, psychics, and warfare are just the nightmare delusions of a dying brain. But until it all goes black, he's decided to carry on the best he can. A wound in the temple during a terrestrial war awakened his psi, which was strong even on Earth, making him an admirable recruit for the Alliance. Unfortunately, his attitudes and outlook made him difficult to deal with, and the Observers quickly ushered him over the Quantum Bridge. He became a gunboat pilot in the Gorilla Squadron, eventually rising to squadron commander. As the War turned against the Alliance, Farquhar found himself promoted by necessity to command a newly-captured Dzogl destroyer. He made a few pithy comments, had the techs refit the saurian ship, rechristened it *Kenesaw*, and got on with the business of battle. One of the few experienced commanders left after Gamma 5, Farquhar is a member of the Admiral's de facto "cabinet," even though he disagrees with almost everything the little bastard says.

Trader Noruzu aka Codename: "Jiviriwoz": Spy (Expert), Sense & Alter Pattern: Bio-Psi (Expert), Sense & Alter Pattern (Good), Trader (Good), Pistols (Good), Pilot (Average), Paranoid (Poor). Noruzu grew up blue collar, cheek-by-jowl with Raviddu slaves and Czpeela laborers. When he saw the way the government treated his alien friends, he knew he had to do something. So he joined a militant activist group and became a fifth columnist for freedom. He currently shuttles vital components from Dzogl space to out-of-the-way systems where he trades Corporate tech for Alliance treasure.

Lieutenant Zora Bhoru aka Callsign: "Slasher"; post-Tragedy: "New Mother": "New Raviddu Eve" (Master), Zero-G Judo (Expert), Pilot (Expert), Devious (Good), Sense & Alter Pattern (Average), Pregnant (Average), Grounded and Pissed About It (Poor), Constantly Under Guard (Poor). The Raviddu pilot Bhoru was one of the top Alliance aces before the Battle of Gamma 5; today, she *is* the top Raviddu ace. Which makes it all the more annoying that she might never fly again. You see, about a week after the Tragedy, Bhoru felt extremely ill. After consultation with the medical officer, she discovered something terrible and wonderful: she was pregnant, and with a male Raviddu fetus. Within her womb was the hope of her race. In some ways, the War is now over for her, but in many others, it is just beginning.

Items & Locations

Spaceships

Most spaceship crews operate totally in zero G: ship crews are taught enough Bio-Psi techniques to retain physical health in weightlessness. For areas that require some stability, gripper panels (which interact with gripper boots; see below) are set into the walls and floors. Some very large ships have rotating sections, which provide spin-gravity.

The standard galactic power system is a fusion Tokomak, supplemented by solar panels when necessary.

Motive Systems

There are several methods of getting from point A to point B:

- *Conventional Thrusters:* Using an advanced ion engine (electromagnetically-accelerated xenon, collimated and rephased), constant but low-power thrust can be generated, so long as the electricity to the magnets and recollimator-rephaser unit (and the xenon fuel) holds out. Conventional Thrusters generate a force strong enough

to push 1 ton of mass 1 mile per hour per hour (i.e., it takes 5 hours to reach the speed of 5 mph).

- *Subluminal Drives*: The Subluminal Drive is a piece of psitechnology that affects the mass of a spaceship, and supercharges the Conventional Thrusters. With an operator skilled in Alter Pattern controlling it (by thinking "go faster"), the Drive makes a large percentage of a ship's mass and inertia simply *go away*, while increasing the output force of a Thruster by several orders of magnitude. This allows a ship to reach anywhere from 10% to 90% of light-speed. Interestingly, while under Subluminal Drive, a spaceship is unaffected by relativistic effects: time passes at the same rate for the crew as for outside observers. A Subluminal Drive requires substantial conventional power and psi power to function.
- *Psi-Jump Engines*: A Psi-Jump Engine is a psitechnology superluminal slingshot. Within a solar system, there exists at least one jump-point of perfect gravitational equilibrium between its two largest masses (for example, in the Sol System, the jump-point would be the point of gravitational equilibrium between the Sun and Jupiter); outside of a system, jump-points turn into jump-regions, based on [Voronoi partitions](#). Jump-points and jump-regions can be determined mathematically, mechanically, or psionically (using Sense Pattern) -- though this last increases the chances of mis-jump. When a Psi-Jump Engine is operated at this jump-point (or jump-region) by an operator skilled in Alter Pattern, the ship can be "slingshot" or "jumped" to *any jump-point or jump-region instantaneously*, so long as the current correct coordinates of the target jump-point are known.

A Psi-Jump Engine requires precise conventional piloting and consumes 90% of a ship's power and 100% of its operator's attention to safely slingshot. Deviations from these factors (piloting, power, psi, proper coordinates) can cause a *mis-jump*: the ship becomes lost in time, space, hypertime, or hyperspace.

- *Quantum Bridge*: A Quantum Bridge is an artificial jump-point (or "tunnel"), created within the center of a psitechnology supercollider free-floating in space. Two psychics gifted with great talent in Macro-Psi must operate the Bridge from either side; this requires great and stressful concentration -- even masterful psychics cannot hold the Bridge open for more than a half-hour at a time -- and truly vast amounts of conventional energy. If either operator or power-supply wavers, or the correct coordinates are not crystal-clear, a mis-jump is probable. Quantum Bridges usually run on a synchronized pre-set schedule, so that widely-separated operators will be concentrating at the same time to hold the Bridge open. Battleships carry a Quantum Bridge that can be unshipped, operated, and restowed.

Ship Weapons & Armor

- *Conventional Weapons*: While much ship combat is via psi, the guided missile is the conventional long range choice; unfortunately the guidance systems are easy to tweak with psi -- with the result that each missile becomes a moving battleground for psychics trying to disable or protect the projectile. Artfully aimed electromagnetic railguns and rockets can be used long-range, but they're mostly for short range disabling of enemy ships, and point defense against missiles.
- *Conventional Armor*: Metal, ceramic, and polymer plating.
- *Psi Weapons*: Big psitech units that amp a psychic's thoughts of "break, damn you" into effective anti-ship weapon-equivalents.
- *Psi Armor*: Crews of psychics plugged into psitech units that use Sense and Alter Pattern at turns to interfere with or reinforce against the enemy's use of Sense and Alter.

Types of Spaceship

- *Scout*: 2 to 4 man ships; very fast, sneaky, lightly-armed and -armored. (Commanded by a Sergeant.)
- *Gunboat*: Three to eight person ship; fast, moderately-armed and -armored. (Commanded by a Lieutenant.)
- *Destroyer*: 100 to 300 person ship; fast speed, heavily-armed and -armored. (Carries two squadrons of five gunboats each, and three scouts; commanded by a Captain.)
- *Container Tugs*: Three to eight person ship; slow, lightly-armed and -armored. (Civilian; attaches to gigantic container pods for commercial shipping.)
- *Luxury Liners*: 100 to 200 man ship; moderate speed, lightly-armed and moderately-armored. (Civilian; commanded by a civilian "Captain.")

- *Factory Ships*: 50 to 60 man ship; very slow, lightly-armed and moderately-armored. (Civilian; manufacturers necessary goods.)
- *Agripods*: 30 to 80 man ship; very slow, lightly-armed and -armored. (Civilian; grows food and raises small livestock for 600 people.)
- *Colony Ships*: 600 to 1000 man ship; moderate speed, lightly-armed and moderately-armored. (Civilian, but often commanded by retired military pilots; may have rotating sections.)
- *Battleship*: 400 to 800 man ship; moderate speed, heavily-armed and -armored. (Carries six squadrons of five gunboats and eight scouts; commanded by an Admiral.)

Suggested Alliance Fleet Size & Composition

While GMs should adjust the size and proportions of the surviving Alliance fleet as they choose, here's a suggestion, just to get things rolling: one battleship, two colony ships, four agripods, two factory ships, three luxury liners, 10 container tugs, three destroyers, 30 gunboats, and 17 scouts, and a population of 3,500. (Here's the first adventure: the agripods only produce enough food for 2,400 people. What do the characters do?)

Personal Weapons, Armor, and Gear

- *Spring Needler*: The most common shipboard sidearm, used so as not to damage valuable equipment or compromise hull integrity. Powerful electric springs fire a sliver of metal at high velocity; needles are often coated with chemicals to provide additional effects (sleep toxin, luminescent coating, etc.).
- *Spring Staff*: A nightstick-sized rod that pops open to full quarterstaff length with the touch of a button. Often used as a steering pole or for extra propulsion velocity in zero G, in addition to its use as a weapon.
- *Psi-Blaster*: Small backpack-sized unit that boosts Micro-Psi to Macro-Psi levels; however, boosting Macro-Psi to Mega-Psi rapidly depletes the battery of this portable unit. Used as a weapon (often incorporating the "directional wand" to aim, though this isn't necessary), a form of armor, and even a medic's kit.
- *Tri-layer Weave*: Sturdy, stiff cloth of woven waterproof polymers that resists damage from any source.
- *Gripper Boots*: Plastic boots constructed of psireactive material that can be mentally switched between two modes -- "sticky" (to gripper plates) and "not sticky." Used in zero G environments.
- *EBPR*: The Emergency Bio-Psi Reinforcer is a undergarment of insulated wires, tied into a small psitech "amulet" (often bearing the wearer's ID and medical information), and powered by a conventional battery cell. In cases of physical harm to the wearer (injury, ejection into vacuum, drowning, etc.), the EBPR can be activated to permit the wearer (or a qualified medical professional) to enhance his Bio-Psi to keep body and soul together.

Events & Possible Story Arcs

The main goals of the vagabond Alliance fleet are: 1) to retreat to Earth; 2) without leading the Dzogl there; and then 3) get Earth to join the Alliance. Many types of events can stem from each of these three goals.

Retreat to Earth

Why? Because it's a planet full of powerful psychics, with abundant resources, in a sector of relative safety. However, the path is long and hard, and must be traveled stealthily. Here are some possible events that can spice up the retreat:

- More ships bearing Gamma 5 survivors discovered.
- Important ship or ships (agripod, container pod full of food, medical frigate) become separated from the fleet.
- Necessary repairs must be made (planet-side or on the run).
- First contact with new species.
- Resupply run to a Earthlike world (probably a single-climate space opera world) for necessary materials (oil, radioactives, xenon, water, food, biomass, metal ore).
- Military or medical cache discovered (Eyendi or Dzogl?).
- Outrun something (meteor swarm, comet, nova).

Hide from Dzogl

If the Dzogl discover the fleet, they are doomed. If the fleet leads the Dzogl to Earth, they will have doomed an entire world of innocent sapients.

- Dzogl recon scouts sighted.
- Dzogl gunboat squadron attack!
- "Sitting duck" Dzogl target appears.
- Weave through Dzogl observation posts without being sighted.
- Fleet must "turtle" while Dzogl convoy passes by.
- Lifeless Dzogl battleship drifting in space. . . Why? Was it a space mishap? Is it a trap? Maybe the breakdown of systems from damage sustained in battle with the Alliance -- or even an unknown, unaligned race?

Arrival at Terra

What happens if the Alliance fleet makes it to Earth?

- What's the current global situation?
- Which country or countries should be approached for help?
- How will different Earthlings react to the existence of alien life? Friendly alien life? Hostile alien life?
- Should contact be open or secret?
- Where is the Observation Station and its personnel?
- Are the Dzogl here already?
- What if Earth says no to fighting the Dzogl? Heck, what if they say yes?

Advice, Opportunities, & Pitfalls

How Far to Earth? (Movie, Miniseries, or Series)

The most important issue a GM running a "Psi Fi Exodus" campaign will need to address -- other than the size and composition of the Alliance Fleet -- is one of basic structure: *how long does it take for the Alliance fleet to reach Earth?*

The answer depends on the desired length of campaign. If the journey only takes a single session, that's structurally like a *movie*, and will tend to undercut the interesting adventure potentials of a ragtag fleet of ships dodging Dzogl patrols and running into new and different problems.

If the fleet takes three to eight sessions to get to Earth, then that's a *miniseries*. This is a strong structure for the full-bore fleeing effect. Also, it's a generous but constrained period of time to dedicate to a single game; if folks get bored, it'll be over soon enough. The main story arc -- get to Earth -- can be interwoven with subplot arcs to add depth. However, a miniseries may leave questions unanswered that the players would enjoy exploring.

The strongest structure is probably that of the ongoing *series*, preferably broken into six to eight "episode" seasons. This way, there's plenty of conceptual room for an overall story arc for the season (*Season One*, find Earth's coordinates; *Season Two*, journey to Earth; *Season Three*, arrival and "first contact" with the rest of the Humans; *Season Four*, the Dzogl fleet shows up; etc.) and a number of subplot arcs to be braided into the campaign. However, such a sprawling epic can suffer a loss of player interest (in the time-proven mode known as "Are we there yet, Papa Smurf?").

It's highly recommended that a GM sit down with his players once all have agreed to play in a "Psi Fi Exodus" campaign, even before character generation, and have an open discussion about how long a reasonable journey to Earth should take (in terms of sessions). This will allow the GM to plan out appropriate adventures, and allow the

players to buy-into the campaign concept all the more firmly by expressing their preferences and expectations.

That's a good thing.

Other Resources

- **Holographic universe links:**
 - [Planetary #19](#).
 - Bekenstein, JD. "[Information in the Holographic Universe](#)." *Scientific American*; August 2003 and [sidebar](#).
 - "[The Universe as a Hologram](#)." (author unknown)
- **Psionic links:**
 - [Parapsychology FAQ](#).
 - Radin, Dean. [The Conscious Universe -- The Scientific Truth of Psychic Phenomena](#).
- **Other links:**
 - *Battlestar Galactica* [Original](#) and [SciFi Channel miniseries](#)
 - "[Junk DNA: the 'software' of life?](#)"
 - [The Last Starfighter](#).
 - *Lost in Space* [Television series](#) and [Movie](#).
 - [The Persian Expedition](#) (Xenophon's *Anabasis*).
 - *V* and [V: The Final Battle](#).

Istee Validios: Viscount of Science Fiction

for *Noblis*

by **Bradley Robins**

We love the works of our hands. We have built devices that allow us to walk the stars as young gods waking from slumber in the cosmic egg. We hope these devices will take us to places and ideas beyond what could be dreamt down the hole of the gravity well. Man creates himself through his ability to alter the plastic world.

The problem is that when man remakes the world he also remakes himself. While we might hope to shape ourselves into something more than we are, we also fear what we might become. What if we become not something more, but simply something more horrid?

We see in science-fiction what we saw in Isaiah: visions of seraphim with flaming swords, thrones raised above the world, and all the joy and wonder of the human soul. But from those visions comes a realization of what humanity is, and how terrible such glory can be. Lucifer, the morning star, was the greatest of all the angels, and because of his place he suffered the greatest fall.

In science-fiction we see the hope that our works can make us the morning star, and the fear that such a terrible power will simply give us all that much farther to fall.

--IV

Sci-Fi Viscount

Attribute Level Miracle Points

<i>Aspect</i>	3	6
<i>Domain</i>	2	6
<i>Realm</i>	1	5
<i>Spirit</i>	1	5

Gifts and Virtues

- Durrant
- Space Capable (not harmed by hard vacuum or radiation, no breathing, limited need for food and water)

Limits/Restrictions

- Limit: Brains over Brawn (physical Aspect is treated as a 1)
- Restriction: Distractible (advanced tech, or transhuman philosophy)
- Restriction: Revelatory Trait (cybernetic augmentations)
- Affiliation: Code of the Light

Wound Levels

- 1 Deadly Wound

- 2 Serious Wounds
- 2 Surface Wounds

Bonds

Strength Subject

6	Advancing human technology to the point of singularity
4	The well being of his estate
4	Protection of Chretien's Garden and his transhuman children
3	HG's discretion
2	His original copies of every Jules Verne novel
2	Happiness and well-being of his Familia

Istee Validios was a patron of many of those on the cutting edge of biotechnological research as well as those artists who bring forth visions of transhumanism and the spiritual potential of technological development. He felt quite firmly that science and science fiction were the investment capital of the future: that the energy invested in dreaming of future hopes and hazards would yield inevitable dividends of progress and safety. His tireless work brought him to the attention of the Powers, and when the old Noble of Science Fiction was killed by his brothers after having been subverted by the Dark, Istee was chosen to fill the role.

Though there were initial worries, given the fate of the previous Noble, Istee has proven to be a bane of the Dark and the Excrucians alike. Tempering his enthusiasm for the new and progressive with concern over side-effects and open-eyed contemplation of the changes that the dynamics of his estate bring, Istee has found a greater degree of balance and control than his predecessor ever did. Though Istee still leaps headlong into new ideas, he no longer supports any idea simply because it is new. These days he presses hard at ever front, trying to milk every drop of potential while battling back any of the Promethean backlashes that writers since Shelley have warned about.

Of course Istee does not always see the positives and negatives of his estate in the way that many other Powers of the Light do. Istee does not quake before the ideas of change or the possibility of humanity changing into something more than what it has been. While many Magisters of the Light insist that being human is based on being exactly what humanity has always been, Istee believes that the essence of humanity is to change. Humanity, he argues, has always changed and will continue to do so. The things that humanity brings forth are humanity, and must be protected and preserved. This does not mean that he accepts all changes, far from it. He believes strongly that while humanity can change, it can also change into something more or something less but that staying the same is impossible. Because of that he is obsessively dedicated to helping humanity become something more, something greater, than it has been.

Though firmly aligned with the Light, Istee also has ties with the Wild. His love of change attracts him to them, and the possibility that his estate could someday birth a way for the Wild to fly free to the stars, over the top of the Weirding Wall, draws them to him just as strongly. To be able to step beyond the bounds of all that is known and fly beyond the dreams of Angels is a dream that haunts Istee and the Wild alike, and so many chancels of the Wild will happily open their doors to him.

Estate

Istee is the Sovereign of Science Fiction in its many forms. He thus has power over writers, artists, and visionaries of genre works and the dreams that they produce and that drive them to produce. He also has mastery over any technology that is feasible but not currently commonplace. He can, for example, make hand portable laser pistols and nanotech viruses and dictate the operations of some cutting edge technology. Finally, the Domain of Science Fiction covers a limited subset of visions of the future. Istee cannot actually tell or control what the future will hold, but he can see and manipulate visions and ideas of the future dealing with hopes and fears surrounding technology and progress. This is one of Istee's greatest weapons against the Dark, for he is able to create dreams and visions that derail or realign the development and implementation of destructive technology.

Weaknesses

Istee is a visionary, and because he spends so much time in dreams of the future he often forgets to make practical implementations in the present. Once an idea leaves the realm of the theoretical and heads into the practical not only does it tend to slide from Istee's estate, it slips from his attention as well. To Istee the point is not the finished product, it is the dream that begins the development. Once the thing is real, it no longer concerns him and he moves on to the next new thing.

As a result of this negligence, many of Istee's best ideas and biggest plans fall apart when they hit reality. While his planning and forethought give some protection to the projects he abandons to fate and mortal hands, it is occasionally not enough. The decades long struggle to bring out electrical, hydrogen, and hybrid cars is an example of one of Istee's projects that foundered without the active backing of its Noble patron.

Design

Mountain Laurels of ambition mixed with the Goat's Rue of reason twine about the branches of the Almond Tree of thoughtfulness against a gray plain covered with white lines that give a suggestion of infinite motion and perspective.

Associated Non Player Characters

Always interested in the works of futurists, dreamers, and science, Istee has his fingers in many places. From bleeding edge research labs in prestigious universities to comic book shops full of impressionable youth and bulletin boards full of nitpicking geeks, Istee makes sure to keep tabs on the movers and shakers who walk through his domain. His current anchors (and they change regularly) are Saul Poller, a transhumanist game writer, and Dr. Gennifer Winters, a researcher working on principles of GUTs interaction with human perception.

Story Elements

Istee can appear in any story having to do with cutting edge or futurist technology, lost worlds from the Age that was nearly destroyed, dreams about the future of humanity, and attempts to wrest control of destructive technology away from the Dark. Weird science, breakthroughs, dreams and nightmares of the future, Babylon 5 conventions, and humans who are no long quite human or constructs who are all too human fit the Viscount of Sci-Fi. He also tends to show up while sci-fi movies are playing, and a random showing of Gattaca or 2001 is often a clue that his influence is present.

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Pyramid Review

Deadwood: On Location (for Deadwood)

Published by [Cheapass Games](#)

Designed by James Ernest

Cover art by Phil Foglio

Edited by Elizabeth Marshall

Six b&w Location boards and rules; \$3

One of the great things about Cheapass Games is when it creates a supplement to one of its existing games, the new product is comparatively every bit as cheap as the original. *Deadwood*, its game of bad movie making, has expanded its studio budget by a couple of dollars and is ready to start filming *On Location*.

For those not in the know (or who haven't read the [Pyramid review](#)), Deadwood Studios USA is the worst movie studio in the world. It makes all manner of cut-rate cinematic bombs, most of them westerns. Players are actors, moving about the company's back lots in search of roles to fill. They start as low-level losers, but by the end of the game they can become high-end losers with better roles. Better or starring roles mean better pay, and the biggest bank is the way to win the game.

Cheapass released a series of alternate decks that could be had for a buck apiece. The studio moved from oaters to musicals, martial arts/chop-sockey flicks, sci-fi movies, and horror films, and there were new roles to assume like Unconvincing Puppet, Squid Tentacle, or the Scuba Coach. The decks also provide Distractions, a new kind of card mixed in with Scenes that, when turned over, shook things up. "Mirror Universe," for example, makes the actors start the day's shooting at the Casting Office instead of the Trailers, while "Spirit of the People" gives you a fan base that ensures you get a bonus for filming.

But one of the biggest problems that plagued the game, according to the publishers, is that the old board became predictable. It was an eight-piece puzzle that fit together to show the studio lot. The Trailers were in one corner, the Casting Office in another, and between them, a series of studio sets interconnected by walkways. Actors were allowed one space of movement a turn.

Much like the first move of a *Diplomacy* or *Axis & Allies* game, it seemed there was a conventional pattern that, though it didn't guarantee success, at least made sure seasoned players hit the same locations in the same ways. They stepped on one another's toes and play became more of a race to a predetermined destination than an exercise in strategic decision making.

Deadwood: On Location is a new board system. The studios have secured a set of rickety buses, and they use these to ferry the cast and crew out to (for Deadwood, anyway) exotic locales outside of town. Unlike the original, these boards don't fit together like a jigsaw. They're Locations, numbered one through six, laid out in a pair of columns.

Each board has a studio set or two, with additional roles listed on the board segments. The Trailers are on board one and the Casting Offices on six, roughly the same orientation. In between, there are still 10 studio sets to work on. They have different names, however (only the General Store has been preserved), and both the number of roles and their required ranks have been juggled.

So what keeps these placards from becoming as obvious as the last set? To get from one Location to the next, you have to schlep it around in a bus. Each board has one or two Bus Stops, and a stop pictures three faces from a six-sided die. When you hop the bus, you roll three dice and compare the results to those numbers. For example, Location 1's depot lists two, three, and four, so you could move to board two, three, or four if you roll a match on the dice. Instead of one space of movement, you are now allowed two moves, and since your first use of the bus doesn't count against you, movement is more a tool than an obstacle when compared to the original game.

Cheapass Games is staying true to its statement of purpose, replacing eight board sections with six (and smaller ones at that). Something had to give, and in this case it's a convenient place for the Scene cards. The old studio had a slot printed at each set where a Scene could slide back and forth to denote which Shot was currently filming. Now they must be placed beside the board, and Shots are tracked by counters (which gamers must provide) on printed clapboard symbols. It's not really an inconvenience, since it trades one awkward operation for another. Sliding the cards around to track Shots had the potential to upset the board, which was stuck together somehow; now you just need a bit more space. Frankly, this is preferable.

The presentation is almost identical (assuming like stationery colors across the whole print run). It may be easier to see the walkways on the first set than on this one, but not notably so. The *Another Day, Another Dollar* expansion decks are the same color blue as *On Location*, but since they contrast well on the first board and they aren't placed atop the Locations at all in the new set, this isn't a problem.

Deadwood: On Location is an improvement in many ways over the first production, and a simple and inexpensive one that Deadwood Studios USA, Cheapass Games, and the customer can all appreciate.

--Andy Vetromile

What to Do With Your GURPS Third Edition Books

by Sean M. Punch

With *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition* on the horizon, many dedicated Third Edition gamers are no doubt wondering, "What do I do with all these Third Edition books?" We've made every effort to ensure that you can continue to use your Third Edition books with Fourth Edition -- where possible. But the reality of a new edition is that it *isn't* possible to keep everything 100% compatible . . . if it were, it wouldn't be much of a new edition!

Compatibility varies from topic to topic, but in general:

- *Characters*. Most Third Edition advantages, disadvantages, and skills are still around in Fourth Edition, and the rules for using them haven't changed much. A handful of traits have different names, and some have changed more -- to distinguish them from or *combine* them with similar abilities, or to balance their point costs better. But unless you insist that every last name and point cost line up, you can use the occasional NPC or creature from a Third Edition book in Fourth Edition without too much work.
- *Combat*. Changes to the combat system -- primarily aimed at streamlining it -- mean many small incompatibilities between Third Edition and Fourth Edition weapons, warriors, combat abilities, etc. in play. Most of these are easily glossed over by the skilled GM, but they're not truly ignorable.
- *Magic*. The magic system has changed some, but all of the changes are in the rules for *casting* spells. Individual spells have basically the same statistics as their Third Edition equivalents, and you can use Third Edition spells in Fourth Edition without negative consequences -- although a few Fourth Edition spell descriptions are worded differently to take advantage of new game concepts.
- *Psionics and super-powers*. We've switched to a completely new system for psi and super abilities in Fourth Edition -- one that has little in common with its Third Edition predecessor. The *Basic Set* provides you with sufficient information to convert . . . but you *do* have to convert, and the conversion isn't always 1-to-1.
- *Vehicles*. Vehicles have changed . . . a lot. Top speed, hit points, loaded weight, and a lot of other important quantities mean the same thing in Fourth Edition as in Third Edition, but many other stats don't line up well. You might have to go with your best guess until we release *Vehicles* for Fourth Edition. Fortunately, the *Basic Set* includes a generous list of sample vehicles, which should be enough for vehicles-light games.
- *Weapons and armor*. Low-tech equipment hasn't changed much. We've tweaked a few numbers, but not enough to upset game balance if you want to use the occasional Third Edition item. High-tech weapons have changed more -- mostly in ways that simplify use. In many cases, you can look up the new stats for the item in the *Basic Set*. This isn't an option for specialized or world-specific equipment, though; once again, you might have to go with your best guess.

So what does all this mean for specific Third Edition books? We've split the entire Third Edition library into a few general categories below, and provided notes on what Fourth Edition implies for each class of books.

Core Rules

Basic Set, Fourth Edition completely replaces *Basic Set, Third Edition*, *Compendium I*, and *Compendium II*. We'll be releasing *Update* to help Third Edition players get used to Fourth Edition . . . but realistically, there are too many rules in these books to offer a full conversion guide. It took us two years of full-time work to revise everything, after all!

Rulebooks

Books that contain major expansions to the core rules are also genuinely out of date. This is an unavoidable consequence of a new edition! The *spells* in *Magic* and *Grimoire* are fine . . . mostly . . . but the *magic rules* aren't entirely the same. The character abilities described in *Martial Arts* and *Religion* work slightly differently, too --

although the *Basic Set* provides enough information to get by until the necessary Fourth Edition books are available. *Psionics* and *Supers* are largely obsolete; you can create psis and supers using Fourth Edition, but they won't look much like their Third Edition counterparts. And supplements on designing equipment (like *Mecha*, *Robots*, and *Vehicles*) just aren't compatible at all.

Sourcebooks

Sourcebooks *might* be fine . . . it all depends on the subject matter. The advice in "genre books" remains as good as ever. Books of spells and magic items mostly work as written, too. Catalogs of equipment (marked * on the list below) are somewhat obsolete -- especially those that focus on high-TL equipment. Books of character and racial templates (†) are *very* obsolete, because they're all about precise point costs. Collections of creatures and NPCs (§) are a special case: if you just want stats that work -- more or less -- it's perfectly safe to use Third Edition stats and ignore the fine print. But to get "legal" Fourth Edition characters, you are going to have to wait for *Update* and do the adaptation yourself.

- *Aliens*†
- *Atomic Horror*
- *Best Of Pyramid 1*
- *Best Of Pyramid 2*
- *Bestiary*§
- *Bio-Tech**†
- *Blood Types*†
- *Cliffhangers*
- *Cops*
- *Covert Ops*
- *Creatures of the Night*§
- *Cyberpunk**†
- *Dinosaurs*§
- *Espionage*
- *Faerie*†
- *Fantasy Bestiary*§
- *Fantasy Folk*†
- *High-Tech**
- *Horror*
- *Illuminati*
- *Low-Tech**
- *Magic Items 1-3*
- *Modern Firepower**
- *Monsters*§
- *Rogues*†
- *Shapeshifters*†
- *Space*
- *Space Bestiary*§
- *Special Ops*
- *Spirits*†
- *Steampunk* (and *Screampunk*)
- *Steam-Tech**
- *Supporting Cast*§
- *Swashbucklers*
- *Time Travel* (and *Timeline*)
- *Ultra-Tech**
- *Ultra-Tech 2**
- *Undead*†

- *Villains*§
- *Warehouse 23**
- *Warriors*†
- *Who's Who 1-2*§
- *Wizards*†

* Contains rules or statistics for technology and artifacts that differ in Fourth Edition.

† Contains templates or character abilities that use different costs or rules in Fourth Edition.

§ Contains creatures or NPCs that work in Fourth Edition *if* precise point costs are unimportant.

Worldbooks

Worldbooks published for Third Edition are mostly fine for Fourth Edition! Background material requires no adaptation at all, and there are sufficiently few NPCs and creatures in most worldbooks that you can use them "as is" by keeping the same abilities and ignoring point costs (but if you want 100% compatible character sheets, be prepared to put in extra time!). Weapons and vehicles need conversion, but Fourth Edition offers ready-made equivalents in many cases. Only extremely tech-heavy worldbooks (*) and those chock-full of templates or new character abilities (†) are likely to be a problem.

- *Age of Napoleon*
- *Alpha Centauri*
- *Alternate Earths*
- *Alternate Earths 2*
- *Arabian Nights*
- *Atlantis*
- *Autoduel**
- *Aztecs*
- *Black Ops*†
- *Blue Planet*
- *Bunnies & Burrows*†
- *Cabal*†
- *Callahan's Crosstime Saloon*
- *Camelot*
- *Castle Falkenstein* (and *The Ottoman Empire*)
- *Celtic Myth*
- *China*
- *Conan*
- *Cthulhupunk*
- *Cyberworld**
- *Deadlands: Weird West* (including *Hexes*† and *Varmints*)
- *Discworld Roleplaying Game*‡
- *Egypt*
- *Fantasy* (and *Tredroy*)
- *Fantasy II*
- *Goblins*
- *Greece*
- *Hellboy Sourcebook and Roleplaying Game*‡
- *Horseclans*
- *Humanx*
- *Ice Age*
- *Imperial Rome*
- *In Nomine*†
- *International Super Teams*† (and *Mixed Doubles*†, *Super Scum*†, and *Supertemps*†)

- *IOU*
- *Japan*
- *Lensman*
- *Mage: The Ascension*†
- *Mars*
- *Middle Ages 1*
- *Myth*†
- *New Sun*
- *Ogre**
- *Old West*
- *Places Of Mystery*
- *Planet Krishna*
- *Planet of Adventure*
- *Prisoner*
- *Reign of Steel**
- *Riverworld*
- *Robin Hood*
- *Russia*
- *Space Atlas 1-4*
- *Technomancer*†
- *Terradyne*
- *Transhuman Space**†‡ (including *Broken Dreams*, *Deep Beyond*, *Fifth Wave*, *High Frontier**, *In The Well*, *Personnel Files*†, *Spacecraft of the Solar System**, and *Under Pressure*)
- *Traveller** (including *Alien Races 1-4*†, *Behind the Claw*, *Bounty Hunters*†, *Far Trader*, *First In*, *Ground Forces**, *Humaniti*†, *Modular Cutter**, *Planetary Survey 1-6*, *Rim of Fire*, *Star Mercs*, *Starports*, and *Starships**)
- *Uplift*†
- *Vampire Companion*†
- *Vampire: The Masquerade*†
- *Vikings*
- *Voodoo*†
- *War Against the Chtorr*
- *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*†
- *Wild Cards*† (and *Aces Abroad*†)
- *Witch World*
- *WWII**‡ (including *All the King's Men*, *Dogfaces*, *Frozen Hell*, *Grim Legions*, *Hand of Steel*, *Iron Cross*, *Return to Honor*, and *Weird War II*)
- *Y2K*

* Contains large numbers of vehicles, robots, or other equipment that requires extensive adaptation.

† Contains new character abilities or significant numbers of character templates.

‡ Self-contained! You can play this game "as is" without *any* edition of the *Basic Set*.

Adventures

Adventures are a lot like worldbooks: the plots and settings are as good in Fourth Edition as they were in Third Edition, but you may wish to update NPCs and creatures to Fourth Edition, and replace specific items of equipment with their Fourth Edition equivalents.

- *Beyond Thunder River*
- *Bili the Axe: Up Harzburk*
- *Chaos in Kansas*
- *Conan and the Queen of the Black Coast*

- *Cyberpunk Adventures*
- *Deathwish*
- *Fantasy Adventures*
- *Flight 13*
- *For Love of Mother-Not*
- *Harkwood*
- *Martial Arts Adventures*
- *Moon of Blood*
- *Operation Endgame*
- *Orbital Decay*
- *Orcslayer*
- *Scarlet Pimpernel*
- *School of Hard Knocks*
- *Space Adventures*
- *Stardemon*
- *Supers Adventures*
- *The Old Stone Fort*
- *The Wyrmslayer*
- *Time Travel Adventures*
- *Unnigh*
- *Zombietown U.S.A.*

Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



With Scenarios, Writer's Block Can Be Good

This week brings us to the third installment of our 773-part series on looking at the metaphor of the building block and how it relates to the gaming world. (For those of you pulling out your straight razors now and heading for the bathtub, I would point out that the above is a joke; I think I can only stretch this metaphor for one more installment after this one. For those of you who assumed I was joking and are *still* heading for the bathtub with the straight razor, just remember: Across the vein to the hospital; along the vein to the morgue.)

Anyway, in our last installment we looked at how our block analogy applies to the rules and character-creation side of RPGs. This time, I thought I'd look at the other side of the cardboard duck blind and see how the GM might use the same ideas for his own purposes.

Unfortunately, I'm not coming up with much so far. (Except, that is, for next week's final installment -- an idea I like so much I'm going to try to milk it for all it's worth.) But I have given it a fair bit of thought, and here's what I've come up with.

Observation One

I've concluded that GMs have their own comfort and interest level in the components of an adventure. I reached this conclusion not based on my years of gamemasterly experience, but rather in my near-half-decade of *Pyramid* editing. In particular, what seems to be most the most important deciding factor for GMs is the size of the building block -- or the granularity of the components.

For example, some GMs like having lots of medium-sized blocks. For them, the more piecemeal components offered by RPGs and *Pyramid* are most useful: Supporting Cast members, collections of interesting artifacts and locations, and so on. For them, coming up with the smaller bits is a pain, but they still want the freedom to use larger prebuilt elements to build into their larger game. It's a lot easier to plug in an interesting character into most campaigns than it is to find a spot for a complete scenario.

Others like having tiny blocks, where they assemble their own characters, dig through their mental sandbox for the grains they'll build the adventure around. For them, the most useful articles are probably the ones that provide new bits to build up from -- new rules, spells, equipment, systems, and so on. For them, an interesting backstory wrapped around a Candle of Soul-Stealing is wasted material. They can come up with their *own* backstory, and if they're provided with the basic mechanics behind the soul-stealing principle, they can make a Lampshade of Soul-Stealing and make their own adventure around this perfect element.

And others like their adventures prebuilt, complete with all the characters, locations, and rules already in place. This is like having great big blocks, or even a preassembled playset, such as the classic Castle Grayskull for the He-Man toy line, complete with skull-mouth doorway and a front lock designed for the assembled Power Sword from the He-Man and Skeletor figures, which were taking up hardly *any* space in my closet until my mom decided they were taking up too much room, and when I got home they were gone, and I went running to my mom, and as the tears were streaming down my face, she tried explaining things to me, saying dumb things like, "But Steven, now that you're 16 years ol-"

I'm sorry; I got off-track.

Anyway, for these readers, the play's the thing (so to speak), and a good adventure means they can start playing almost immediately. They don't have as much interest in building their own characters, or coming up with plots, or working out the logistics of how Dr. Dume's earthquake device can provide a credible threat while still being thwartable.

Interestingly, I note that each of the three editions of *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* seems to fit one of these broad categories. The First Edition focused much more on the large-block model, where the bulk of what was available for years was ready-made adventures. The Second Edition was more like the medium-block model, with lots of books of

creatures and lots of campaign world support material. And now, with the Third Edition, the most popular supplements seem to be those that provide the smallest blocks – more tiny bits with which to make characters, monsters, spellcasters, and so on. (With this last observation, I note it's somewhat arbitrary; the first wave of *d20 System* supplements were almost entirely adventures, and the myriad-option books that exist nowadays are targeted at least as much to players as they are to GMs.)

Anyway, probably the most interesting observation I can make with this system of categorization is that it is often easy to strip elements out of more complex entities. For example, a fully-fleshed adventure can have its NPCs, items, and plot elements taken out and used elsewhere, even if the adventure as a whole isn't useful. Likewise items or locations with an interesting mechanic or element can have that "block" taken out of them and used elsewhere (such as the Lampshade of Soul-Stealing). And for many game systems, it's possible to take various creatures and NPCs and change one or two elements to have a new block; for example, if you have stats for a medical doctor in a system, in a pinch it is often possible to switch "Law" for the "Medicine" skill and -- *voila!* -- Instant Lawyer! (The same applies to almost any game system's Evil Humanoids; with at most just one minor tweak, it's possible to make any of those lawyers, too.)

Unfortunately, it's those who prefer fully realized adventures that have it worst off. There isn't much they can do to get ready-to-run adventures . . . unless, that is, they use some kind of random adventure generator.

Observation Two

Random adventure generators are fairly common; the earliest I remember is from the *World Builder's Guidebook* from *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*. And I was talking with a friend for a column idea today, we discussed various random adventure generators. Now, here's where my "not sure where the building block metaphor is going" admission above rears its ugly head again. In this case, I can only speak from personal experience, rather than any gobs of wisdom I've gotten from *Pyramid*. However, I've often found these generators to be somewhat unsatisfying, both as a player and a GM. As a GM, I've used them at times when I've been *really* stuck for an adventure idea, in the hopes of stirring my creative juices. But I've never really liked using them, probably because I'm at heart a middle-block guy.

As a player, I don't much care for them, especially since the results feel so arbitrary; when I look at a random adventure table, I realize that the various plot elements -- the *raison d'être* for the PCs' existence -- are very arbitrary; there's nothing that makes one more or less special than the other. So when I look at them, I just envision Batguy standing on a rooftop, looking up at the Batguy Signal in the night sky: "I'm being summoned by the police! Perhaps there is a crime involving the museum, the dock front, or the science laboratory; I wonder if it will be a kidnapping, theft, or fire-slash-flood-slash-some-other-natural-disaster? Oh, well . . . better see how the dice turned up."

Yes, I know it's irrational. And I recognize this because, when I've used similar random adventure generators online, I find them to be quite interesting and useful . . . probably because I can't see all the elements that *weren't* randomly chosen.

Nevertheless, random generators are perhaps the purest form of building-block adventure concepts. And it's possible that there might someday be a pen-and-paper product that captures the interest and complexity of more plotted adventures using nothing but random elements.

Observation Three

I think "Observation Three" would be a good name for a *Star Trek* adventure, science fiction project, or alternate world. Or maybe even a New Wave band.

But that's not important.

Anyway, I suspect we're all drawn to different kinds of blocks, depending on our interests, tastes, and probably even first -- or most memorable -- experiences and exposures to adventure design. But for those who've grown too

accustomed and comfortable with their current system, it might be worthwhile to try out different techniques to see what pops out.

But be careful; it might be a lawyer.

--*Steven Marsh*

Istee Validios: Viscount of Science Fiction

for *Noblis*

by **Bradley Robins**

We love the works of our hands. We have built devices that allow us to walk the stars as young gods waking from slumber in the cosmic egg. We hope these devices will take us to places and ideas beyond what could be dreamt down the hole of the gravity well. Man creates himself through his ability to alter the plastic world.

The problem is that when man remakes the world he also remakes himself. While we might hope to shape ourselves into something more than we are, we also fear what we might become. What if we become not something more, but simply something more horrid?

We see in science-fiction what we saw in Isaiah: visions of seraphim with flaming swords, thrones raised above the world, and all the joy and wonder of the human soul. But from those visions comes a realization of what humanity is, and how terrible such glory can be. Lucifer, the morning star, was the greatest of all the angels, and because of his place he suffered the greatest fall.

In science-fiction we see the hope that our works can make us the morning star, and the fear that such a terrible power will simply give us all that much farther to fall.

--IV

Sci-Fi Viscount

Attribute Level Miracle Points

<i>Aspect</i>	3	6
<i>Domain</i>	2	6
<i>Realm</i>	1	5
<i>Spirit</i>	1	5

Gifts and Virtues

- Durrant
- Space Capable (not harmed by hard vacuum or radiation, no breathing, limited need for food and water)

Limits/Restrictions

- Limit: Brains over Brawn (physical Aspect is treated as a 1)
- Restriction: Distractible (advanced tech, or transhuman philosophy)
- Restriction: Revelatory Trait (cybernetic augmentations)
- Affiliation: Code of the Light

Wound Levels

- 1 Deadly Wound

- 2 Serious Wounds
- 2 Surface Wounds

Bonds

Strength Subject

6	Advancing human technology to the point of singularity
4	The well being of his estate
4	Protection of Chretien's Garden and his transhuman children
3	HG's discretion
2	His original copies of every Jules Verne novel
2	Happiness and well-being of his Familia

Istee Validios was a patron of many of those on the cutting edge of biotechnological research as well as those artists who bring forth visions of transhumanism and the spiritual potential of technological development. He felt quite firmly that science and science fiction were the investment capital of the future: that the energy invested in dreaming of future hopes and hazards would yield inevitable dividends of progress and safety. His tireless work brought him to the attention of the Powers, and when the old Noble of Science Fiction was killed by his brothers after having been subverted by the Dark, Istee was chosen to fill the role.

Though there were initial worries, given the fate of the previous Noble, Istee has proven to be a bane of the Dark and the Excrucians alike. Tempering his enthusiasm for the new and progressive with concern over side-effects and open-eyed contemplation of the changes that the dynamics of his estate bring, Istee has found a greater degree of balance and control than his predecessor ever did. Though Istee sill leaps headlong into new ideas, he no longer supports any idea simply because it is new. These days he presses hard at ever front, trying to milk every drop of potential while battling back any of the Promethean backlashes that writers since Shelley have warned about.

Of course Istee does not always see the positives and negatives of his estate in the way that many other Powers of the Light do. Istee does not quake before the ideas of change or the possibility of humanity changing into something more than what it has been. While many Magisters of the Light insist that being human is based on being exactly what humanity has always been, Istee believes that the essence of humanity is to change. Humanity, he argues, has always changed and will continue to do so. The things that humanity brings forth are humanity, and must be protected and preserved. This does not mean that he accepts all changes, far from it. He believes strongly that while humanity can change, it can also change into something more or something less but that staying the same is impossible. Because of that he is obsessively dedicated to helping humanity become something more, something greater, than it has been.

Though firmly aligned with the Light, Istee also has ties with the Wild. His love of change attracts him to them, and the possibility that his estate could someday birth a way for the Wild to fly free to the stars, over the top of the Weirding Wall, draws them to him just as strongly. To be able to step beyond the bounds of all that is known and fly beyond the dreams of Angels is a dream that haunts Istee and the Wild alike, and so many chancels of the Wild will happily open their doors to him.

Estate

Istee is the Sovereign of Science Fiction in its many forms. He thus has power over writers, artists, and visionaries of genre works and the dreams that they produce and that drive them to produce. He also has mastery over any technology that is feasible but not currently commonplace. He can, for example, make hand portable laser pistols and nanotech viruses and dictate the operations of some cutting edge technology. Finally, the Domain of Science Fiction covers a limited subset of visions of the future. Istee cannot actually tell or control what the future will hold, but he can see and manipulate visions and ideas of the future dealing with hopes and fears surrounding technology and progress. This is one of Istee's greatest weapons against the Dark, for he is able to create dreams and visions that derail or realign the development and implementation of destructive technology.

Weaknesses

Istee is a visionary, and because he spends so much time in dreams of the future he often forgets to make practical implementations in the present. Once an idea leaves the realm of the theoretical and heads into the practical not only does it tend to slide from Istee's estate, it slips from his attention as well. To Istee the point is not the finished product, it is the dream that begins the development. Once the thing is real, it no longer concerns him and he moves on to the next new thing.

As a result of this negligence, many of Istee's best ideas and biggest plans fall apart when they hit reality. While his planning and forethought give some protection to the projects he abandons to fate and mortal hands, it is occasionally not enough. The decades long struggle to bring out electrical, hydrogen, and hybrid cars is an example of one of Istee's projects that foundered without the active backing of its Noble patron.

Design

Mountain Laurels of ambition mixed with the Goat's Rue of reason twine about the branches of the Almond Tree of thoughtfulness against a gray plain covered with white lines that give a suggestion of infinite motion and perspective.

Associated Non Player Characters

Always interested in the works of futurists, dreamers, and science, Istee has his fingers in many places. From bleeding edge research labs in prestigious universities to comic book shops full of impressionable youth and bulletin boards full of nitpicking geeks, Istee makes sure to keep tabs on the movers and shakers who walk through his domain. His current anchors (and they change regularly) are Saul Poller, a transhumanist game writer, and Dr. Gennifer Winters, a researcher working on principles of GUTs interaction with human perception.

Story Elements

Istee can appear in any story having to do with cutting edge or futurist technology, lost worlds from the Age that was nearly destroyed, dreams about the future of humanity, and attempts to wrest control of destructive technology away from the Dark. Weird science, breakthroughs, dreams and nightmares of the future, Babylon 5 conventions, and humans who are no long quite human or constructs who are all too human fit the Viscount of Sci-Fi. He also tends to show up while sci-fi movies are playing, and a random showing of Gattaca or 2001 is often a clue that his influence is present.

Story Type: Action

Lightsaber duels, running battles with Excrucian-tainted cyborgs, and daring raids against Dark-backed factories mass producing weapons of destruction are all just a day in the life of Istee Validios. Heated debates and fistfights between rampaging geeks at conventions fit in as well, and even a Noble might wilt before the raging Internet flames of a computer geek scorned -- especially when the spirit of the flames comes alive and burns flesh to ashes. As far as Istee is concerned, he is fighting a war for the very future of humanity and its children, and he is not afraid to sweep other Nobles into the constant sci-fi action movie that surrounds him. He also has occasional problems with hunters from the Locust Court, as there are rumors about him causing dementia animus in mortals who he "awakens" by offering them the choice of a red pill or a blue pill.

Icosahedron Adventures

Game Killers

by Owen K.C. Stephens

Welcome to the first installment of my new monthly *Pyramid* column on *d20 System* games, "Icosahedron Adventures!" Apparently I've now written so much *d20 System* material for Steve Jackson Games, The Powers That Be decided to offer me an official column on the subject. No fool, I accepted. So if you happen to be one of the people who prefer to rate all *d20 System*-based articles as a "1" without reading them, mine are now all clearly marked to make your life easier.

I know columns are supposed to have a theme. ("Campaign in a Box" = neat fictions you've never thought of, "Suppressed Transmission" = weird reality you've never heard of, "Random Thought Table" = Steven Marsh proving his ramblings are more coherent than most careful considerations.) So, put simply, the theme for "Icosahedron Adventures" is "Stuff I thought would be neat for the *d20 System*."

That's it. I may do adventures, monsters, or even new spells and prestige classes (though I notice those tend not to be the most popular). More likely, I'll be looking at places where the basic rules can be tweaked, added to, or replaced entirely. Like any good game engine, the *d20 System* can be tuned up, tricked out, or attached to a whole new machine. I want to look at what sorts of games it can do that it may not have been designed for, and how to change some of the things that may restrict what those types of games are.

Of course, all that's only useful to you if you use the *d20 System*. If I think of good idea-based articles that can be used for other systems as well I'll do them, but the focus of "Icosahedron Adventures" is *d20 System*-specific material. If that's not going to be any use to you, just think of this as the monthly proof that *Pyramid* is a full-service gaming magazine, rather than a house organ (and hope other magazines currently only providing *d20 System* material might try running a *GURPS* article or two in response).

Okay, enough introduction. Let's move on to this month's ideas.

Game Killing Rules

So, say you do like *d20 System* games in general, but certain kinds of games (or certain kinds of players) just don't seem to work well with it. What can you do to change the feel and function of the game to accommodate your players or plot needs? Obviously that depends on what's going wrong, but some common culprits (and suggestions for how to change them) are presented below.

As a design note, I've always found that the most important part of a game working well is some effort on the part of players and GM alike to put some effort into accepting, and consciously overlooking, problem areas. No game system is perfect, and any group that spends too much time complaining about a lack of realism, or even a broken genre convention, just isn't going to have much fun. If segmented movement, a top-down view of the universe, the ability to take five minutes to make a split-second decision, and having a good idea of what your odds of success are at any given moment don't bother you, why should any of the other oddities that most rules systems create do so? If a group either decides to trust the GM enough to simply ignore and modify rules as needed on the fly, or accepts that strict adherence to any rules set is going to cause some weirdness they'll need to overlook, fun is much more likely to occur.

Class Restrictions that Kill Character Concepts

Classes can be a great tool for speeding game play (for many people, the guidance a class gives, and the limited

choices it offers, make character generation faster and produce more uniformly useful results), protecting role niches (a fighter needs a rogue, cleric and wizard, no matter how well designed a fighter he is), and easily explaining character focus to both GM and other players (if you don't intend your sorcerer to blow things up, or at least charm the socks off foes, you may have picked the wrong class).

On the other hand, classes can be unnecessarily restrictive. There's no game balance reason, for example, why a chivalrous knight can't be a world-class singer, but fighters and paladins don't get Perform as a class skill (and while it's possible to make a chivalrous knight out of a bard, it does create some odd spellcasting knights). Players often get frustrated that some character concepts are rewarded, while others (often less powerful ones) are at a penalty due to largely arbitrary decisions about what class has access to what abilities.

There's no reason classes can't be kept as a template, but loosened up to allow more flexible character designs. Doing so does weaken some of the built-in role protection of the *d20 System*, but experienced groups often have no need of such protection (and indeed find it hindering).

One easy way to allow broader character concepts within the class structure is to allow players to decide what class skills their class gives them. The total number of skills is not altered (fighters receive 7 class skills, while bards receive 34), so game balance between the classes is preserved, but each player can customize what skills his character learns more easily. Once a character has set what skills a given class receives in his case, he can't change it. (In other words, if a player decides his character gains Perform and Use Magic device with fighter levels, that always what he gets as class skills with fighter levels.) If the character takes a new class, he can determine its class skills separately.

If there is a concern about role protection (which can widely by group), the class skills of all characters can be determined together. All players reveal their first choice for a class skill. If none are duplicated, each character gains that as their exclusive class skill (it may not be taken as a class skill by other characters). If two players have selected the same skill, they may auction it off (bidding to have it count as two, three, or even four class skill slots). If the auction is a tie, whichever character normally receives the skill as a class skill gets it. Failing that, flip a coin.

Obviously there may be more class skill slots than skills in the game (especially for a large group). Only the first two choices of class skill should be protected; after that any remaining skills may be designated as class skills by any character that still has open slots.

As a much easier method of increasing flexibility, a GM may decide all skills count as class skills. A variation on this is to allow all skills that may be used untrained as class skills, and allow each character to choose a number of additional class skills equal to half their classes listed class skills.

Another option is to treat all special abilities, including spellcasting, as feats. One feat buys one level worth of one special ability from one class (not including bonus feats the class receives, which are separate). A character may never have more levels of ability in a class than his total character levels, nor may he have abilities from a level higher than his total character level. The two levels of ability need not be consecutive, but all lower level abilities related to a higher level one must be taken first.

A character gets the abilities of his own class normally. Feats restricted to being taken from a particular list (such as fighter and wizard's bonus feats) may not be used to buy the abilities of other classes. Feat slots can, of course, be spent to buy normal feats instead. A feat may also be spent to gain proficiency in a class of weapon (not just a single weapon), two classes of armor (including shield classes), increase a character's base attack bonus (to a maximum of his character level), or to increase his base save in one category (to a maximum of half his character level +2). Any special ability gained works with the same restrictions as normal for the class it is taken from (arcane spells suffer arcane spell failure if cast in armor, paladin abilities are lost if the character becomes chaotic, and so on).

Thus a 2nd-level human fighter begins with four feat slots (one starting, one human, two bonus for being a fighter). He takes Weapon Focus and Power Attack as bonus fighter feats. But the player wants to make a character with some skill as a spellcaster, so he also spends two feat to gain the spellcasting special abilities of a 2nd-level sorcerer. If the fighter never puts more feats into this he remains only a 2nd-level caster, and he doesn't gain a familiar (that would be a different special ability). A 2nd-level human wizard, on the other hand, could use his two free feats to be proficient

in all martial weapons and bring up his base attack bonus to +2.

This method does require GM oversight, as it can be abused, but for reasonable character concepts it can allow great flexibility. (Truthfully, the fighter above is likely better off taking Cleave and Great Cleave, or maybe a couple of cleric spellcasting levels).

This also serves as a guideline for swapping out unwanted abilities for different ones. For example, a player might wish to play a roguish scholar and leader who excels at raiding tombs. He wants some sort of ability to inspire allies and a chance at knowing a little about everything, so bard makes sense, But the player doesn't want to be able to cast spells, which is a problem. Looking at the ability as feats rules, the GM decides its reasonable to replace bardic spell ability with a thief's sneak attack progression and a barbarian's trap sense. The new character doesn't fill any standard niche well, but if the group lacks any other kind of bard and does a lot of dungeon looting, that may not be a problem.

Power Dumps that Suspend Logic

Another problem some players have is the idea of gaining a startling amount of power all at once, in the form of a new level. This sudden jump in competence can be hard to accept on a logical level. If a player decides to give his fighter character a level of rogue, for example, and spends all his skill points on hide, he may jump from a +2 to +10 bonus in that skill overnight.

Numerical boosts for attacks, saving throws, and special abilities should be applied immediately, as should new hit points. These rarely represent a major jump in power, and as representations of a gradual increase in skill they have to happen at some point. Everything else (skill points, new spells, new feats, new special abilities, etc) are held back. At the beginning of each game session, players may decide to gain any one ability, spell, or feat they now have access to, or spend up to two skill point they've gained.

This has two main effects. First characters develop more slowly, and thus don't gain as sudden a power dump. (This is particularly nice when characters gain a level in the middle of an adventure -- threats that challenged them earlier aren't instantly underpowered.) Secondly, players can save some developments until later, allowing them to select things based on their ongoing encounters. For example, a rogue with 10 skill points a level has to take at least five game sessions to spend them also, and can hold on to some indefinitely. If the rogue runs into a mast lock-pick three game sessions later, he can ask to be trained in that skill, and spend the retained skill points now instead of having to wait until he gains a new level.

Though it's not necessary, a GM can also require players to justify spending feats and skill points on new areas of ability. For example if a wizard picks up a level of fighter, the GM may not allow him to take the weapon proficiency feats that come with his new class until he's gotten some instruction in-game. In this case taken a new level is just the beginning of gaining new skills and abilities -- the character has developed a natural knack for his new abilities but can't master them until he finds a teacher, or spends a reasonable amount of time in study and practice.

Spells That Kill Plots

There are a few spells that can kill classic plots faster than a barbarian can kill a goblin. Interestingly, most of the begin with the word "detect."

Detect magic, *detect chaos/evil/good/law*, *identify*, and even *detect undead* are often used by players to guide them through any attempt at mystery, intrigue or suspense, frustrating GMs enormously. They can also raise problematic questions about how a society would realistically function (even a 1st-level adept has access to *detect evil*).

Detect magic and *identify*, along with the less common *analyze dweomer*, eliminate many opportunities for "mysterious magic items," and can make the mystic seem much more mundane. An easy fix for this is to create new classes of things the spells do not function for (similar to how artifacts are immune to these spells). For example, the GM can warn players that there are "mystic" influences that cannot be detected with spells, and "relics" which are only as

powerful as normal items but may fool divinations. Getting players to accept such changes (instead of complaining about them) is easy -- let them have the new toys first. A GM can give out a +1 keen relic sword as treasure, having a sage explain that as a relic it's immune to *detects* and *identify*. The players will immediately begin thinking of way to turn that to their advantage (sneaking it in to dinners with adversaries, for example). But they also must accept that if they have a relic, NPCs may as well.

The alignment detecting spells and *detect undead* make it difficult for a GM to create plots where PCs are unsure if they can trust someone or not. Of course a cunning GM can work around such problems ("Of course I'm evil, but I want the dragon dead as much as you do -- he's killing my slaves!"), but doing so constantly can be tiring. Additionally, many players don't like the possible social implications of being able to reliably detect evil (certainly a theocracy is likely to at least levy taxes against the evil, and may exile or even execute them).

One answer is to simply eliminate the spells. Alignment and undead status are kept, but no mortal means are allowed to reveal them. Anything dependent on alignment (the effects of some magic items, damage done by a few spells) should also be hidden or eliminated to prevent them from become "poor priest's detects." Similarly, any class that can *detect* as a class ability must have it removed.

Another solution is to turn *detect* spells into opposed checks (the caster's Sense Motive vs. a level plus Wis modifier check for the opponent, with a +2 synergy bonus if he has 5 or more ranks of Bluff), or give them a saving throw. In either case, once a target has resisted the spell of a particular caster, that caster can never again gain information from him with that spell. Combined with an inability to distinguish between a failed effort to gain information and a truly neutral alignment, and PCs (and society in general) can never be sure who to trust if they get a neutral read. (It can also lead to heresy and argument if one cleric claims someone is evil, and no one else can confirm that -- even more plots for the GM.)

Combat Rules That Crush Spontaneity

Some game groups love having complex tactical level rules that call for miniatures, if not quite requiring them. Others hate it.

A simple opposed check roll can be used to replace most of the tactical movement rules, and be used to determine if an attack of opportunity occurs, if a target is flanked, and if a charge is possible. This maneuver roll is a d20 check to which a character adds his squares of movement (movement/5), reach in feet, and Dex modifier. If one of the characters has 5 or more ranks in a skill applicable to a given check, or has a feat that applies to the maneuver, they gain a +2 synergy bonus. A character may do nothing but make a move action to gain a +5 circumstance bonus to all maneuver checks made for a round.

For example, a fighter (Throrra) and a rogue (Shadow) are fighting a troll. Throrra rushes him, and makes a maneuver roll to avoid an attack of opportunity. Her maneuver check is 1d20+4 (for her 20 movement rate) +5 (her reach in feet) +2 (for her Dex bonus). Since she has Mobility, which is relevant to avoiding attacks of opportunity, she gains another +2, giving her a total of 1d20+13. The troll has a maneuver check of 1d20 +6 (for its 30 move), +10 (for its reach), +2 (for its Dex), for a total of 1d20+18. As it happens Throrra rolls an 18 and the troll rolls a 3, so Throrra manages to avoid the attack of opportunity.

Next, Shadow tries to flank the troll. His maneuver check is 1d20 +12 (for his 60 foot move rate, aided by *boots of springing and striding*), +5 (his reach in feet), +4 (his Dex modifier), for a total of +21. He rolls a 10 and the troll rolls a 9, so Shadow successfully flanks the troll with Throrra.

Obviously not every game system handles every genre or play style, but hopefully some groups will find these rules allow them to get a more satisfying game, allowing them to tap the vast supply of adventures, supplements, and genre books available for it (including, of course, future installments of "Icosahedron Adventures").

The Man Who There Wasn't: Kaspar Hauser

*"I came out of the darkness
Holding one thing
A small white wooden horse
I'd been holding inside
And when I'm dead
If you could tell them this
That what was wood became alive
What was wood became alive."*

-- Suzanne Vega, "Wooden Horse (Caspar Hauser's Song)

Once upon a time, a boy lived who played with a wooden horse, and who was as pale as wood, and spoke as little as wood. He might have been a little wooden boy himself made by a magician, or he might have been a Gypsy left behind by the caravan, or he might have been the lost prince of a wondrous city shut up in a dungeon by his wicked stepmother, or he might have just been a very unlucky boy. And so the boy became not just a boy, or even a prince, but a puppet, painted to resemble whatever Those holding the strings wanted him to. We don't even know his name, only that They called him "Kaspar Hauser." And so, too, must we, even as we follow the strings.

"His behavior during this first deposition provided no reason to assume that it was occasioned by idiocy or dissimulation, but rather led one to believe that this young man, from childhood, had been deprived of all human society and kept prisoner, isolated in an animal-like state in the most inhuman manner."

-- from the official proclamation on Kaspar Hauser by Jakob Friedrich Binder, mayor of Nuremberg, July 7, 1828

On May 26, 1828, a young boy dressed in oddly-cut clothes stumbled into the Unschlitt Square in Nuremberg, with a letter addressed to the commander of Light Horse in the town. He could say only "Don't know" and "I want to be a rider like my father" in answer to questions; his feet and hands were soft, his eyes a watery blue, and his aspect unnerving. Taken to the police station, he evinced no knowledge of swords, or women, or fire, and rejected meat and beer in favor of bread and water. Slowly, he learned more words and eventually, it was teased out of him that he had been held prisoner in a dark room for the last dozen-odd years. His release was as mysterious to him as his appearance was to the townsfolk of Nuremberg. Finally, he was given a pencil (in desperation, one imagines) and to the surprise of all, wrote a name in block letters: "KASPAR HAUSER." As one of the letters he carried (both written by the same hand, although purportedly twelve years apart) named him "Kaspar," and he had a handkerchief embroidered with a "K.H." on him (I wondered where that had gotten to), he was so named by mayoral proclamation.

The town put him on the support rolls, especially as he became a minor tourist attraction to the savants of Central Europe. From the home of the jailer (one Andreas Hiltel, who taught Kaspar to eat and clean himself), he moved into the house of a local schoolteacher, Georg Friedrich Daumer. Daumer somehow unlocked Kaspar's potential, and he began to learn to speak and write with much greater facility. Kaspar wrote out two drafts of an autobiography, but revealed little new information. Daumer kept control of the stream of gawkers and onlookers interested in the "noble savage" who had "dropped from the clouds," while teaching and treating Kaspar using his own eccentric notions of mesmerism and homeopathy. Everything seemed to have settled down to a nine-days wonder, when on October 17, 1829, Kaspar appeared with a [wound to the forehead](#), saying he had been attacked by a man in black.

"[I]t would not be possible to entrust something like this to my letter without great danger. I am therefore forced to remain silent here about the most interesting thing to come out of the whole Hauser affair . . . You will be amazed and you will shudder. Of all the horrors that I, as an experienced criminalist have witnessed, this one . . . is the most horrible."

-- letter of Anselm Ritter von Feuerbach to the Earl of Stanhope, May 12, 1832

Kaspar was assigned two policemen as guards, and the eminent jurist Anselm Ritter von Feuerbach, the chief police official for the Kingdom of Bavaria, began to investigate the case. Feuerbach was made his official guardian, and moved him from Daumer's house to that of the businessman Johann Christian Biberbach. Six months later, Feuerbach

moved Kaspar again (after rumors of inappropriate conduct with Frau Biberbach reached his ears) to the home of the Baron von Tüchel (Hegel's brother-in-law, as it happens). In 1831, the fourth earl of Stanhope came through Nuremberg and took a prominent interest in Kaspar, wining and dining him and filling his head with notions of a noble lineage. Feuerbach, in his more prosaic fashion, had also convinced himself that the "angel" Kaspar must be the lost heir to the throne of Baden, made off with by evil conspirators. Feuerbach published this theory in a book in 1832 -- and died, suddenly, in May of the next year. More dramatically yet, Kaspar was attacked again on December 14, 1833. Found bleeding in the snow, he said that he had gone out into the garden of Anspach to meet a man in black who had news of Kaspar's mother, and been stabbed for his pains. He died three days later of a burst lung; among his last words were "I didn't do it myself."

Several German historians have pinned Kaspar's death on his supposed benefactor, the Earl of Stanhope. Stanhope was a secret agent for William Pitt, with connections to both the Bourbons and the Hapsburgs -- two families who would definitely not have wanted a new heir on the throne of Baden. Especially since the "missing heir" was the adopted grandson of Napoleon Bonaparte, who had "died" six weeks after his birth, in October of 1812 -- the same date that Kaspar's letters claimed he was "born." Stanhope, as it turns out, was in Nuremberg during Kaspar's first attack, and wrote a very suspicious set of letters trying to shift his position from boosting Kaspar's hopes to claiming the boy was a fraud and impostor. Stanhope had also gotten the police coverage lifted, and moved Kaspar from Nuremberg, where he had many friends, to Anspach, where he was terrorized by his new tutor -- one selected by Stanhope, of course. Finally, it seems suspicious that Biberbach and three doctors with intimate knowledge of Kaspar's appearance all died in the next two years.

"Kaspar Hauser may or may not have been the prince of Baden, but it is worth noting that the world today knows more about, and is more interested in, Kaspar Hauser than in any prince of Baden who ever lived."

-- Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, *Lost Prince: The Unsolved Mystery of Kaspar Hauser*

This is the dramatic story painted by psychiatrist Masson, whose deep and abiding interest in child abuse causes him to identify strongly with the Kaspar Hauser case, and to swallow the "noble heir" story whole. There is, it must be said, some evidence that supports it -- Kaspar drew a flower while alive that was found depicted (much later) in the grillwork of Pilsach Castle; renovations at the Castle uncovered a toy wooden horse very like the one Kaspar described as his companion during his imprisonment. On the other hand, of course, there is the fact that Daumer outlived Stanhope (that homeopathic goodness working for him) and, apparently unmolested by any conspirators, wrote a scathing attack on the Earl. More prosaically still, in 1996, mitochondrial DNA testing of the blood on Kaspar's shirt proved that Kaspar was not descended from the royal house of Baden at all, but was likely a Tyrolean of some sort.

"Kaspar Hauser showed such an utter deficiency of words and ideas, such perfect ignorance of the commonest things and appearances of Nature, and such horror of all customs, conveniences, and necessities of civilized life, and, with all, such extraordinary peculiarities in his social, mental, and physical disposition, that one might feel oneself driven to the alternative of believing him to be a citizen of another planet, transferred by some miracle to our own."

-- Anselm Ritter von Feuerbach, *Kaspar Hauser* (1832)

But where science closes doors, pseudoscience flings them open. Rudolf Steiner, the founder of Anthroposophy, claimed Kaspar was actually the son of Napoleon Bonaparte, and an incarnate spirit from the planetary sphere of Mercury. His holy mission was to unite Central Europe -- if Kaspar had become Prince of Baden, he, not Bismarck, would have built the new Germany. However, continued Steiner, various sorcerous British Masonic lodges were jealous of the Germanic spirit, and (wisely fearing that if they killed Kaspar he would merely reincarnate somewhere else) kidnapped the boy to keep him a drugged prisoner, unaware of his amazing psychic and angelic gifts. Stanhope, it must be admitted, was in fact a magician -- he was part of Bulwer-Lytton's Rosicrucian circle of skryers and spiritualists, and like his arch-foe Daumer, was also a proponent of homeopathy and mesmerism. While we're giving Steiner his due, let's also note that the knife that killed Kaspar Hauser was engraved with a (Masonic?) skull and crossbones, along with the hourglass of mortality. However, not satisfied with granting the "Orphic Circles" the power to divert the Divine Plan for Central Europe, Steiner made a hard left and identified Kaspar with, well, Jesus. Kaspar's death becomes not a mere tawdry murder by the conspiratorial Stanhope's Man In Black (Bulwer-Lytton also pioneered the male black dress code, intriguingly) but a Christlike sacrifice. Saith Steiner, "If Kaspar Hauser had not lived and died the way he did, contact between the earth and the spiritual world would have been completely broken."

"As his intelligence increased, his features altered. He had struck most people as a typical idiot, coarse, lumpish, clumsy and oddly repulsive; now his facial features seemed to change and become more refined. But he continued to walk rather clumsily; in the place at the back of his knees where most of us have a hollow he had protrusions . . ."
-- Colin Wilson, *The Encyclopedia of Unsolved Mysteries*

Or perhaps, contact between Earth and some other world. Daumer's experiments proved (to Daumer's satisfaction anyhow) that Kaspar could see perfectly in pitch blackness, that his senses were super-powerful, that he responded to homeopathic treatments in a way very unlike normal humans, and that he could detect magnets by their pull and differentiate metals hidden beneath a cloth. His knees, as Colin Wilson points out, were not really humanlike at all, resembling bird or reptile knees. Could Kaspar have been a Reptoid, or an alien scout, shape-shifting into a human form to blend in? He liked only red, and hated the natural world because of its "nasty" green color; could he have been a [Martian](#)? Could his killer (who left no tracks in the snow beside him) have been a flying alien himself (possibly explaining why Kaspar's feet were so soft) such as [Spring-Heeled Jack](#), who begins his own deprivations a few years later?

"However, not all far, deep, and high places are accessible to the reach of civil justice. With respect to certain places in which we have reason to search for the giant responsible for this crime, we would have to have the power of Joshua's trumpets, or Oberon's magic horn, in order to get him, in order to do battle, tooth and nail, with the high and mighty Colossuses armed with ball and chain who stand guard in front of certain golden castle gates."
-- Anselm Ritter von Feuerbach, *Kaspar Hauser* (1832)

Or was Kaspar's fate, as Rudolf Steiner dimly perceived, somehow the fate of Europe? Was Kaspar a [tulpa](#), a thought-form created by Stanhope's Orphic Circle, embodied in Bulwer-Lytton's Vril force? Was the boy who the broadsheets called the "child of Europe" literally the Child of Europe? He emerged out of nothing, a Grimm fairy tale come to life complete with animal friends (cats would approach him unbidden), imprisonment in a tower (possibly by a wicked stepmother, the non-Bonaparte second Princess of Baden), and mysterious gifts. He was exposed to the savants of Europe -- to impress them, or to impress something upon them? (His meeting with a youthful Richard Wagner, on the cusp of Aquarius -- the coming New Age -- in 1833, seems fraught in this context, but no transcript of it survives.) His dreams were reaching out for more answers, but a shining being appeared in them and told him "It is for the best if you leave the earth before having lived on it long." Sentence, or sacrifice?

Ritual and sorcery surround the story, hidden in the background of dynastic duels and Romantic educators. When he appeared -- on Whit Monday, the day of the sacrificed "Leaf King" in upper Germany -- he carried a key, religious pamphlets, gold dust, and prayer beads made of horn (the material of true visions). One of the pamphlets Kaspar had on him was entitled "The Art of Replacing Lost Time and Years Badly Spent"; an ironically interesting way to describe one whose whole life was a [lens, a bisociative performance](#) of the highest order. He slowly dreamed his own past, choosing (or being chosen for) aristocracy (Stanhope) over bourgeois complacency (Biberbach) or Enlightenment science (Daumer). He entered Nuremberg -- a city whose destiny echoed back to the medieval guilds and forward to mass murder -- walking on boots cobbled with horseshoe nails, the very emblems of chance and contingency. He refused to go near grandfather clocks, perhaps fearing their implacable order would bind him in its chains, leaving him once more a prisoner rather than an actor. But something stopped him nonetheless, something that left no tracks and wielded a knife engraved with an hourglass, freezing him finally as a mystery rather than as Europe's future or as the Second Coming of one who "dropped from the clouds."

Pyramid Review

EarthAD: Post-Holocaust Adventures

Published by [Politically Incorrect Games](#)

Written by Mark Bruno, Brett M. Bernstein & Matt Drake

Cover by Chris Martinez

34-page 691-KB PDF file; \$4.00

Coming in the wake of major releases such as [Gamma World](#) and [Redline -- High Speed Road Duels In A Post-Apocalyptic Future](#), *EarthAD: Post-Holocaust Adventures* is the non-*d20 System* entry into the post-apocalypse genre. Like [Vice Squad: Eighties Police Adventure](#) before it, *EarthAD* is another game in Politically Incorrect Games genre Diversion QUICK FIX GAMES series designed to facilitate both easy play and adventures or mini-campaigns that can be run between longer, more substantial games. It comes with no little pedigree, the trio of authors possessing plenty of experience in terms of creating and designing RPGs in the PDF format. Mark Bruno with his own [Armada X](#) and *Vice Squad*; Brett M. Bernstein with other Politically Incorrect Games titles that include [The Colonies RPG](#) and the recently published *Iron Gauntlets: Heroic Fantasy Roleplaying*; and Matt Drake with his contribution to the comprehensive treatment of the classic pulp genre, [Two Fisted Tales Roleplaying Game](#), also released in electronic format.

EarthAD uses the same easy mechanics seen in *Vice Squad* and also seen in a slightly more complex form in *The Colonies RPG*. They are light and simple, but are not as clearly and immediately explained as the format warrants. However, once understood, they should not get in the way of the game's play. Character generation is quick and easy, with players probably wanting to roll for their attributes rather than assign points, as the starting points makes them a little weak. Along with the familiar character stocks of Pure-Strain and Mutated Humans, *EarthAD* adds a third: the Radio-Operated Mutant, or ROM. These are mutants captured by enclaves of Pure-Strain Humans, and augmented with invasive cybernetics and other electronics that deny the character his free will. While a ROM has his cybernetics (Cybersenses, Cybergun, and Motion Detector), a Mutated Human has his mutations -- both beneficial (Acid Touch, Carapace, and advanced reasoning Dual Brain) and detrimental (Armless, Distinctive Odor, and Weak Dual Brain), and the ordinary Pure-Strain Human has access to pre-calamity Old Earth technology, and knows how to use it. The seven sample characters given at the back of the game include the Vaultier, the Sprawler (who resides in the rebuilt surface cities), the Nomad, the Raider, the Tribal, the Scavenger, and the Desert Strider. All have been created by the method of assigning attributes rather than rolling for them.

Where *EarthAD* gets into its stride is in discussing the nature of the various catastrophes that could strike our world. This game is not about one, set type of apocalypse, but instead presents a series of mini-essays covering a variety of disasters. "The Big Bang, Part II" has an Earth long after a nuclear winter in which the ozone layer has been eaten away and mankind must now weather the sun's harsh ultraviolet rays. The origins of the disaster in "Judgment Day" are religious in nature, but not overtly so. The planet has been betrayed by a world leader who brought about world peace and then unleashed a nuclear war, and after millions upon millions of people suddenly disappeared, all that were left behind were the unworthy, the corrupt, the psychotic, and the lawyers. The sudden reversal of a North-South airflow in "Ice Age" caused a massive climate shift that disrupted civilization with freakish weather patterns and then crushed it under glacial layers. In "I, Robot," a *Terminator*-inspired android rebellion has divided the planet between the robot collective and human shadow governments that wage guerrilla warfare for mankind's freedom. Like the book of the same name, "Lucifer's Hammer" has the world hit by a meteor, but here it is long in the past so that mankind has had the chance to rebuild. "Outbreak" has humanity brought low by a fatal wasting disease, while "Resurrection"

brings back the dinosaurs to drive mankind underground and beyond their reach.

These diverse settings are supported by a selection of more-or-less ready-to-run scenarios. A chance to locate a cache of unspoiled Old Earth technology lures the characters into the arms of a dark cult in "Dark Gods," while "Ambushed" sees them as wasteland travelers guarding a merchant caravan waylaid by raiders. The promise of access to another vault comes with the sound of a mobile phone in "Ready To Run." A further three ideas are given in thumbnail detail, along with a short biography.

Although **EarthAD** is a simple game, there is nothing to stop a GM bringing in elements of his own. These could be the vehicle rules from *Vice Squad*, the psionics rules from *Hard Nova: Space Opera Adventures*, or the nanotechnology rules from *The Colonies RPG*. But beyond this, the GM will need to bring a lot more of his input to the game. This is due in main to the treatment of the post-apocalyptic genre in **EarthAD**. Its broad approach is both a strength, presenting a wide range of possibilities, but also a weakness in that leaves the reader wanting a greater depth and more information than is given here.

Yet the scenarios and ideas in **EarthAD** are far from unplayable, just in need of the input that a more sharply divided genre would not require. The previous *Vice Squad* is an example of that. As a broad overview, **EarthAD: Post-Holocaust Adventures** is an excellent introduction to the genre, but its lack of focus will leave the reader wanting more.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Review

Roll Call 3: Country Matters

Published by [Guardians of Order](#)

Written by Elissa Carey, Eleanor Holmes, Michelle Lyons, Michelle A. Brown Nephew, Matthew Keeley, & Jesse Scoble

Art & Graphics by Conley Philpott & Jeff Mackintosh

Edited by Mark C. MacKinnon, Jesse Scoble, & Adam Jury

32-page b&w softcover; \$9.95

The *Roll Call* series for Guardians of Order's superhero roleplaying game *Silver Age Sentinels* has, to this point, been a showcase of heroes and villains to fill out the GM's rosters. While the people in these volumes often had interconnecting stories, they were by and large random celebrities in the setting. The first was a selection of the men and women (and aliens, and . . .) in the spotlight, and the second was a cast of sidekicks, faithful companions for the big hitters. The third, *Roll Call 3: Country Matters*, has a much tighter focus.

Remember Janus, the hero-hating millionaire adventurer from the core rulebook? He's made it his mission in life to suck the marrow out of the good life, and to do worse than that to Caliburn and any other super freaks who get in his way. This high living has included a lot of lovely ladies. Janus has high-end tastes to match, however, and so he's got more than his fair share of metapowered sweethearts in his exotic and checkered past.

Roll Call 3 lists two dozen women from around the world (hence the subtitle, apparently), all of whom have one thing in common: Each has some sort of history with Janus. A few he's still on good terms with. He showed the metal-shaping Golddigger how to best use her talent for warping physical objects, and the psychic Myriad (along with the several other folks inhabiting her formidable mind) still works with him to gather proprietary information.

To some of them he took a love 'em and leave 'em attitude. Dark Valkyrie, a divine and seemingly unkillable warrior, is convinced it's only a matter of time before her beloved returns to her and reinstates their successful partnership. Young Mina isn't in love with Janus, but her mother was for one night. Their resulting child is a groupie for superhumans with a gift for winning people over.

The majority, however, have had their fill of all things Janus. From criminal alliances that went south to partnerships that ended with the woman fleeing from authorities while her erstwhile suitor made good his escape, the two-faced mask-hunter has left in his wake a river of enemies. Assassin Black Mamba was cut loose when she wouldn't play dead for his benefit, Kitty Kat (one of Samuel Matthews' genetic experiments) fears the day Janus will decide she's a useful tool, and the shifting sand-being Mirage owes him for ratting her out and nearly getting her killed by smugglers.

Janus has even managed to brass off a Hawaiian goddess, incur the wrath of the mythical, disease-ridden Plague-Bearer, and manipulate an autistic young girl named Jenny with enough mental power to span the globe.

Closing out the book is a brief two-page set of story seeds to hook your characters into the ongoing saga of Janus and his castoffs.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

Predictably, most of these plots have to do with team-ups between the many femme fatales in the book. Some of them involve outdoing Janus, succeeding in schemes where he failed; some are attempts to regain his attention if not his affections by offering up his favorite targets as sacrifices; and a few are illicit enterprises conceived of by women who simply take advantage of the network they've unwittingly become a part of.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

The typical *Silver Age Sentinels* book has classic comic-book artwork. This time out, most of the pictures have clearly been influenced by the anime style. Some splash pages still have the flashy, full-size comic covers you might expect, but the biographical entries are pencil drawings, rough but very much agreeable, and the cover is in the "small-body" manga subgenre.

Like most of the books in the *Silver Age Sentinels* line (not just the *Roll Call* books), the character write-ups are short and sweet, perhaps half a dozen paragraphs each, and they're all dual-statted for the Tri-Stat and d20 Systems. They're tightly written (and the tiny text is tighter still), giving you a fair idea of what the person is like in a concise little package. Readers will have to decide for themselves whether the lack of a timeline is worth fretting over; the "issues" where everyone first appeared may be some sort of roadmap, but we're getting an awful lot of back story about a supervillain whose womanizing wasn't a well-established facet of his bio in the core book. This isn't unlike the real comics, but GMs looking to make use of a cast full of women betrayed are going to have to juggle his own history.

One troubling thing about it is the similarities among some of the NPCs. Black Annie and Plague-Bearer both carry disease; precognitive Fortuna and Lucky Lady fall into a similar "used their talents to score at casinos" mold; Honey and Mina both use looks and underlying telepathy and mind control to ingratiate themselves with others. These aren't their only characteristics, nor do they come off as cookie-cutter products from an assembly line, but in a book with only 24 personalities a little more variance shouldn't be hard to come by.

On the other hand, the authors avoid piling it on with the superpowers and funny suits. Some of the women are just capable folks, or they have abilities that *aren't* their defining characteristics. Anyone looking for metahumans brimming with power, ready to topple tall buildings in a single pound, will only get partial satisfaction here. *Roll Call 3: Country Matters* is more evenly spaced than that, another blessedly low-cost offering that trims the fat and delivers the goods in a pretty package.

--Andy Vetromile

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Pyramid Review

The Book of Fiends (for d20 System)

Published by [Green Ronin Publishing](#)

Written by Aaron Loeb, Erik Mona, Chris Pramas, Robert Schwalb, Jim Bishop, Brian Kirby, & Jesse Decker

Art by Julian Allen, Toren Atkinson, Tom Baxa, Drew Baker, Brom, Brian Despain, Chris Keefe, Raven Mimura, Sam Wood, Mike Villardi, Kevin Crossley, James Ryman, Dennis Detwiler, & Kent Burles

224-page b&w hardcover; \$34.95

Fiends, demons, devils, and other purely evil otherworldly creatures are used both to create adversaries for a *d20 System* group and to fill out a cosmology for the fantasy world the game is set in. Green Ronin Publishing expanded the realm of fiends immensely first by releasing the 3.0 supplements *Legions of Hell* to expand upon lawful devils and Hell, *Armies of the Abyss* to fill out the ranks of the chaotic demons, and the *Book of the Righteous* to provide a complete divine cosmology to place the forces of evil into context.

In the *Book of Fiends*, Green Ronin collects the fiends from the 3.0 version books, updates them to *d20 System 3.5*, throws in new ones and throws in a third collection of daemonic fiends for the neutral-evil plane of Gehenna, and includes a few extra bits such as an updated unholy warrior core class from the *Unholy Warrior's Handbook* for the previous version, making it a fairly customizable supernatural military-champion-of-darkness class.

In total there are about 150 fully statted creatures ranging from a pesky ½ CR daemon up to unique fiendish sub lords and even the CR 40 fallen angel Iblis. The highest powers of the nether planes such as demon princes, the lords of Hell, and the seven exarches of Gehenna are provided short descriptions but no stats. Together these luminaries create an interesting pantheon of evil, with each of the exarches symbolizing one of the seven deadly sins, the demon princes providing a jumbled but vast pantheon with domains described for cultists, and the lords of the nine layers of Hell swapping in Leviathan and Lilith for two from the standard hellish cosmology published by Wizards of the Coast. Demons have an interesting backstory of originally being the plaything creations of an older order of chaotic fiends called Qliphoth who were decimated by a scouring army of celestial ghaeles, allowing the demons to fill the power void left by their old masters and grow into their own planar dominance. Hell has a lot of references to failed angelic rebellions where the losers were cast down to hell. Egyptian and Babylonian myths are also tied in through a few devilish nobility and creatures loyal to the evil gods associated with those pantheons.

The CRs of the presented creatures are mostly not on the epic scale. One third of the creatures are under CR 7, one third go from 7 to 13, and the last third mostly covers from 14 to 23 comprehensively with six ranging from 25 to 40. A lot of the higher CR creatures are unique fiendish nobility. The individual demon princes and subnobility of Hell who are presented seem rather on the weak side when compared against even unadvanced balors and pit fiends. For instance, Eurynomus the Corpse Eater is a 16 HD "primal demon lord" with a CR of 13 who seems like he could easily be chewed up in combat by high-level characters. He has an interesting back story and legends but does not mechanically seem like a figure that would cause churches in a standard campaign to alter their funerary customs to avoid his depredations. Another example is the resulting spawn of a Gehenna exarch who tempted and corrupted a gold dragon then dragged her to his plane as a brood beast. The resulting horde of 4HD spawn are significantly weaker than either a half dragon fiend or a half fiend dragon would be.

There are also some quibbles to be had with the editing. There are sidebars for standard demonic, daemonic, and devilish traits, but these are inconsistently used in the stat blocks. Some entries follow the *Monster Manual 3.0 Edition* style of just cross referencing these standard arrays of powers with a single entry under special qualities saying "demonic traits" while others will say "demonic traits" then follow the 3.5 template and list out each of the standard demonic immunities, resistances, and abilities individually so that cross referencing is not necessary to get an individual creature's specific abilities. In addition, some of the layout formatting has the text cut off by the overlaid picture on a few entries instead of ending and starting a new line before it hits the picture edge.

However, there are a lot of well-developed interesting fiends to be used to expand the ranks of an infernal dungeon or to provide a varied planar cosmology. All of the individual creatures are well illustrated and have in-depth descriptions. A web enhancement with demonic, daemonic, and devilish templates to supplement the all-inclusive fiendish one from the *MM* as well as a comprehensive chart for what can be summoned using the various summon monster spells just adds to the usefulness of the book for creating more magical fiendish fun in a *d20 System* game.

--*John Henry Stam*

Be the First on Your Block to Have Blocks!

We are now beginning our final descent into the building block concept column series. We know that you have a choice of gaming magazines, and we thank you for choosing *Air Pyramid*.

For this final installment, I'm going to apply the metaphor to game world construction. Oh, but first let's take care of the obvious stuff first. Ummm . . . yadda yadda game world is made of blocks, blah blah have fun. Really, if you just reread [last week's column](#) and substitute "game world" for "adventure," you'll cover all the basic ground.

Anyway, while I note that playing with blocks alone is fun, there can be a certain thrill in getting together a big batch of blocks and dumping 'em in a pile for a group of friends to sift through -- the madcap scramble for the "cool" blocks, the give-and-take to barter for crucial needed pieces, and the competition to come up with the coolest creation.

For those looking for an interesting experiment, the same concept can be applied to game-world creation.

One of the more interesting experiments I've been part of as a player was the creation of a city for a super-hero game. While I'm sure this isn't very uncommon on the surface, what made it interesting was that each player of the gaming group assembled a *part* of the city, with the GM working out the logistics of making sure everything fit together. Thus each of us made boroughs with various themes or tropes: the high-tech district, the rough-and-tumble dockside, the "Chinatown," the affluent district, the historic downtown and government buildings, the suburbs, and so on.

All the players were given as much or as little leeway as they wanted, free to come up with a history, geography, notable characters, and atmosphere for the city section.

Sadly, that's as far as I can offer about real-world, "Gosh, I actually did this!" anecdotal evidence. The resultant parts were disparate and quirky, and required some group thinking to make them work together, but in general the project *worked*; we ended up with a city suitable for grand adventuring. And, more importantly, we ended up with a construct that all of us had a hand in; in theory, that probably would have made a more invested experience for the players involved. (In reality, the game never got off the ground. But don't dwell on that fact; this happens a *lot* with me.)

Now, since the campaign never got off the ground, I'm not sure what, exactly, would have happened next. But there are a number of options. Here are a few ideas, off the top of my head:

It would have been interesting if each of us players created a character from the region we designed. This would have permitted the players a level of knowledge that's common in the genre, but difficult to replicate without the GM spoon-feeding the player information. ("We need to act quickly. Do you know where the warehouses are in this part of town, Gothique?" "Uhhh . . . I'm not sure, SuperlaTim. Do I?") If everyone would have been okay with separating player and character knowledge, the player who designed that portion of the city could have even included secrets about his portion, while still allowing his character a lot of freedom to know stuff about the city. Regardless, this would have required some understanding between GM and players about what was "really" true about that part of the city; that way, if the GM inserts an Acme Oversized Novelty factory in the borough that the player didn't expect, the number of bloody fistfights that break out are kept to a minimum. (As a good starting point, I would've recommended a strict interpretation of the creator's text for the city, like a strictly literalist constitutional scholar. If it wasn't explicitly written, it's not true; there's no searching the "penumbra" of the setting for meaning.)

It would have been possible to swap off GMing duties, with each player responsible for his own portion of the city. Players could swap around, either as they were inspired ("Hey! I've got a *great* Techtown adventure in mind!") or by a set schedule ("Okay; Techtown this week, the Docks next time."). If the latter, in a long-running campaign I might have attempted to work out adventures that "crossover" into other parts of the city:

"Hey, Jeff; your Chinatown adventure comes up next week after my Docks one. Would you be able to work with it if, at the end of my adventure, the PCs can capture someone with smuggling ties to Chinatown?"

"Sure; can you make it baby dolls filled with opium? That actually fits well with what I had in mind."

"No problem! One crate of narcotic Natural Newborns coming up!"

It would even have been possible to rotate GM duty and let people tinker with *whatever* part of the city they wanted. I've been part of shared worlds in the past, and it's worked out well. The only difference in this case is that, instead of a game company or solitaire GM creating the game world, the gaming group as a whole would be responsible for its creation. The infusion of other players' ideas and viewpoints could go a long way toward strengthening the game world as a whole. ("Cool; I never considered that Techtown could have been the hub of gin-running in the 1920s. That makes a lot of the underlying money there tainted!") However, in this case it would have been useful to have a "veto" or overrule power, just in case someone utterly violates the creator's vision. ("Ummm . . . Having Mole People in my suburbs *really* screws things up. Can we agree to never mention them again? Ever?")

Regardless, having a group create its own world from the ground up reinforces the communal storytelling aspect that underlies a lot of good gaming. And the way each player approaches the project can tie to his own comfort level of building-block sizes. In our shared world, some people (such as myself) were more comfortable with a macro, large-block level, designing an overarching history, structure, landmarks, and "atmosphere" for the section in question. Other players designed not only street-level names -- complete with street names and population congestion -- but also had most of the individual *buildings* in town labeled, along with a blurb about their purposes. ("Pawn shops? I think there are 17; let me search the spreadsheet. Are you looking for legit or shady?") Another player was more comfortable with the game system we were using, so he focused on creating dozens of characters and backgrounds for his part of the city. And so on.

The building block motif continues to work well on many levels in gaming. And not unlike building a city itself, building a campaign world together can accommodate many different views, approaches, and desires. And in the end, you're sure to end up with an interesting place to call home.

Even if it *does* turn out to be infested by Mole People.

* * *

Pyramid has been busy lately, and I thought I'd let you know a few of the exciting things that are going on:

- First, we have a third-party playtest going on. [West End Games](#), publisher of the recently released *D6 Adventure* game as well as the forthcoming *D6 Space* and *D6 Fantasy* games, is conducting a playtest of *D6 Space: Ships*. If you think you might have something to contribute to the process, please feel free to [check it out](#).
- Second, we have two chats coming up. I don't think they're set in stone yet, but Graveyard Greg -- part of the creative force behind [Gaming Guardians](#) -- is scheduled to stop by on Wednesday, July 7th.

Then on Friday, July 9th, we've got some of the Steve Jackson Games crew stopping by to talk about talking about *GURPS Lite* and other Secret Things I'm not allowed to mention yet. Sean Punch and Andrew Hackard will be there, and possibly other folks.

I'm not sure when these chats will be yet -- the *Pyramid* minions are still flying around the landscape, confirming details -- but they'll probably be around 7 P.M. CST.

- Finally, for those of you who don't check out the various bottled messages I toss into the sea, *Pyramid* is currently seeking experts in a variety of topics. Those who might be interested are encouraged to check out the [Daily Illuminator](#) on the subject.

And what, exactly, does *Pyramid* have in mind for this assemblage of experts? Well, we're planning on . . .

Whoops! I see we're out of time and room. But we'll be back next week. And then, I assure you, we'll be off our block.

--Steven Marsh

Designer's Notes: GURPS Dragons

Working With the Fire

by Phil Masters

Certain legends say that dragons tend to grow bigger and bigger if left to their own devices. *GURPS Dragons* has proved the point through its moderately tortuous history. Originally planned as a short book by a different author, it . . . well, grew in the telling, and my commission was to expand the earlier manuscript out to 128 pages. It has subsequently grown even beyond that, especially as its publication date has ended up falling close to that of *GURPS Fourth edition*, with the result that it now has an appendix of rules material updates.

The long example setting in the book, "The Reptilian Gaze," had its own twisted, coiled, and scaly history. At one point, not only was it somewhat shorter, but its dragons had a completely different, slightly more "rational" history. That was ultimately rejected as showing too little respect for the mystique of the big lizards, and replaced with something fiercer and more fiery, but I'd like to think that it has a certain integrity, even a battered power, of its own. So, in the tradition of these things, and by way of a bonus for readers of this august periodical -- here is that version of those dragons, rescued from under the eraser. Note that it assumes a baseline date for campaigns around 1901 A.D..

Second Gaze: The Alternate Ancient History of Dragonkind

Dragons have been a feature of this world for a *long* time, although they have been more visible at some times than at others. For the last couple of thousand years or so, they have regarded discretion as the key to survival. Nonetheless, they are native to Earth -- with an older claim to it than humanity. On the other hand, they owe humans a great deal.

The Primordial Ones

Dragons -- or rather, their distant ancestors -- started out as a small species of Antarctic dinosaur which just survived the Great Extinction. They were fairly intelligent hunters, with large eyes and a capacity for hibernation which suited their home, and helped get them through the dark days after the great meteor obliterated most large species of the time. They also had, by a freak mutation, the only even faintly reliable psychic powers ever to exist in Earth's Animal Kingdom.

Specifically, they had limited access to what, for want of a better word, we can call the *Astral Plane* -- a realm of pure thought and psychic energy. Through it, they could achieve momentary links to the perceptions and memories of other animals, and they could shift "out of phase with reality" for a few moments at a time (something else which helped their survival -- many of them dodged the shockwaves following the fall of the meteor by shifting to their astral state). They eventually spread widely across warm regions, although they were never common, which is why they left few fossils (and they have since made a point of hiding any which show up), and they didn't evolve much because they didn't need to.

The Apes and the Mindstorm

Then, after millions of years, the descendents of those survivors ran into another mutant species, one which was expanding out of its original ecological niche -- a primate with an over-developed capacity for abstract thought. The proto-dragons reached out instinctively with their powers, and were, in their non-sapient way, horribly surprised.

The interaction between the two very different types of oversized brain was violent and bizarre. It led to a psychic storm which lasted for thousands of years. For the apes, the night became full of ghosts and terrors. The psychic dinosaurs mostly just died a lot; if they wandered too close to an ape community, they ran around in circles until

something killed them or their brains exploded.

Forced Evolution

Then, thanks to this brutally Darwinian experience, the proto-dragons evolved a strategy; they spent as much time as possible on the Astral Plane. The survivors were those who could spend most time there, and not run around in circles too much when exposed to ape-minds. Of course, the apes evolved somewhat, too; the ones with weaker mental abilities suffered a lot of heart attacks and seizures, and the survivors learned to control the use of their own memories. The story of the Garden of Eden, and the image of the serpent guarding the Fruit of Knowledge, actually represents a subtle racial memory of this time of horrors; the proto-human bicameral mind didn't just *break down*, as some modern scientists have suggested, it was *ripped apart*, accidentally, by dragons. Some would say that it explains a lot about human consciousness that it was created this way.

So the proto-dragons survived, and even began to exploit what had recently been a threat to them, gaining access to the rich seam of hominid perceptions and memories of the environment.

The Coming of the Dragons

But to humans, they were still a nightmare -- and the proto-dragons, spending much of their time as beings of pure mental energy, were shaped by this thinking. They became bigger and more terrible whenever they materialized in the vicinity of a human brain. The trouble was, they were being shaped into biological impossibilities -- huge creatures, all fang and claw and cunning, and sometimes wing and flame. They came to depend on the psychic energy of human brains to exist, even while in material form, and there just weren't that many human brains around. They could only materialize -- which they had to do to mate or breed -- very occasionally.

The Cities

Then, after millennia, human beings created cities. Now, there were large enough concentrations of thinking minds in close proximity that the reptilian dream-demons could sometimes return to the material world for extended stays. Eventually, preferred forms for such incursions developed, partly drawing on the city-dweller's fear of the wilderness. Of course, being psychic projections, albeit with a legacy of dinosaur biology, dragons have mutable forms -- they can, in effect, be quite skilled shapeshifters, if they choose to work at it. They are products of their weird racial heritage in other ways, too, including their capacity for hibernation.

The Secret

At this point, readers may wonder why dragons have not long since made themselves known to humanity. Why, in fact, are they so much *less* well known, or widely believed in, than they were in the Bronze Age?

The fact is, dragons have made themselves prisoners of human perception. If they reveal themselves to humanity too often, aside from the risk of would-be heroes trying to slay them, they become the subject of obsessive fears -- and those fears influence the shapes which dragons materializing in the vicinity can assume. If they are thought of and feared as terrifying monsters, that is what they become. They lose some of their intelligence and most of their self-control, and they *hate* that.

Thus, they mostly prefer that humans not believe in dragons *too* strongly, or at least not think about the subject too much. Over time, this preference has become a racial policy, which has spawned a racial taboo with some of the force of a law. Dragons are taught not to reveal themselves to any more humans than absolutely necessary, although trusted servants are permitted. Many dragons administer a series of formal oaths to these human employees as they are granted more complete knowledge of what it is they serve. Many humans are reluctant to violate such oaths, of course, but these ceremonies are actually as much for the dragon's benefit as anything else; they mark the points at which the taboo may be put aside, and secrecy may be breached.

Humans who find out about dragonkind by accident are sometimes destroyed, but smarter dragons find that wasteful, preferring to recruit them instead. Dragons have become not only secretive, but manipulative, and often take the time to assess any human who comes to their close attention as a tool.

Hoard and Gold

These dragons have only a restricted interest in valuable things *as such*. What the species has discovered is that treasure invokes strong emotions in humans who observe it, while gold -- presumably because of its conducting properties -- has some ability to channel psychic energies. Apart from which, many dragons have long recognized the pragmatic advantages to being rich. All this explains the mythological association between dragons and treasure. Used with a certain amount of skill and judgment, a hoard with a high gold content can enable a dragon to exploit human minds a little more efficiently. The potential uses of money to buy comforts and protection is a bonus. On the other hand, a dragon's attitude to wealth may be a little confusing for human observers, especially those who think in clichés.

Generally, a hoarding dragon is not really terribly interested in its hoard except as a means to an end. Rather, when humans come into its presence, they will be deliberately exposed to the sight of exceptional wealth, in such a way as to provoke some kind of emotional response. Greed and jealousy are the most likely, and are useful, but awe and admiration are just as good, and even contempt or disgust may serve. Meanwhile, the dragon remains close to at least a significant quantity of gold -- sitting on a heap of the stuff, or a gilded throne, is best, but wearing fancy jewelry is adequate -- and soaks up the emotional energy.

This means that dragons tend to be very brash and ostentatious about their wealth, so long as they are reasonably sure that the situation is safe. Some dragons even admit privately to a degree of sympathy for humans who call them tasteless or vulgar -- but refined appreciation of good taste simply doesn't meet their needs as well as simpler emotions.

A Secret History

Dragons have a peculiar need for *limited* isolation. The natural environment of the modern dragon is *human thought*. However, too rich an environment can be as dangerous to them as too little psychic energy. With no humans around, they can only materialize as mindless lizards; with too many, the old madness returns. Therefore, they seek out situations in which they can control their social environment as precisely as possible.

A dragon's ideal home is remote, but near to a small but vibrant human community which knows *something* about him, albeit not necessarily as anything but an unusual human being. A community of a few dozen or a few hundred people -- perhaps a couple of thousand -- serves draconic purposes best, offering useful but not overwhelming psychic energies. The crazy hermit near the village, the enigmatic owner of the big house with a busy estate, the terrifying mother superior in a large convent -- all might be dragons. But this is a balancing act, and even the cleverest dragon can sometimes fall.

Gods and Monsters

Faced with this need to exploit humanity and its emotions, without becoming trapped in human assumptions, and without becoming the target of fearful hatred, dragons have developed various strategies.

In China, they solved the problem by becoming demigods, worshipped for wisdom and power rather than feared as ravening beasts. In India, they took the role of *nagas*, serpents with magical powers living in a secret land of their own (actually the Astral Plane), no more monstrous than the many ordinary snakes of that land, but credited with intelligence and culture. In the West, their approach was to appear as dangerous but remote and very cunning creatures, not (usually) the subject of immediate fears, but something which lurked in secret places, to be respected but not often confronted.

The flaw with the latter approach was of course that the dragons were too often reduced to unthinking monsters, but Chinese lung and Indian nagas had another problem; they had to live up to their claims of demi-divine power, when their physical abilities were in fact rather limited.

Pacts of Secrecy

By the end of the Bronze Age, the dragons had things quite well calculated, while the dragon myth was well enough established among humanity that they very rarely had to work to reinforce it. Thus, they were mostly able to withdraw from any sort of overt presence in human society. For a while, some outside China played at impersonating very immanent gods, dwelling in the city-state temples of ancient Mesopotamia and caves or lakes in northern Europe, receiving tribute and worship through their priesthoods. But humans expected more of their deities than dragons could provide, and after one or two were butchered by conquering armies -- or worse, carried away maimed and in chains, humiliating the whole race -- that habit fell out of fashion, just as their Chinese counterparts had learned not to boast too much.

(Incidentally, despite the claims that they occasionally make, dragons did not actually invent human religion; they merely exploited a recurrent human impulse. Many human gods have nothing of the dragon about them. That said, how far that impulse may have been shaped by draconic activity in earlier times is an interesting question.)

The Iron Age made dragons ever more cautious, and better weapons and larger armies left them feeling increasingly vulnerable. The last few would-be gods in Mesopotamia fell to Assyrian blades, while more than one surly forest-dweller in the woods of Europe gained the posthumous honor of a starring role in a new myth after a warrior with a "magic" (iron) blade sneaked into his lair as he slept. Persia and then Macedonia raised empires to match those of China or India, and those dragons who were slow to adapt to new realities paid the price. (In later centuries, manipulator dragons would carefully convert the tales from those days into legends about heroic founder-princes slaying monsters.) By the time that Rome arose, sensible dragons had learned to live quietly, and more or less mastered the art of manipulating human cultures and societies. A few gloried in Rome's fall, seeking to restore the older, simpler dragon ways, but most frankly preferred to live in greater comfort at the price of a little secrecy.

And by the end of the first millennium A.D., the old informal pacts and agreed strategies had hardened into something slightly more formal. There were plenty of dragons in the world, but most remained well hidden; only on the far fringes did the occasional monster assert itself and demand tribute from humanity. The more sophisticated hidden dragons rarely mourned when they heard that such creatures had been slain by human heroes; frankly, they gave dragonkind a bad name. Some even formulated the theory that the race would do best if humanity actually denied its very existence, so long as *stories* about dragons were still told, and even worked actively towards this end. They could *enjoy* bizarre heraldic images, or tales of monster-slaying saints; it all showed what a good job they were doing of embedding themselves in human dreams. In the east, meanwhile, dragons had almost entirely withdrawn to life as astral entities associated with wild places; they could disregard the odd Mongol invasion, as the new arrivals were happy enough to adopt the local monster-tales on which dragons could subsist.

The Americas

Dragons have always been rare in the Americas, though not unknown. With their ability to move through the Astral Plane and to sense and locate human thought, it was inevitable that they would follow humans to these other continents, and so far as can be told, a few draconic stragglers did so not long after the end of the last Ice Age. However, they were never numerous -- at least until relatively recently, in historical terms.

For one thing, settled human communities in the Americas were very rarely large enough and widespread enough to support a stable dragon population. These are predators, who need large herds of "food animals" to support them -- but their food source is not so much individual humans as human *communities*. Then again, because the Native Americans had no contact with the dragon myths which the dragons carefully cultivated in Europe and Asia, their own myths generated weird, primal, divergent forms, which might impose themselves on an astral dragon seeking to manifest. Being forced into the guise of a piasa bird or an "underground panther" was disquieting for a dragon who was aware of the more "appropriate" shapes taken elsewhere. Only eccentrics, outcasts, and renegades bothered with the Americas.

A few dragons did see an opportunity with the rise of Mesoamerican civilizations. The Mayan city-states proved hard to exploit -- their imaginings were still a little too strange -- but not impossible, and eventually, the myth of Quetzalcóatl, the Feathered Serpent, arose in various forms, marking the establishment of a minor dragon community which seemed stable for a while.

But again and again, these cultures and their dreams proved hard to cultivate. Dragons rarely worry about humans dying or shedding blood, but the impulses to sacrifice and pain-induced hallucination were simply not what dragons *needed* from humanity. By the time of Columbus, the Mesoamerican dragon population was in serious decline, the few remnants lurking in remote villages and confused dreams. Only gradually, over the centuries, did dragons of European (or occasionally Chinese) extraction move in with the great waves of immigrants.

Exploration and Empires

In Renaissance and subsequent eras, the rules changed again. Some dragons blamed each other for this, saying that someone -- someone *else* -- should have taken responsibility for keeping the apes more docile and less mobile, or claiming that some faction was encouraging inconvenient behavior for its short term profit or to undermine an existing arrangement. While this was mostly nonsense, it is true that several European draconic groups took advantage of human expansion, especially once they realized how effete and ineffectual their Eastern counterparts had become. Clever European dragons had learned to speculate in order to accumulate, and their unknowing human minions were sending home reports which suggested that a clever dragon could find a new home -- with lots of wonderful gold -- in other lands.

In fact, the dragon race sometimes seems to have infected humanity with a terrible obsession with that metal. Humans were always perfectly capable of being greedy on their own account, of course, but the downright bizarre, often self-destructive behavior of, for example, the Spanish *conquistadors*, who would endure almost any horrors if they heard a rumor of plunder, shows some signs of draconic manipulation of dreams and desires. It is also possible that the obsessive pursuit of rumors of *El Dorado*, the "man of gold," was promoted by a dragon looking out for dangerous rivals or competitors in new lands.

Thus, outward-looking Western dragons were thoroughly implicated as the Age of Exploration changed into the Age of Empires. (More conservative Westerners sat at home muttering that no good would come of innovation, or more intelligently criticized the violation of ancient pacts or impetuous and careless tactics.) Colonialist dragons *loved* plantations; they could escape the increasingly crowded and confusing lands of Europe to hole up in some great house with a small family and a pack of compliant human servitors. Friction between colonialists and their former allies and neighbors in Europe mirrored that between human colonies and parent countries, and each inspired the other; the most successful breakaway movement was among the dragons of British North America, who learned the art of spreading new dreams among their human pawns in what was essentially virgin psychological territory. Even so, their break with European allegiances required that they call in favors from the old, powerful draconic factions of France -- factions which, ironically, suffered terrible few years later. Some dragons suspect that dangerous dream- images had been carried back across the Atlantic by American dragons' agents.

Elsewhere, European influence ran into the more complex problem of native dragons. The nagas of India had mostly withdrawn to the astral realm, and so European influence -- and even a very few European dragons -- were able to move in quite successfully. However, the psychic environment of the sub-continent -- as defined the dreams of its human population -- proved less amenable to conquest. European domination was always shallow and potentially fragile. China, by contrast, proved a much more blatant sort of problem. While the Chinese dragons were *mostly* withdrawn from human contact, they carefully preserved a number of lines of influence -- and they were numerous, powerful, and subtle. Only a very few, cautious European dragons moved to this land, taking up residence in the entrepôts of Hong Kong and Macao. Still, the effort resistance may have weakened the Chinese dragons severely; this successful defense may prove to have been their last hurrah.

Their cousins in Japan perhaps did better. For centuries, they sealed the land from all intrusions, leading many other dragons to think that their eventual collapse would be total, but in fact, they were making careful plans all that time.

When Japan *was* opened up to the West, the dragon lords carefully allowed specific Western ideas and images to enter the Japanese dream-space, while fiercely guarding their personal independence.

Meanwhile, even in 1901, American dragons remain thinly spread and notoriously eccentric. However, with access to the resources of a growing, dynamic society, they are becoming a serious factor in global draconic society. Furthermore, with the rise of American plutocracy and concepts such as "conspicuous consumption," the cleverest of them -- especially those willing and able to maintain a convincing human form most of the time -- are finding a new place for the old draconic lifestyle. Some hold that the American Dream will be a happy hunting ground for their kind.

The Nature of the Beasts

So what do dragons *do*?

In brief, they try to control human society so that it remains comfortable for themselves, and to maintain a steady flow of psychic energy which they can tap. However, that energy seems to be a limited resource -- or at least, dragons, even the reptilian predators, think so. Note also that they are habitually territorial, with highly competitive and fairly complex mating rituals. They are usually solitary, but break that solitude quite dramatically from time to time. They have lots of experience, but they are sometimes somewhat impulsive and not *especially* smart. They are potentially almost immortal, but terribly fragile.

Thus, they spend their time pursuing power, dominance, and security, while working hard to preserve secrecy. (They are in fact quite impressively uniformly sane, in some very important ways; they all recognize the certainty that a serious lapse in secrecy would be fatal for the individual responsible, probably quickly and painfully.) Their conflicts are primarily political, but can occasionally break out in spectacular violence, either by proxy or, very occasionally, in a personal form.

Shapeshifting

Modern dragons are essentially creatures of psychic energy rather than flesh. This means that they can assume human and other forms *fairly* easily. However, the shapes into which they slip reflexively are influenced by human imaginations and memory. This sometimes leads to odd results.

Dragons also have problems sustaining the stability of any form over long periods. Some are better at this than others, but most find it very tiring to retain a non-reptilian shape for more than a few hours. Only a very few are "shape masters," able to shift between human appearances with any sort of ease; indeed, the wilder stories about such individuals may represent the dragons' own mythology, especially as these experts are often described as assassins and power-thieves.

Dragons have one other problem; for all their shapeshifting powers and psychic abilities, animals invariably seem to sense something "wrong" about them, and react badly.

Psychology

For all their coldly sane urge to self preservation and dependable obsessions, dragons are psychologically complex. Their tendency to political maneuverings seems to be ingrained, and *almost* universal, but is primarily a focused aspect of their urge to dominance. How far this in turn is truly natural to them, and how much it is shaped by human legends and fears of domineering monsters and demigods, is very hard to judge.

Breeding

Dragons have to adopt a material reptilian form to breed, and the females have then to hold it for an extended period. The parents then have to guard their eggs while keeping them in a suitable physical and psychic environment.

Obviously, all this can be dangerous and stressful. It is probably fortunate for the survival of the species that they have a powerful breeding instinct, although they lose almost all parental interest once their young are out of the nest. However, dragons *do* see their offspring as potentially useful political allies -- or at least as pawns. Likewise, dragons are often closely allied to their brood mates, if not out of affection (although they are capable of that), at least because they know each other's habits, tastes, and weaknesses. Dragon mated pairs seem to form on the basis of a mixture of calculation, raw instinct, and a kind of affection that verges on romantic love. Such pairings often last for many decades, but not usually for life. Although most former couples are polite to each other, it is considered a lapse of taste for them to make much casual social contact.

Beliefs

Those few humans who study dragons tend to think of them as atheists, but this is not quite true. Most dragons are pathologically incapable of religious submission to a higher power, but this does not mean that they refuse to believe that such powers exist. Primarily, they have a mystical-religious attitude to the Astral Plane, seeing it as possessing a "higher" or "deeper" aspect where living dragons cannot (usually) venture, but which may be identified with God. A few have sought to relate this perception to human religious ideas, and some believe (or hope) that "faded" dragons are not dead, but have moved on to communion with the high mystery.

All of which said, any dragon found in church is there for purely social reasons, or to bathe in the emotions of the human congregation.

Dragon Conflicts

Dragons are competitive and territorial, and not generally pacifists. They also know how to do each other vast damage, either physically or psychically, in person or by proxy. Sometimes, the impulse proves irresistible. However, if they succumbed too often, draconic society would quickly collapse.

Like most such creatures, they handle this problem by means of an intricate set of social rules and taboos, which vary from region to region, but which have common underlying principles. Conflicts must be formally declared, and inflicting "collateral damage" on neutral parties is seen as poor taste. Surrenders and formal submission must be respected, and minor conflicts can often be resolved non-violently, by displays of wealth or contests between proxies (who may be humans or junior dragons). Rules are designed to ensure that the loser preserves just enough dignity, while still making it clear who won. Which is not to say that these systems *always* work, but they do ensure that draconic society holds together.

The Secret Threats

Dragons are actually in danger from multiple directions in 1901, although many of them refuse to recognize it. For one thing, the world is becoming more *organized*; it is becoming a lot harder to conceal oneself if one happens to be an immortal supernatural creature with a need to spend much of one's time in the form of a giant reptile.

For another, exploration, development, and colonialism are eliminating the last true wildernesses, or at least reducing their scope, so that dragons who seek a psychic-environmental equilibrium, or just refuge, in such areas are fast running out of room. For a third, human culture is becoming *mixed up*, at once randomized and homogenized; the distinctive mental images which spawned dragons and sustained their culture are being scrambled.

And last and maybe worst, ever since the Industrial Revolution, humanity's nightmares and gods have grown increasingly inhuman and detached from the dark night and the wilderness. Dragons, long since transformed into manifestations of such dreams, are slowly being reduced to incoherent fantastical tempests of chaos. Unfortunately for them, not many of them realize or accept this as yet.

Dragon Template

527 points

A dragon is basically a spirit being for game purposes, but can take physical form; it can most easily take the classical "big reptile" shape, but most sometimes materialize in a (weaker) human guise for practical purposes. (Some also sometimes take animal forms, but few see much point to this indignity.) These game details are for *GURPS Third Edition*, but should be easy enough to update to *Fourth Edition* if necessary. Note that some of the psionic skills used here are taken from *GURPS Psionics*, while the rules for spirit forms come from *GURPS Spirits*.

Attribute Modifiers: ST +30 (No Fine Manipulators, -40%; Not in human form, -10%) [90]; HT +5 [60].

Advantages: Alertness +2 [10]; Damage Resistance 3 (Not in human form, -10%) [9]; Extra Hit Points +15 (Not in human form, -10%) [68]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Metabolism Control $\times 5$ [25]; Nictating Membrane $\times 1$ (Only in dragon form, -10%) [9]; Night Vision [10]; Passive Defense 1 (Only in dragon form, -10%) [23]; Sharp Claws (Only in dragon form, -10%) [23]; Sharp Teeth (reach 1) (Only in dragon form, -10%) [9]; Spirit Form (Physical Form, +80%; Unlimited Lifespan, +30%; Missing Powers -- Cannot hear name if invoked, Cannot travel to summoner, No Poltergeist Effect, Possession, or Probability Alteration, -70%) [140]; Temperature Tolerance $\times 2$ [2]; Unaging [15].

Disadvantages: Bad Grip (Only in dragon form, -50%) [-5]; Chauvinistic [-1]; Compulsive Behavior (Acting like humans nearby believe that dragons behave; Only if subject thought to be a dragon by such people, -75%) [-4]; Dependency (Proximity of large groups of people with some kind of belief in dragons, or even more people feeling strong emotions; common, weekly) [-10]; Extra Sleep 1 [-3]; Frightens Animals [-5]; Horizontal (Only in non-human forms, -50%) [-5]; Inconvenient Size (Only in dragon form, -50%) [-5]; Selfish [-5].

Skills: Shapeshifting (M/H) IQ-1 [2]-9.

Psionic Powers: Telepathy (power 5) [25]; +4 to Telepathy power, only in proximity of a large mass of gold (-50%) [10].

Psionic Skills: Emotion Sense (M/H) IQ [4]-10; Illusion (M/H) IQ-1 [2]-9; Telesend (M/H) IQ+4 [12]-14.

A typical full-grown dragon in its "default" form is around 8-10 hexes in size, and weighs about 3,000 lbs. Many, especially older individuals, have high Wealth and Status, as well as related Allies, Ally Groups, Reputations, and Contacts. (They are also prone to disadvantages such as Hidebound, Greed, Megalomania, Overconfidence, and Stubbornness, and to switching Selfish to Self-Centered, as well as other dragons as Enemies.) However, younger "drakes" may still be finding their way in the world.

An individual dragon can buy extra ST with or without the limitations listed above; if bought at full cost, it also applies to their human form. In general, a dragon should have twice as many base hit points in dragon guise than in human; simply double or halve current totals when switching between forms.

The nature of belief in dragons or similar beings among the local human population can influence the physical as well as the mental state of a dragon (specifically, it influences the dragon's normal manifested form), but this is a slow and primarily cosmetic process, and so is not covered by a disadvantage.

Psionics: Dragon characters cannot buy any other psionic powers apart from Telepathy. They can buy additional Telepathy skills from the *Basic Set* (as well as Telescan), although Mental Blow, Sleep, Mindwipe, and Telecontrol are rare; GMs may prohibit them to PCs, or require a 20 point Unusual background to reflect unusual training or talent. They can also buy up to 3 extra levels of power, but no more. The conditional extra Telepathy power require physical contact with a couple of pounds of gold (a big, complicated crown or similar ceremonial regalia may be enough), or the presence of 10-15 lbs. within a few feet; this cannot be bought up or down. Note, when designing dragon characters, that their Illusion skill has prerequisites.

Common Options: To represent a talent for the adoption of human forms, add one or more levels of the Easy Materialization enhancement to the Spirit Form advantage, and also increase the Shapeshifting skill. A true "shape master" (if such beings actually exist) would have one or several additional Physical Forms, mostly human but possibly including some alternate dragon identities. GMs may prohibit these abilities to starting PC dragons, or require

a large Unusual Background to have attained such mastery of form. Dragons *cannot* acquire the ability to hear their name when invoked, or to travel to an invoker, however. Any dragon may take the Alternate Identity advantage shapeshifting ability, plus draconic wealth and influence, makes this fairly easy to manage in this period.

Dragons cannot generally draw on "places of power" for Fatigue. However, there are rumors in draconic circles of locations where physical manifestation is especially easy, or that certain old and powerful dragons have more than sentimental reasons for staying in particular homes. Dragons *can* tap human worshippers for Fatigue, but this is long out of fashion and is widely considered rather dangerous. More importantly, it renders the dragon *extremely* likely to be shaped, physically and psychologically, by the worshippers' beliefs and assumptions -- and few dragons like putting themselves in others' power.

Mythical Abilities

Dragons do not actually fly (in material form -- their astral forms can move however they like), breathe fire, or even possess a venomous bite. Nor can they control the seas or the weather. Human psychic influences can only warp the limits of biology and physics so far. What dragons *can* do is make dramatic and inventive use of their actual powers; many use these to promote the "dragon myth."

There are some dragons who have gained the Amphibious advantage through the influence of human beliefs. Rumors within dragonkind suggest that some even have Gills (or perhaps just Oxygen Storage) when in physical form.

Immortality?

Dragons are classed as "unaging," which is near enough to the truth for practical purposes. After 15-25 years of growth from the egg (which will have been incubated for four to five months), they achieve a form which, other things being equal, can survive unchanged for centuries, and maybe millennia, on the Astral Plane or in the physical world.

However, other things are *never* equal, and the true limits of dragon agelessness have never been properly tested. To begin with, of course, dragons are not immune to accident or misadventure, and every year, a few of all ages die in one way or another. More to the point, they are all subject to psychic decline. Extreme insanity tends to lead to death fairly soon -- a mad dragon rarely defends itself efficiently, and some other dragons are inclined to put such sickening and tragic individuals out of their misery -- while less extreme problems can render a dragon incapable of interacting with the human beliefs and psychic energies which sustain the biologically implausible dragon form, which leads to decrepitude and decline. Probably for very similar reasons, other dragons lose their ability to manifest in physical form, and while a dragon can survive for years or decades on the Astral Plane, the species preserves a vestigial (and possibly psychosomatic) need for physical nutrition, material world -- and in any case, purely astral dragons usually go insane eventually.

Which leaves a final category of cases, of old, powerful dragons who simply *vanish*. Most of the species assume that these fit into the last category, presumably having declined unusually rapidly. However, even after millions of years, the dragons do not properly understand the astral "dream realm," and some believe that it holds secrets accessible only to the uniquely enlightened -- secrets which may take a dragon beyond the merely material. There is a whole set of legends on this subject, more or less believed by some dragons, ranging from the transcendent to the messianic.

There's No "I" in "Roleplay"

by **Brian Rogers**

In addition to being Games, [Toys](#), Media or Art, there is another lens for viewing roleplaying: sports. Specifically, team sports. After all, we already have a referee, we already have a group of people working together, and we often have a balanced opposition and clear end game (if you can accept that the GM can be both Ref and Opposition, and if you like scenarios with directed goals). In other words, there's enough overlap to justify a gratuitous use of sports metaphors while providing player advice.

Practice the Fundamentals

Know the rules of the game -- what works, what doesn't. For RPGs this means get as good a grip on the mechanics as fast as you can, then focus on the details. This is not to trump the ref or rules lawyer the other players, but to keep play seamless. Notice how no serious player dribbles the ball with both hands? Or how frustrated the fans get when the Ref has to call penalty after penalty? Know where things are on your character sheet, how to make a basic attack, and if your character will routinely make mounted Overruns with a lance, know the rules for that, too. Every time you stop play for rules reasons, the game suffers.

Know the Court

While the rules are the same, you'll have different basketball games if you play with your friends, in a Y league, on a school team, in the pros or in \$5-a-point 1-on-1 in the park. There are big differences between a "let's all tell a story," "it's us against the NPCs," and "every PC for himself," as well as beer and pretzels and deep immersion, or high genre or pure reality simulation, even if all of them are using the same rules. Even if you love the system, if you don't like how it's being played you won't have fun or be seen as an asset. While it's unlikely you'll owe the other players money if you flub the house game, you'll have damaged everyone's play and not had any fun yourself. Better to pack your bag than do that week after week.

Set Your Mark

Know why you play, and then make that happen. Victory conditions are what you set: make 12 steals and you've won that game, even if you only scored four points. Find the things that are heroic for your PC and do them, then take pride in having done them well. Didn't slay the dragon? If you're the healer, that's not your goal! Every life saved or soul comforted is a victory. Weren't the one who stopped the villain? If you're playing the sidekick, your tally should be the number of bystanders pulled from harm, mooks humiliated, and jokes cracked. That's not heroic? Says who? Diseased knights won't win battles, and centers who never get the fed ball certainly can't score.

No I in Team

The strongest teams are those that work together. Don't hog the ball, don't force yourself into the center, and don't denigrate your teammates. Know what your teammates are good at, then set them up to have a chance. When it's time for someone else to shine, help them shine, even if that means taking a hit for them. If you could do something alone, but someone else could do it better (or better still, you could do it together) swallow your ego and make it happen. It will improve the game and the team. If for some reason you're warming the bench, cheer from the sidelines, make plans for your return and stay involved -- stalking to the showers isn't going to win points with your teammates or your fans.

Accept Penalties with Grace

Sometimes the Ref will call you on something or make something harder. Take it, and keep playing. If you disagree, briefly say so but then keep playing (remember, stopping play for rules hurts the game). The Ref's job is to know more about the situation than you, and might not have the time or inclination to explain. This may mean taking a penalty to hit, or it might mean trusting someone whom the Ref says "You instinctively like him." Don't look for reasons to not like him just because the GM says you do -- you might not be charmed, he might really be on your side with a high charisma. He might be your soul mate. You don't know, but the ref does, so stay focused on the play, even if you think it's a bad call. There's plenty of time to go over it at the bar afterwards.

The Referee Is on the Side of a Good Game

He's not against you. To stretch the metaphor, he's also your coach! And the opposing team! It might look like "Team NPC" has a home court advantage and hasn't had a penalty flag all game, but you don't know what's happening behind the screen. High school coaches will avoid humiliating the other team and put in their bench once they have a commanding lead, and your GM might be doing the same thing with the opposition to keep the game interesting, or at least prevent bad feelings. Is that cheating? No, but someone in a \$5 a point game would think it was pretty dumb. A lot depends on the court, but if you've agreed to play with the court rules, you have to trust the Ref's arbitration, and that the rules will be fairly applied.

Understand the Game

Finally, you have to understand how the team plays the game. This is partially knowing the court and partially trusting the ref, but mostly it's knowing which sport the game is emulating. Basketball is a fast paced game of constant action, with small, cross trained units, constantly in motion. Football (well, American football) is a series of tactical engagements and breaks for planning the next set of actions where participants have specific roles and redundant positions. Baseball alternates between whole team activity in specialized positions and spotlighted moments of personal achievement. Roleplaying sessions can be handled in any of these ways: a dungeon crawl could be agile warriors breaking into room after room in perpetual conflict, a regimented party tackling a single room then pausing to re-assess and plan before moving to the next or some whole team battles followed by moments of the rogue scouting ahead, then the mystic speaking with spirits, and other spotlight moments before the team reconnects.

Got all that? Good! Now grab your dice bag, and remember that the winning team is the one that came to play!

Information, Please! Pretty, Pretty Please?

In most modern roleplaying games, like movies, the search for information follows a certain pattern.

Action Hero: "Hmm . . . we need information on the location of all volcanoes with hollow niches suitably large to hide Dr. Sharehip's airship there."

Mousy Compu-Geek: "I'm on it! <types furiously at the keyboard> I've got nine locations."

Action Hero: "Can we narrow that down?"

Mousy Compu-Geek: "Sure! <he clicks NARROW IT DOWN> Here it is . . . breathtaking Diablo's Peak in exotic Maui!"

Action Hero: "Let's go; we need to save the world . . . *on location!*"

There are a number of reasons behind this. First, in the modern era, finding information is trivially easy -- almost magically so. Thanks to Internet search engines, information that would have been impossible or at least wildly inconvenient to find 15 years ago is trivial. For example, at my Day Job, my friend Chuck had seen a movie on late-night cable that he didn't know the name of, but he knew it starred Meryl Streep and had the *Seinfeld*-quoted phrase, "Maybe a dingo ate your baby." A three-word Google search later, and I knew the answer after about five seconds. (Proving that the more trivial the information is, the more trivial it is to find it.) In the old days, it would have taken at *least* a trip to the bookstore or library to find that kind of information out . . . and remember the days when people bought *paper* encyclopedias?

Second, in action-adventure sequences, the search for information usually serves as the bridge between scenes, not a scene in and of itself. This makes a certain amount of sense; usually the only reason to have this kind of search is to advance the plot. And as I've detailed elsewhere, having a geek typing furiously at the keyboard [just isn't exciting](#).

Third, at least in the roleplaying world, most games do a poor job of detailing what is and isn't possible with a skill. The base assumption (or, at least, my base inference) in most RPGs is that any information search is possible, assuming the person rolls well enough. On some level, this is very logical; if someone rolls a phenomenal Critical Success on the "Gather Information" roll, it seems very petty to deny someone the information he's seeking.

But a lot of times, the information just isn't available. And acquiring the information will require a lot of work and luck . . . if it's possible at *all*.

Case in point: I am in the process of trying to acquire my baptismal certificate. This process has been stymied by a number of factors:

- The amount of starting information I have is almost minimal; apparently I didn't realize the importance of keeping good notes about my location, despite being over one month old at the time.
- I made a poor life choice by having decided to be born in Detroit area, which has approximately three Catholic parishes for every citizen. As a result, the number of parishes that could possibly contain my baptismal information is *huge*.
- As a schlub off the street, I have had a difficult time navigating various bureaucracies. I think the quintessential symbol of this trouble was when I found myself talking with a parish in Michigan that refused to call me back after she had done some research there, because the long distance call would be "too expensive." (This is beside the fact that I calculated the call would have cost, at most, about 45 cents.)

On a completely unrelated note, [a couple of days ago](#) the Department of Justice denied some Freedom of Information Act requests, claiming that the act of complying with the request "risks a crash that cannot be fixed and could result in a major loss of data, which would be devastating." Without answering the question of the validity of this assertion, the

fact remains that the person isn't getting the data they want.

Anyway, both these points converge on one undeniable fact: The desired information isn't readily available, and it's difficult to envision circumstances where it *could* be available . . . certainly not within the timetable to thwart your average nuclear-missile-wielding megalomaniac. (And never you mind exactly how my baptismal certificate could be used to stop said megalomaniac.) In the case of church records, the information isn't on computer at *all*, and any research attempts will be limited to either telephonic inquiries or considerable travel time and expense.

How can this apply to your standard RPG?

First, I think most RPGs require a fundamental redefinition as to what, exactly, information and research attempts (and skill rolls) can accomplish. Knowing this from the beginning will keep players from growing resentful if they score a Mega-Ultra-Spendupular success on an information attempt, only to be told by the GM, "Sorry; that information isn't available." This is especially important in games with Hero Points or similar limited-use game-altering effects; many players would feel resentful if they burned a bunch of those points to get a good result, only to learn that it's moot.

One way around this is to redefine what information rolls are. As the expression goes, "Half of knowledge is knowing where to find it." Information attempts could be broken down into two separate rolls: One to gauge the scope and nature of a search, and the other to indicate the actual information search attempt. Thus a great success on the church record roll would indicate as much knowledge about what the actual research attempt entails. ("It will probably take a month to track this information down; the information only exists in paper form, and will either require in-person searches or persuasion and specific questions by phone. Getting more people to help contact places would speed up the process, but then you'd need to trust those others with knowledge of the information you're looking for. Even so, at best it will still probably take at least a day to find the information, and possibly up to a week depending on how hidden the information is. And, of course, it's possible that the information won't exist at *all*.") A minimal success would give only the vaguest notions of what is involved. ("The information will probably take a while to uncover, and it may only exist in paper form.") A failure on this result would give no indication as to what the information search will entail, or even false information. ("Dealing with the Justice Department? No sweat! Should take about a minute.")

In this regard, the player will have a good idea how long an adventure request will take. ("Okay; so without help one roll indicates a month-long search attempt. I can do other things in that time, right?") Or, if he rolled poorly on the first roll, then the GM has much more justification to provide setbacks on the second roll. ("Well, you *should* have been able to find the information if it was easily available, but you're running into more dead ends than you were expecting at the Justice Department. You may need to put this on the backburner for now.")

Second, I suspect that players should become reacquainted with the notion of needing to hunt for information. A decade or so ago, this was a common trope, but in many adventures I've seen, run, and played in since then, the difficulty in searching for lore has diminished substantially. Detective work and other searching for information is a classic adventuring trope, from the dusty libraries combed in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* to classic stories such as DC Comics' "Who is Donna Troy?" which details the search for one character's "true" identity. If players start viewing looking for information as an adventure itself instead of an interlude between scenes, they should be more likely to accept setbacks such as the GM saying, "You rolled well, but that information just isn't available."

Third, the campaign should determine what information-gathering sources are (if they exist), and possibly redefine them. The existence of divination spells or the like can greatly disrupt many kinds of adventures. But what if, instead of banning these abilities, the GM instead redefines them? For example, what if any supernatural ability that acquires knowledge requires knowledge of an equal or greater value to "enhance" the network? (This could make magicians who dabble in secrets *very* untrusted, and always eager to learn of others' closeted skeletons to swap for other information.) Or, drawing from the computer analogy again, what if all those who connect to supernatural information networks are, in fact, sharing their information with each other, like a giant peer-to-peer network? This could result in players being tapped for information requests. ("You feel a probing at your mind; someone is asking you the True Name of the Great Red Dragon. Do you respond?") If a cosmic ranking system is used, then mages who provide truthful information often would find their requests more likely to be used, while those who deny most requests for lore would have a much more difficult time. In this case, the ground rules would need to be established; at the very

least, it should probably be required that the PCs either answer requests truthfully, or not answer at all. (Otherwise, the entire notion of divination would become tainted of people spreading various lies throughout the "net.") In this way, the GM has yet another tool for not allowing information to be accessed; it's simply unavailable by any of the members of the divination web.

Regardless, the notion that information is omnipresent and easily accessible is a modern one, and it makes for good gaming to keep all the heroes' woes from being solved with a few taps at the keyboard. After all, if half of knowledge is knowing where to find it, the other half could just as easily be the excitement of *getting* it.

--*Steven Marsh*

Language

GURPS assumes that most characters can read and write their "native" language. This ability costs no points, but you should note your native language on your character sheet; e.g., "English (Native) [0]."

The rest of this section is only important if you can communicate in more than one language (an advantage) or have difficulty with your native tongue (a disadvantage).

Comprehension Levels

The point cost to learn an additional language depends on your "comprehension level": a measure of how well you function in that language overall. There are four comprehension levels:

- **None:** You are completely incapable of functioning in the language. If you do not spend points on a non-native language, this comprehension level is assumed -- there is no need to note it for every language you don't know! 0 points/language.
- **Broken:** You can recognize important words and understand simple sentences if they are spoken slowly. You have -3 when using skills that depend on language, such as Fast-Talk, Public Speaking, Research, Speed-Reading, Teaching, and Writing. This doubles to -6 for artistic skills that rely on the beauty of the language (Poetry, Singing, etc.). In stressful situations -- e.g., encounters involving combat or reaction rolls -- you must roll against IQ to understand or make yourself understood in the language. On a failure, you convey no information, but you may try again. Critical failure means you convey the wrong information! For hurried speech, bad phone connections, etc., this roll is at -2 to -8! Native speakers who already dislike foreigners (see Intolerance, p. 140) react to you at an extra -1. 2 points/language.
- **Accented:** You can communicate clearly, even under stress. However, your speech and writing are idiosyncratic, and it is obvious that this is not your native language. You have -1 when using skills that depend on language, doubled to -2 for artistic skills. You receive no reaction penalty from native speakers, but you will be unable to pass for a native (this can be a major problem for would-be spies!). 4 points/language.
- **Native:** You have full mastery of the language, including idioms. You can think in the language. You have no penalty to use skills that depend on language. You start with one language at this level for free. If you buy Native comprehension in a foreign tongue, you can pass for a native speaker. 6 points/language.

Exceptional Competence and Incompetence

Great orators, writers, and other masters of the language should start with Native-level comprehension, then learn skills such as Public Speaking and Writing at very high levels.

Poorly educated individuals who can barely get by in their native tongue should take the point difference between their actual level and Native level as a disadvantage. For instance, someone who has his native tongue at Broken level has a -4-point disadvantage.

Spoken vs. Written Language

The point costs above assume that you read/write and speak the language equally well. If your written and spoken ability differ, select separate spoken and written comprehension levels and pay half cost for each. For instance, if you learned to write French from a book, you might have "French: Spoken (None)/Written (Native) [3]."

Literacy

Your written comprehension level determines your degree of literacy in that language:

Literacy is a written comprehension of Accented or better. You can read and write competently and at full speed.

Semi-literacy is a written comprehension of Broken. A semi-literate person would require three minutes to read this sentence, and would have to make an IQ roll to understand the full meaning! Many words are always unintelligible to a semi-literate person, including some in this paragraph.

Illiteracy is a written comprehension of None. If this is the case, you really can't read! Signs, scrolls, books, and names on maps (though not the maps themselves) are completely incomprehensible to you. The player may pass secret notes to the GM (and vice versa), but the character cannot read anything.

At TL4 and below, it is quite possible to go all your life without needing to read. In settings like this, illiteracy or semi-literacy is the norm. Most people have a spoken comprehension level of Native, but their written comprehension is Broken or None.

Illiteracy in your native tongue -- Spoken (Native)/Written (None) -- is a disadvantage worth -3 points. Semi-literacy -- Spoken (Native)/Written (Broken) -- is worth -2 points. The GM should not count these points against the disadvantage limit if illiteracy is the norm in the game world.

Sign Language

A true sign language -- e.g., American Sign Language -- is complex, stylized, and can communicate almost any concept. Treat it as any other language, with one important difference: a sign language has one form (signed) instead of two (spoken and written). As a result, sign languages costs half as much: 1 point for Broken, 2 points for Accented, and 3 points for Native comprehension.

Characters with the Deafness (p. 129) or Mute (p. 125) disadvantages start with one sign language and written ability in one regular language -- both at Native level -- instead of spoken and written ability in one language. Those who are illiterate, or incompetent at sign language, can buy down their language abilities using the usual rules.

Learning Languages

To learn a new language, use the rules for learning skills (p. 292): 200 hours of learning gives you one point to spend. Note that language study is four times as hard without a teacher!

If you live in another country and speak its language at all times, that is the automatic equivalent of 4 hours/day of training; there is no need to allocate specific study time unless you want to get more than this default. Thus, every 50 days, you get a character point to spend in that language.

Accents

If your spoken comprehension is Broken or better, you can attempt to fake a regional accent. To fool someone, you must win a Quick Contest of Acting (p. 175) or Mimicry (Speech) (p. 210) vs. his IQ. You are at -6 for Broken comprehension, or -2 for Accented . . . but a non-Native listener has similar penalties to his IQ roll!

Each accent is a separate familiarity (see p. 169) for Acting or Mimicry. To memorize a new accent, you must listen to that accent used in conversation for at least one hour and make a successful roll against the higher of IQ or Linguistics, at +5 for Eidetic Memory or +10 for Photographic Memory (see Eidetic Memory, p. 51).

Broken to Broken

If you and the person with whom you are speaking both have a comprehension level of Broken, conversation will be

difficult. This is definitely a "stressful situation"! Each of you must roll against IQ once per piece of information; all the usual modifiers apply. If you both succeed, you get the point across. If one of you fails, you just fail to communicate. But if both of you fail, the listener gets the wrong idea. This could be embarrassing or dangerous -- possibly for both of you. The GM should be creative!

Damage and Injury

Wounding Modifiers and Injury

Any damage left over after subtracting DR from basic damage is "penetrating damage." If there is any penetrating damage, multiply it by the attack's "wounding modifier." This is a multiplier that depends on damage type:

- Small piercing (pi-): $x0.5$.
- Burning (burn), corrosion (cor), crushing (cr), fatigue (fat), piercing (pi), and toxic (tox): $x1$ (*damage is unchanged*).
- Cutting (cut) and large piercing (pi+): $x1.5$.
- Impaling (imp) and huge piercing (pi++): $x2$.

The damage after this multiplier determines the injury: the HP lost by the target. Round fractions down, but the minimum injury is 1 HP for any attack that penetrates DR at all. Reduce the victim's current HP total by the injury sustained.

Example: Filthy Pierre is struck by an axe, which does cutting damage. His attacker's basic damage roll is 7, but Pierre is wearing DR 2 leather armor, so he suffers 5 points of penetrating damage. Multiplying by 1.5 for cutting damage, Pierre ends up losing 7.5 HP, which rounds to 7 HP -- a nasty wound!

Note that blunt trauma injury has no wounding modifier.

Where you were hit may further affect the wounding modifier; see Hit Location (p. 398). The rules above assume a hit to the torso or face.

Golden Fire Seals

for *GURPS* and *In Nomine*

by Elizabeth McCoy

The Golden Fire seal appears to be a sub-species of fur seal, with a particularly fine amber pelt. Rare, its fur is prized for its color and texture by those who have no understanding of the Golden Fire seal's complex life cycle.

It is said that in the spring, Golden Fire seals come to birth their young between the sea and the land. Or, less poetically, on the beaches around the high tide mark, during low tide. Then, after the baby seal has suckled its first rich milk, they may remain on the beach until it's old enough to return to the sea . . . or, if they're close to human habitations, the baby may push itself up and toddle towards men.

Toddle, yes. Golden Fire seals are also a sub-species of Selkie.

When exposed to *something* from humans -- psychic vibrations, pheromones, magical auras, whatever -- a baby Golden Fire seal will turn into a human toddler, appearing somewhere between six months to two years old. The Golden Fire child, with its amber-brown hair and tanned skin, will then proceed toward the nearest humans, happy, unafraid, and beautiful.

Most of them are quickly adopted, and spend the next 18 years of their lives cared for by human parents. (The mother seal mates shortly after, if she can find a male, and returns to the sea.)

Scholars who know of this species consider that Golden Fire seal is actually a mammalian version of the cuckoo bird, foisting its young off on other species. Fortunately, the Golden Fire children are not -- unlike cuckoo hatchlings -- prone to shoving "siblings" or other eggs out of the nest. They are all very good swimmers, rarely get sick, and tend to be a little on the *zaftig* side, unaffected by cold temperatures, but are otherwise normal children with a normal range of personalities.

And at 18, they are drawn back to the sea. It is an overwhelming compulsion, possibly mistaken (by those who read the *Cthulhu* mythos, or who live in it) for something akin to what is felt by those suffering the Innsmouth Look. If the Golden Fire child can get there within a year, then he or she will cast off human guise, and return to the waters as a seal. Sapience fades, until the Golden Fire seal is just a bright animal. It seeks out a mate at the appropriate time, and cycles resume.

There are two ways to avert this fate as a sub-sapient animal.

Firstly, if the Golden Fire child is prevented from returning to the ocean -- it will still change shape by the end of the year. Many Golden Fire seals are returned then, back to their home, and continue as above: animals. However, if one is kept in captivity (and it is captivity, as they seek to escape to the sea), and kept away from salt water, after a year . . . Sapience returns, and the shifting becomes mostly voluntary. (They have trouble resisting when swimming in large bodies of water, especially if it's salty.)

The second method is more chancy. If a Golden Fire seal (even one who never changed as a baby) is prevented from mating, during mating season, for approximately three months -- it will revert to human, to seek a human mate. Sapience does *not* return immediately. Females are sweet, wide-eyed, and show themselves willing by shy caresses. Males are a bit more assertive, but can still be given a good shove; it seems to bewilder them mightily, but they are not prone to violence in return.

Naturally, if they succeed in mating, they quickly seek out the waters again, and revert. To recover their sapience, they must remain captives until their intelligence grows back, a process of several months. Then they frequently remember

their human lives, and are -- as above -- able to shift voluntarily.

Golden Fire seals are cross-fertile with fur seals, but the Golden Fire genetics are recessive, and have their activation, apparently, on the X chromosome. Male Golden Fires can father bright seal children, and a Golden Fire may crop up a few generations down the line, but it's rare. Likewise, Golden Fire Selkies are cross-fertile with humans, but the offspring is not a full shapeshifter (unless the human happened to have a Golden Fire ancestor, and bears the recessive gene); Golden Fire-fathered children tend to be good swimmers.

Seal-mothers of half-human or half-normal seal babies are a bit more odd. Somehow, she manages to impart some of her magic in the womb, and in the first milk. Her half-human babies will change *once*, from seal to human, after birth, as normal. After that, they simply grow to be good swimmers, as their Golden Fire-fathered cousins do. The seal-sired babies may or may not change (approximately fifty-fifty odds, or higher if the fur seal father carried the Golden Fire recessive); if they do, they may or may not change *back* at 18 (though they are never the brightest of humans). And after that, if they revert to full seal-dom, they remain seals whether or not they fulfill the biological imperative to mate in any given season. Fortunately for the breed, they tend to carry the recessive, and may have or sire Golden Fire children.

Naturally, this is a complicated life cycle. Golden Fire Selkies are guaranteed approximately a year as an animal, no matter what. Even if a sapient breeding pair exist, their children will go through the same processes as "wild" Golden Fire babies. Knowing the call of the sea themselves, it is hard for parents to prevent their children from returning -- though not impossible. Still, far more Golden Fire stories end in bittersweet tragedy; they are happy in the waters, but to go too soon, and for too long, extinguishes their minds.

Adventure Seeds

- Any PC can be a Golden Fire Selkie. If he is younger than approximately 18 (which, it should be noted, may be counted as "20" if he was a "two year old" at the time of adoption), then his change is in his future. Adventure fast, and hope that when the time comes, your friends hang onto you. (Suitable for any character with a secret disadvantage.)
- Likewise, any PC may have relatives who have recently adopted a child. Being the paranoids they frequently are, player characters may notice the oddities about the youngster and travel to distant libraries and countries trying to find out what's going on. This may save the child down the line. If they don't get a clue that something is strange, mysterious would-be kidnappers may attempt to steal their cousin for study by a shadowy organization or researcher. (Can Golden Fire Selkie marrow hold a cure for AIDS? Will Golden Fire blood cure the Black Plague? If you taste of a Selkie's flesh, will you be immortal? Or is that only mermaids?)
- Alternatively, they may hear that their adopted cousin has vanished from college, and was last seen feverishly buying bus tickets for California. (Or stealing a horse and heading for the Magoon Ocean, depending on the setting.) Can they track their cousin, or will their aunt and uncle's hearts be broken? And will those same shadowy kidnappers, as above, be after the newly-revealed Selkie as well?
- Naturally, a *functioning* Selkie, who has somehow managed to return to humanity and voluntary shapechanging, will have a secret to keep. Hopefully, he'll also want to keep the secret of any other Selkies he finds -- not to mention crusade against the killing of Golden Fire seals in the wild! They're an endangered (sub)species, true enough . . . but sometimes it seems it would be so easy to explain that they're potentially *human*.
- Revealing the secret deliberately is a player-motivated plot, but could afford a great many sessions dealing with publicity, unethical researchers, ethical researchers who only want a few blood samples, panicked Selkies and Selkie-descendants who are terrified of changing, would-be Selkies who *want* to change and "return to nature's womb," and circus or theme park offers of employment . . . or stud fees.
- And for the less-ethical groups, they are hired to "acquire" someone's prized seal. Funny how the stolen animal is gone shortly after the snatch, and a confused young woman is in its place. Will they traffic in kidnapping and human slavery as easily as stealing an animal? If they do, then there will be private investigators or troubleshooting teams after their victim. If they return the captive, their employers are going to be upset. Life's just full of tough choices . . .
- As above, only the group is hired to recover a stolen seal. Or maybe a kidnapped youth. Either. Both. Their

employer isn't very coherent; you'd think that he'd lost his only child or something.

GURPS Stats

Human Form

ST +1 [10]; **DX** +1 [10]; **HT** +1 [10].

Advantages: Breath Holding +2 [4]; Disease-Resistant [5]; Temperature Tolerance +4 (to cold, for a comfort zone of -5 to 90 degrees Fahrenheit) [4]; Amphibious (No Obvious Features, +10%) [11]

Disadvantages: Up to 20 points from Bestial [-10], Chummy [-5], Curious [-5, -10, -15], Easy to Read [-10], Enemy (Unknown would-be kidnappers) [varies], Gluttony [-5], Hidebound [-5], Honesty [-10], Impulsiveness [-10], Innumerate [-1, -5, -10], Light Sleeper [-5], Lunacy [-10], Motion Sickness [-10], Overweight [-5], Shyness [-5, -10, -15], or Truthfulness [-5].

Quirk: Loves fish [-1].

Base cost for being a Golden Seal Selkie is 30 points.

Pre-change Golden Seal children add Youth [-2, -4, -6, more at the GM's option], and Secret Disadvantage [-5]. "The Change" is half the cost of Terminally Ill, minimum -25. (This means that a Selkie-child unaware of its nature has a 0 point racial package, and normal Youth.)

Adult Golden Fire Selkies add the advantages of shapeshifting into a seal form requiring a Will roll to avoid changing in large bodies of water, and a Will -5 roll to resist changing in the ocean. They add the disadvantage of Secret (Selkie) [-10], and may have Enemies (unknown or otherwise).

See *GURPS Bestiary*, p. 111, for the Sea Lion racial template. See *GURPS Shapeshifters*, p. 19, for the shapeshifting advantage. An adult Selkie who has regained human form after the first seal-change removes the IQ modifiers, Presentient, and (assuming that he does not possess them in human form) Bestial and Innumerate; as Amphibious is part of the Selkie template, it is not paid for twice. Human-form Selkie attribute bonuses are replaced with the normal sea lion ones (attributes added during character creation are treated normally). He adds the Enhancements of Absorptive Change [+5%], Once On, Always On [+150%], and Proportional Damage [0%], and a Limitation adapted from External Trigger, Urge to Change (as in the description) [-5%]. Total cost is 23 points.

Optional advantages: Appearance (Attractive or better), Absolute Direction, Animal Empathy [5] or Beast-Kin [15], and Enhanced Move (Swimming), plus any not already taken from the sea lion template.

Optional disadvantages: any of the above not already taken as part of the racial package, plus any from the sea lion template.

In Nomine stats

In an *In Nomine* setting, most creatures of myth were actually ethereals (or offspring of ethereals with the appropriate Song of Fruition), and died when the Archangel of Purity attempted to wipe out ethereal "leeches of mortal Essence." Naturally, Jordi, the Archangel of Animals, objected to slaying creatures who were mortal. Still, Golden Fire Selkies -- never numerous to start with -- were among the casualties.

Except, that is, for a few carefully protected cross-breeds. (They weren't Selkies, so why should they die? Jordi wasn't doing anything but protecting his Word . . .) After Uriel's recall to the Higher Heavens, recessives have combined, and finally reached a critical level: Golden Fire seals are a recently discovered (and endangered) species. So far, no other celestials have really noticed that they exist.

For his part, Jordi would rather they didn't turn human at all, but simply remained bright seals. He hasn't managed to find a way to make this happen yet, though.

Servitors of Jordi might be assigned to watch over certain human young (Golden Fire Selkies, pre-change), or protect Golden Fire seals and keep them away from humanity (to keep the human-change from happening). Jordi rarely bothers to explain *why* he is assigning one of his angels to these projects, which can cause a bit of surprise or consternation on the part of the angel in question.

(A Selkie-assignment can be used to explain why a Servitor of Jordi is in the area and *generally* available to assist other PCs; a very distressed Jordian might also follow a shape-shifted baby into human territory in an effort to retrieve or protect it. The seal-herding task is better for NPCs or an all-Animals group trying to retrieve a human-formed baby.)

Golden Fire Selkies have 5 Forces, with 2 additional attribute points in their Corporeal attributes, Strength and Agility. They frequently acquire a third in that realm, too, and sometimes achieve 6 Forces. They automatically have Swimming/3, and are -- as noted above -- comfortable even in the cold. They take a minimum number of disadvantages with combined levels of 3 from the **GURPS** selection above (typically each will be -3 points per level, or -3 points for a disadvantage that the GM rules has no levels).

A pre-change Selkie has no additional disadvantage points. A Selkie adult has a 10 point "attunement" allowing appropriate shapeshifting. They roll Will+1 to avoid shifting in large bodies of water, or Will-1 to avoid shifting in oceans.

Brutal Space

Variant Rules for Fantasy Flight Games' *MagBlast*

by Philip Reed

MagBlast, billed as "A Card Game of Screaming Space Battles," is a fast-playing game that's become a favorite around my game table. Usually a game is over quickly and only after a great deal of cheering, explosions, and fun by everyone involved. Unfortunately, after several dozens sessions of *MagBlast* a few players move on in search of a different game; the replay value is there but not as high as your first few months of play would suggest.

MagBlast veterans looking for a little more heat in their next game need look no further than the variant rules presented in this article. If you're a *MagBlast* novice, it's recommended you play the standard game a dozen or so times before attempting any of these variants.

Note: These variants were written for the second edition of the game, and have not been tested with the earlier edition of the game.

Long-Range Bombers: In the basic game a bomber may only be launched at an enemy ship in the *same zone* as the carrier. By discarding three resources of the same type -- at the beginning of his turn -- a player's bombers are equipped with long-range tanks and for that turn only may be launched at a ship in *any zone*, just like fighters. The stress of long-range attacks has a chance of rendering a bomber useless after it strikes its target: for each bomber launcher during this turn the player must draw one action card and for each action card with two resources (either different or identical) one bomber is discarded. All remaining bombers return to the player's hand as per normal bomber usage.

Pinpoint Accuracy: Any time a "Direct Hit" critical card is played successfully (not countered in any way) the attacking player may discard one card from his hand and then choose to play *two* critical cards on his target or double the damage of the blast card that successfully hit the enemy ship.

Example: Shannon successfully plays "Laser Blast" on an opponent's hit and then follows up with "Direct Hit." Shannon's opponent has no counter so she discards a card and plays "Bridge Hit" and "Catastrophic Damage." Her opponent not only loses all of the cards in his hand (due to "Bridge Hit") but also loses the targeted ship ("Catastrophic Damage").

Double Reinforcements: Sometimes war escalates quickly. In this variant, it is assumed that the players' factories are working overtime to produce new star ships. When a player draws a new ship (either through the exchange of resources or by playing the "Reinforcements" action card) he may draw a second ship if he discards all of the cards remaining in his hand (a minimum of one card must be discarded).

Doomsday Weapon: At the beginning of each turn, after your draw phase, you may randomly (have another player select the card without looking at them) place one card from your hand to one side -- this is your Doomsday Weapon. When your flagship is destroyed your Doomsday Weapon inflicts a number of points of damage -- equal to the number of cards you've set aside -- to one zone of your choice on the player who destroyed you.

Hopefully these variants will make your next *MagBlast* session more destructive and enjoyable.

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Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Pyramid Review

Friends of the Dragon: A Guide to Player Character Groups (for Feng Shui)

Published by [Atlas Games](#)

Written by Keith Baker & Will Hindmarch

Illustrated by J. Scott Reeves

72-page b&w softcover; \$17.95

Like so many other roleplaying games, *Feng Shui* can sometimes suffer from a problem. All too often, it takes a disparate bunch of characters -- say, for example, a Masked Avenger, a Scrappy Kid, a Maverick Cop, and an Everyday Hero(ine) -- then throws them together and expects them to gel. A problem more particular to *Feng Shui* is that while the genre it is based on usually involves solitary protagonists, the roleplaying game itself does not. Of course, in the hands of a competent GM, this is not all *that* much of a problem, but it is one that the game's latest supplement, *Friends of the Dragon: A Guide to Player Character Groups* sets out to address and explore.

Since *Feng Shui* is about fighting the Secret War, this supplement is about fighting the Secret War *as* a group, rather than as a bunch of eclectic individuals. Its central idea is not to run a game, but to create and run a themed *Feng Shui* game called a "Show." To do this it brings a number of new genres to the game, so that a GM could run a Cop or Espionage Show, just two of the five genres explored in *Friends of the Dragon*. Then it asks the players to work together in the process of not only creating their characters, but their group as a whole. This combination of group and genre works to give both the GM and the players a sense of expectation about what a game is going to be like. More particularly for the GM, it opens up a whole new box of tools with which he can play.

This being a *Feng Shui* supplement, *Friends of the Dragon* wastes little time in getting down to specifics. In rapid-fire fashion, the book runs through the elements of a Show. This includes the Pitch, Setting the Stage, Props intrinsic to the Show, and Scripting -- a more detailed look at the genre, before placing the Show in the context of the Secret War. It does the same for the anatomy of the group: their Pitch, Name, the Junctures that they might originate from, their Backstory (how the group members know each other) and what it is that keeps them together, their appropriate Schticks, and Wealth Level. Different group types and how they are created are discussed, including villainous groups, mixing up different groups, and how an already existing group, or rather a PC party, can be made to take advantage of the material contained in this book. Best of all, though, is the section on Flashbacks, which allow the exploration of a character's past and their associations with the other players taking the roles of the members of the groups they previously belonged to. This is a concept well done, and at the same time as exploring a character's past, each flashback provides the GM with a fistful of ready to run NPCs. The concept should also find a home in RPGs and campaigns that make use of character histories, of which Eden Studios' [Angel Roleplaying Game](#) is a fine example.

Feng Shui supplements are always light on new rules, and in keeping with the rest of the line, *Friends of the Dragon* is no exception. The primary addition goes hand-in-hand with the supplement's core concept, and introduces the idea of the "Group Schtick." These comes in two related types, the first being the Group Schtick itself, and is one possessed by the group as a whole, representing a benefit or resource that they can all partake of. Police groups will enjoy the benefits of "Authority" and "Back-Up"; all kinds of groups could have access to a "Library" (occult or otherwise) or employ a "Secret Code" to pass on clandestine messages in plain sight; while "Johnny! No!" does exactly what it should when yelled in slow motion on the silver screen. Ex-Soldiers on the run, or bands of itinerate investigators into the unknown (dog in tow or not) might like to take advantage of "The Van" Group Schtick, a mobile mini-

headquarters that is really, *really* hard to blow up. Most radical of all, is the introduction of the Mook Schtick, which, yes, does allow players to have their own band of Game Master Characters to command. All ready to protect your headquarters, or fight the bad guy mooks while you go toe-to-toe with the villain, this supplement's appendix provides a ready range of stats, as well as discussing the possibility of a player mook progressing to named character status. Group Schticks are purchased by the group as a whole, with some of each character's experience points and also from a pool of group experience points that the GM awards the group.

The second type of new Group Schtick is the Synergistic or Synchronal Schtick, also known as the Sync Schtick. These are not purchased as a group, but by each individual and -- for the most part -- still to the benefit of the group as a whole. Some, like "Back To Back" and "Combined Sorcery," work in tandem, so that at least two characters need to select them in order that they work. Others benefit the group more directly, such as "Guiding Firefight." With this a character can spend an action to shout something like "Look Out!" or "Behind You!" to pass on a bonus to another character's next shot.

Everything behind the Group concept is put into practice in the book's examination of five different genres and the Shows that they can spawn. These make up the bulk of *Friends of the Dragon* and look at Cop Shows, Crime Shows, Espionage Shows, Action Family Shows, and Sentai Shows. The five are all very well done, and present a plethora of possibilities and ideas from which a GM can create a themed campaign or Show. For each there is given at least two sample shows. For example, "Detectives," "S.W.A.T." and "P.O.W.E.R.S." ("Paranormal and OtherWorldly Event Response Squad" -- think *The X-Files* meets *Supercop*) are given for Cops Shows, while for Espionage Shows there is "Mission: Unstoppable" and "Nether Powers," in which the characters protect time and space from the villains of, and outside of history.

The first three of the genres covered are done so in a definitely intelligent though perhaps predictable way. The last two genres while not as predictable, are certainly different. Action Family Shows covers everything from *Alias* and *Scooby Doo* to *Spy Kidz* and *Lara Croft Tomb Raider*. They include not just family groups, but also family-like groups and both can fall into two further types. In "Wanderers," the group travels from one adventure to the next. They of course, get "The Van" Schtick for starters. In "Cornerstones," the group is wealthy, famous, and upstanding figures on the world stage where they run some kind of wealthy foundation. With their fame, and homes around the world, the enemy is likely to know where to find the group. More outré still is the Sentai Show, drawn from 1970's Japanese television and best typified by *Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers* and *Science Ninja Team Gatchaman*. In this type of Show, the world is a cleaner place, with the divide between good and evil sharply drawn, all threatened by some monstrous evil. Only a team of young clean-cut heroes can hope to save the day, and sometimes only then if they can combine -- quite literally -- to increase their power. Of the Shows in this book, this is the only one to receive a new archetype, the Science Ninja.

Friends of the Dragon is engagingly written, referencing everything from *Homicide: Life on the Street*, *The Italian Job* (the remake), *True Lies*, *Johnny Quest*, and *X-Men*. Instead of the usual range of illustrations, J. Scott Reeves offers us a series of movie posters that nicely fit their genres. Their titles alone might be enough to inspire a whole adventure or two! Yet the book is not quite perfect -- one poster is used twice, but this is minor compared to the fact that the text needed one more read through.

As an aide to an already existing campaign, *Friends of the Dragon* will prove to be of little use, but as a means to create a new one, it more than delivers. Further, there is no reason that these newly created groups cannot exist in the in the same campaign as already existing ones, the guide to Flashbacks being very useful in suggesting how this might be done. But in introducing the concepts of the Show and the Group, *Friends of the Dragon: A Guide to Player Character Groups* serves up a whole new approach to setting up and running a *Feng Shui* game.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Mü & More

Published by [Rio Grande Games](#)

Designed by Doris & Frank

Art by Doris Mattháus

66 full-color cards & rules; \$11.95

Over the last 10 years, give or take, *Mü & More* has bounced across a couple of companies. Designers Doris Mattháus and Frank Nestel have retrieved their game license and released the first English-language version through Rio Grande.

The game has been issued with rules for as few as four games and as many as six; this edition has five. The deck has 66 cards, including six reference "sheets." The rest of the stack is split into five 12-card suits of different colors (each color features a different animal -- yellow hedgehogs, green serpents, and so on). Cards are numbered zero to nine, and they also have zero, one, or two triangular symbols.

The eponymous Mü, similar to bridge, features the set's basic mechanics. The object is to take as many tricks as possible. You bid by revealing as many cards as the tricks you think you'll take, and bidders can enter or drop out of the bidding at will. The high bid is the "chief" and the second-highest is the "vice." Each chooses a trump from among the card numbers or colors they bid (the chief's choice trumps the vice's). The chief also gets to choose a partner for the round.

A chart tells the chief team how many points they need -- the more cards bid, the more points they must score. The card *numbers* don't get you points, though; the triangles on the card margins do, and these aren't always on the highest-valued cards. If the team takes points sufficient to reach their goal, they get a bonus. If they fail, the chief loses points, his partner gets nothing, and everyone else gets a bonus. This continues until someone achieves a winning score.

The Last Panther (the only game without an umlaut in its title) is much simpler. After the deal, everyone chooses three cards to pass to their left before play. Here, yellow cards and taking the last trick score bonuses while reds and the black sevens lose more. The winner has the highest total when one player plummets to a predetermined negative number.

In Wimmüln, the last cards the dealer gives himself determine the color trump. Then everyone picks a pair of cards, one secret, one face-up, that represent how many tricks they believe they can take. If you take tricks equal to the number on one of these cards, you receive bonus points.

Rummü allows you to play in pairs if there's an even number of participants. Players start with a hand of cards instead of divvying up the full deck. A discard pile is started, and players must draw cards from the draw or discard pile. They must play combinations to the table, and then discard at least one card (you can't play the last one). The longer a combination (of consecutive cards, or cards of the same number), the more potential points. Colors are important: They determine what combos may be played and what they're worth. If you use the yellow "jokers," you lose some points. Others can steal them from your face-up melds for their own plays, saving you point-loss, but it may improve their total.

Safari is different from the other games. Players are trying to capture animals (or in the variant, release them into the

wild). Four cards are placed face-up in the middle of the table -- this is "the wild" -- and players capture them by pairing cards (playing the same number); adding them (taking multiple cards that add up to your card's value); or by playing a card that, with cards from the wild, total 17. Pairing allows you to keep the card played. Players receive bonuses for the most unicorns and minuses for babies (zero-value cards) and having the most hedgehogs.

The cards are a little soft, but since it's not a game about speed this will help the shuffle and hinder nothing. The colors are bright and the numbers big and clear, which is good because you don't want to depend on the cards' psychedelic slide show to determine if something's an eight or a nine. It's lovely stuff, fancy and intricate, but looking at the stylized cougars too long will make you dizzy.

For some, the variation between this deck and a normal pack of playing cards will be negligible, or it may seem like players are having to relearn both the deck and an old game. But the duality of the card values and points is a nifty mechanic that lends itself both to new takes on old favorites and endless customization. It's excellent for house rules, and games like *Safarü* are great for teaching the kids math and logic. Those not used to balancing all the factors in trick-taking games will find this one at least as tough, but *Mü & More* does its part to refresh such pastimes and to make this set stand out in its market.

--*Andy Vetromile*

GURPS Tarot Magic

by Volker Bach

This is a magic system that uses a tarot deck in addition to, or instead of, dice to represent the spellcasters' powers. It can be played without cards if desired, but this would hardly be as much fun; the idea is not, after all, to make this a "realistic" or particularly well-rounded system, but simply to have fun with appropriately mystical, easily accessible and affordable props. The lesser cards, and thus the powers of most beginner-level spellcasters, can also be played with a standard deck of cards, though again this somewhat defeats the idea.

This system does not try to model the real tarot tradition. Some aspects of the tarot are reflected in its mechanics, but most have been left out in the interest of playability and brevity. And, of course, this magic system does not reflect any kind of mystical power that may be inherent in the real tarot; it is merely a fictional approach to modeling magic powers with the aim of having fun with beautiful cards.

Base Theories

The theory behind Tarot magic is based on the idea that everything in the world is made up of varying combinations of the four basic elements: Fire, Earth, Water, and Air. The Suits of the Tarot are aligned to these elements and confer mastery of them to the Tarot Mage. It is important to remember that the elements are not just influenced in their pure form. Almost everything that is not pure fire, water, earth, or air contains several or all of these elements in part and thus is subject to the power of the aligned Suits. Living creatures in particular are always combinations of all four elements in careful balance, and disturbing this balance usually has negative -- and often very painful -- effects.

To decide which element or elements can be used on a given object, take your cues from the basic properties of the elements -- hot, cold, moist, and dry. Fire is hot and dry, earth is dry and cold, water moist and cold, and air hot and moist. In addition, water is liquid, earth solid, and fire and air are gaseous. Anything that can be said to conform to these properties can be affected through the appropriate element's Suit. Much of this is perfectly intuitive, which is a great advantage for roleplaying.

Example: Loose garden soil is solid and cold, though not dry. It is therefore subject to earth. It is also moist, so the water contained in it could be affected magically as well. A solid, cold, and dry material, like rock, conforms perfectly to earth and would be subject to that element only. See the descriptions given for the Suits for more ideas.

It is generally assumed that at least traces of each element are present in everything, though they may not be strong enough to allow any direct magical effect. Anything flammable, for example, is seen to contain traces of fire; things that do not burn do not contain enough. Similarly, anything that can be liquefied must contain some water, though the power needed to get that effect makes it clear that it can not be much. A GM might allow an effect with a less than ideal material at a penalty, or not at all -- it is not evident that mastery of water should affect stone in any way, but a very powerful Tarot mage could possibly do something with the minute traces of that element present even in rocks.

The Suits

The suits of the tarot represent nuts-and-bolts magic. While they are limited to temporary effects, and can only work with existing materials, they convey mastery of the four elements and there is little that, between them, they can not do. Each corresponds to one of the elements and mastery of it allows the mage to influence this element in all its forms.

Mastery of the cards of each Suit is purchased as an Advantage costing 5 points per level. In order to master any cards, a character must first purchase the Page of a suit (see below). Cards must be purchased in ascending order (that is, a mage must master the Two of Swords before the Three, the Three before the Four, and so on). Each card represents

mastery of an element proportional to the number; the Two is twice as powerful as the Ace, the Three three times as powerful as the Ace, the Ten 10 times. Other than this, they do not differ in the range of possible effects. Normally, only one card from each Suit may be used at a time (thus, an effect that would require the Five of Swords can not be jury-rigged by using the Two and Three of Swords on it). A mage must also have the Suit Skill (M/H) in each suit to use it. Any character having mastered the Page of a suit also has the Skill at a default of IQ-6. It can be improved normally. The Skill is rolled against every time a card from the suit is used.

The Court Cards -- Page, Knight, Queen and King -- of each Suit represent the Tarot mage's level of mastery. In order to master a suit at all, a character has to purchase the Page as an Advantage worth 5 points. At the GM's discretion purchasing a Page in play, like an Attribute, may cost double. This is not appropriate for any higher Court Card. A mage at this level is referred to as a Page of one or more Suits. He may purchase the cards of that suit up to the Five, and learn the Suit Skill. This level represents the beginnings of mastery, the first steps on the way to understanding. The range of magical effects at the mage's disposal is already quite impressive, but limited.

The Knight represents experience and consummate familiarity with the Suit. Pages must pay an additional 5 points to become Knights. Mages mastering the Knight of any Suit may purchase the Suit's cards up to 10 and the lower cards of the Great Arcana. A mage at this level is referred to as a Knight, and Tarot-mages and other Initiates react to him at +1. The Knight of one Suit is already powerful, and one of all Suits is a truly formidable mage. Only a few Tarot Mages progress beyond this level.

The King and Queen are the highest cards of each Suit. They represent full mastery and understanding of the Suit and its element. A male character purchases the King, a female one the Queen, at an added cost of 10 points. Mages of this level of initiation are referred to as Kings or Queens of their Suits, and there are very few of them. Other Tarot-mages and initiates react to them at +2. Kings and Queens may purchase all of the Great Arcana cards.

Point Costs

Court Cards

Page	5 points
Knight	10 points
King/Queen	20 points

One of (Suit)	5 points
Two of (Suit)	10 points
Three of (Suit)	15 points
Four of (Suit)	20 points
Five of (Suit)	25 points
Six of (Suit)	30 points
Seven of (Suit)	35 points
Eight of (Suit)	40 points
Nine of (Suit)	45 points
Ten of (Suit)	50 points

(The point costs are cumulative)

The Suit of Wands: Fire

The Suit of Wands (or Clubs) conveys mastery of Fire. This element's main property is heat. Aside from the obvious, it is associated with the heart, with strong emotion, hatred, fear, worldly or sexual desire, pride and anger. It is also close to the "animal" level of the mind and soul, and to wild animals. In general, heat, fire and any effect associated with emotion control, animal control, willpower or raw, aggressive mental and physical strength are governed by the Suit of Wands. Fire and the Suit of Wands are opposed to Water and the Suit of Cups. It is often seen as a masculine element.

The Suit of Coins: Earth

The Suit of Coins (or Pentacles) conveys mastery over earth. This element's main property is its immobile solidity and worldly reality. The Coins are often associated with worldly wealth and material concerns. They govern the physical body and the material world of solid objects, in particular stone and metal. Stability, immobility and passive strength are close to the nature of earth. Any solid object is subject to the power of the Coins. Rock, metal and earth, and all effects that concern inanimate objects, the physical body and its properties, and more generally protective and stabilizing effects are properly placed in this realm. Earth and the Suit of Coins are opposed to Air and the Suit of Swords. It is often seen as a feminine element.

The Suit of Cups: Water

Water is governed by the Suit of Cups. This element's main property is its moisture and fluidity. All "normal" liquids are subject to this Suit (though a GM is justified in excluding molten metal or lava). It is also associated with the spiritual or "soul" aspect of the human personality, with creativity, intuition and the gentler emotions such as love, friendship, piety, sympathy and humor. By this token it is also associated with nature spirits and the lesser denizens of the otherworld. Through its proximity to intoxicating drink it holds mastery over the befuddling, dazing and twisting of the mind. The Cups govern all liquids, and all effects of spirit communication, empathy, intuition, confusion, illusion and evasion are their proper realm. Water and the Suit of Cups are opposed to Fire and the Suit of Clubs. It is often seen as a feminine element.

The Suit of Swords: Air

The Suit of Swords governs Air and all gaseous and insubstantial matter. This element's main property is its insubstantiality and detachment from earthly matters. It is also associated with the higher mental faculties, detached from bodily or emotional concerns. Communication with and control of the higher spirits fall into its realm, as do all things associated with language, mathematics, technology and philosophy. The Suit of Swords governs air and gas, weather, the mind of sentient creatures and the realms of higher spirits. If technology plays a major role in the campaign it will also be governed by the Swords. Air and the Suit of Swords are opposed to Earth and the Suit of Coins. It is often seen as a masculine element.

The easiest way to gauge the effects the use of each card can have is by referencing *GURPS Magic*. Assume that the number of the card is equal to the Fatigue that can be spent on a spell. As a rule of thumb, an effect that causes damage to any one person or object should cost 1 Fatigue per 1d of damage. Effects causing the same damage over an area cost 2 Fatigue for one hex, with costs for larger areas following the rules for area spells (i.e. increasing with the radius of the area, not the number of hexes). The required card for other effects is determined by the GM, with reference to the Fatigue costs of similar Spells. Effects may require cards from more than one suit if more than one element is involved.

Example: Goran Tanju, a Tarot mage, needs to cross a river. He decides to use his powers to walk across the water's surface as though it were solid earth, a flashy but simple effect. For reference, the spell "Walk on Water" costs 3 points, so the GM rules that the cost is equal in Tarot magic. Goran selects the Two of Cups (for water) and the One of Coins (for firmness). His Skills in the two Suits are 13 and 12, respectively. The player rolls 9 and 10 and he crosses on dry feet.

The Great Arcana

The Great Arcana is reserved for true masters of Tarot magic. Mastery of each card must be purchased as a separate Advantage and requires a separate M/H Skill. Most of them have mastery of Court Cards or other cards of the Great Arcana as a prerequisite. Each card has a distinct, unique effect.

The Fool

0 Points

Prerequisites: none

The Fool represents ignorance, carelessness, foolishness and lack of understanding, but also the joys of simplicity. It is the card of the mundane -- you could say, the card that all non-mages have mastered -- and a Tarot-mage who decides to embrace the Fool loses all his powers. This may seem unappealing, but many powerful Tarot-mages have chosen to do so towards the end of their lives. A mage who sees the temptations of power growing too strong, or who feels unequal to the demands made on his powers and judgment, can take this path into honorable retirement. Embracing the Fool always requires the consent of the Tarot-mage. There is no way to remove the powers of an unwilling Tarot-mage short of killing him.

The World

30 Points

Prerequisites: King or Queen of one Suit

The World represents all worldly things. Mastering it allows that Tarot- mage to actually create matter. This is a major achievement in mystical terms, but also quite useful in day-to-day affairs. The energy cost is 1 point per lb. Of created matter. The cards of each Suit can be used to create its element. Since most things are composed of more than one element, making them should require cards from more than one suit. For play balance, making anything specific should also require some knowledge of its composition and skill in its manufacture. GMs going for a cinematic feel can use this card to have powerful Tarot-mages grab things out of thin air.

Judgment

20 Points

Prerequisites: Knight of one Suit, Page of all others

Judgment represents the nexus between the physical and spiritual world and allows the Tarot-mage to cross that boundary at will. By using the card, he leaves his body in astral form to interact with spirits on their own terms. This functions exactly as Spirit Projection (P. SP76), but the spirit form cannot interact with the physical world in any way or use any spirit abilities.

The Sun

15 Points

Prerequisites: Page of all Suits

The Sun represents honesty, good fortune, and happiness. In Tarot Magic it is the card of blessing, luck and supernatural protection, the opposite of the Moon. Used by itself it can be used to bless and impart good fortune on an individual -- a once-off version of the Luck or Serendipity Advantages (the GM decides when they come into play). Combined with Suit cards the Tarot-mage may opt to take some control over what shape the good fortune takes, or what activity the luck applies to. For example, to give a character luck in battle a Wands card would be appropriate while to improve health or material fortunes Coins cards would be called for. The higher the card used the more advantageous or long-lasting the effect will be. As with the use of the card alone, the actual shape it will take is decided upon by the GM.

The Moon

10 Points

Prerequisites: Page of all Suits

The Moon represents deceit, danger, and misfortune. In Tarot Magic it is the card of malison, curse, and doom, the opposite of the Sun. Used by itself it can inflict suffering and evil fortune on an enemy -- temporary versions of the Unlucky (regular Skill roll) and Cursed (Skill -5) Disadvantages. These last for a number of days equal to the margin

of success, with a minimum of one day. Combined with other cards the Tarot-mage can even take a hand in defining (loosely) what kind of misfortune befalls the target. Using Cups will cause the fate to involve water, for example, which could mean anything from a thorough drenching to shipwreck and death at sea, depending on the roll and the GM's tender mercies. There are risks involved, however -- on a failure the caster suffers the intended effect!

Example: Soothsayer Aladira Kepple has been bullied and insulted by the bailiff and is determined to get her own back. She flashes the Moon and the Ace of Cups at him, hoping to give him a tumble into the river, or a boating accident. Her Skills are 14 (The Moon) and 15 (Suit of Cups). The player rolls a 15 and 7 -- a success on the element, but failure on the arcana card. Aladira had better stay away from bridges and boats for the next few days!

The Star

15 Points

Prerequisites: Knight of at least one Suit, Page of all others

The Star symbolizes hope, the successful completion of one's efforts, the reward of labor invested and a fortunate future. It governs the dimension of the future, allowing the suspension of magical effects. The most common use is conditional suspension; the effect is cast, but only comes into being through a certain action or set of circumstances. A fiery surprise (say, the Four of Wands) for the first person to open a certain door would be a possibility. Suspending an effect has an additional energy cost of 2 for up to a day, 4 for up to a week, 6 for up to a month, 10 for up to a year, 15 for up to ten years and additional 5 for each ten years past that (long-term enchantment is best done in groups as most Tarot-mages will find even months beyond their powers). This energy can come from any Suit. The effect is triggered by a circumstance specified by the caster ("the first person to open the door", "the first sunrise after new year", "the first innocent man to sit in this chair"). A favorite of many Tarot-mages is to suspend Justice on themselves until an unexpected spell is cast on them, thus returning the first magical attack in any confrontation . . .

The Tower

10 Points

Prerequisites: King or Queen of one Suit

The Tower represents sudden destruction, doom and ruin. This card allows the Tarot-mage to completely destroy matter. This power may not be too useful in everyday magic use, but it is highly significant in the cosmic scheme of things and immensely respected among Tarot-mages. It comes in handy occasionally when incriminating evidence needs to be made to disappear utterly, and it can be used to unmake all but the most potent magic items.

The Devil

20 Points

Prerequisites: Knight of one Suit, Page of all others

The Devil represents submission, enslavement, and domination. In Tarot- magic it is the card of daimonurgy. Its masters can summon and dominate demons -- whatever these are in your game world. The exact mechanics of this are up to the GM. In general, summoning a demon should always require lots of power and mastering it involve at least some risk of it getting loose. Traditionally, minor demons can be forced to do the mage's bidding easily (a Contest of their Will vs. the Tarot-mage's Skill is reasonable) while major ones can only be bargained with.

The Devil can also be used to dominate fellow humans. This requires energy equal to the victim's Will (Swords and Wands in equal numbers) and is resolved through a Contest of Will vs. the dominating mage's Skill. Once enslaved, the victim must obey all nonhazardous commands from the mage implicitly (this includes demands for money, valuables, secret information, or sex). Dangerous or repulsive orders (or any command that contravenes one of the victim's Disadvantages such as Greed or Pacifism) give the victim a Will-5 roll to refuse. Suicidal or utterly repugnant orders may, at the GM's discretion, be resisted at better odds or even allow the victim to break loose from the enslavement.

Every week after the first the victim gets another Will roll vs. the Tarot- mage's initial success at a cumulative +1 per week. Of course mages know about this loosening bond and an order to submit to another ceremony of submission sounds immensely reasonable to a victim . . .

Temperance

15 Points

Prerequisites: King or Queen of one Suit, Page of all others

Temperance symbolizes the mage's mastery over the elements and their permutations. It allows the mage to transform one form of matter into another. This can range from simple parlor tricks -- water into wine -- to the most secret alchemical reaction of all -- lead into gold. Using Temperance requires at least one minute of concentration and 1 point of energy from the appropriate element per lb. of transformed matter. The GM should feel free to require additional energy, time, or effort for particularly challenging transmutations (i.e. those he wants to limit).

Death

25 Points

Prerequisites: King or Queen of all Suits

Death stands for change imposed from the outside (not least, but by no means only, death), abrupt endings and new beginnings. In terms of Tarot magic the card allows the Tarot-mage mastering it to literally master death! He can bring back to life the bodies of people killed no more than the last sunrise or sunset ago. Doing so is incredibly draining. For each point of damage the dead character took, the Tarot-mage must expend a point of energy (from any Suit card). This cost is levied irrespective of how well the body is repaired prior to resurrection. The mage may choose to spend Hit Points instead of energy, at a rate of one for each point of damage.

There is another problem, though. The soul of a dead person can be invited back into the resurrected body, but it can not be forced. If the soul wishes to return to life the character to be resurrected must roll vs. Will. On a success the soul returns and resurrection takes place. On a failure the soul cannot return and the body rises up as an abomination, a soulless, enslaved zombie. If the mage wants that to happen, the soul's return to the body is possible only after winning a contest of Will with the mage. If the resurrection was successful the returning character returns to life at 0 Fatigue and needs to heal naturally.

Death can also be used to lay the undead and wandering souls to rest, making their death permanent. This requires a Contest of their Will vs. the Tarot-mage's Skill in the card. GMs looking for that cinematic flair may allow Death to also cause immediate, inescapable and final death in the best pulp-fantasy tradition. This goes against the flavor of Tarot magic, but puts truly awesome power at the disposal of "evil" mages. High- cinematic campaigns could put the idea of the death card to good use.

The Hanging Man

10 Points

Prerequisites: Knight of one Suit, Page of all others

The hanging man stands for a change in perspective, for things that are different from what they appear -- or appear different from what they are. It allows the Tarot-mage to create illusions and false appearances, big or small, or dissolve those of others. The energy cost for an illusion that affects only one sense is 1 point per hex per hour, one that affects all senses requires 2 points per hex. The power can come from all Suits (GMs who like such detail can work with the subtle differences between a Wands Illusion and a Cups Illusion, but for most purposes they are identical). Illusions that move or act must be consciously controlled by the mage while inert ones can simply be left in place.

Whether an Illusion is successful is determined by a Contest of the mage's Hanging Man Skill and the target's IQ. On a failure by the mage, the target realizes something is wrong. Mages having mastered the Hanging Man roll vs. their Skill in the card instead and immediately see through the illusion on a success.

Fortitude

20 Points

Prerequisites: Knight of one Suit, Page of all others

Fortitude or Strength represents effort and power. This card allows the Tarot-mage to use more than one Suit card in an effect. This increases the effective power at his disposal considerably -- combining the Ace through Five of a Suit alone would provide 15 points of power, and the complete cards sum up to a whopping 55!

The Wheel of Fortune

30 Points

Prerequisites: King or Queen of one Suit, Knight of all others

The Wheel of Fortune stands for the cycle of life, death and rebirth and governs youth and age. The mage mastering it can cause a person or item to become younger or older at a cost of 1 point of power per month.

Making a person or object younger can not restore parts (lost limbs, erased writing, missing rivets etc.). Memories are not lost, though a human reverted to young childhood may not be able to consciously retain or understand them. Objects can only be reverted to the point where they were finished (GM's call). They do not dissolve into their constituent parts. Living creatures can be reverted to pre-embryonic stage and, unless placed into the right environment, will die from this. Aging for characters follows the standard Aging rules. For objects, the GM decides the exact effect. It is impossible to distinguish magical age effects from natural ones, though in some cases it may be obvious that something supernatural has occurred.

The Hermit

10 Points

Prerequisites: Knight in at least one Suit

The Hermit represents wisdom, knowledge and wise counsel. It is the card that Tarot-mages turn to in need of insight - the Scrying card. The Hermit is not required to "read" a person, object or magical effect at hand. That is done by creative application of the regular Suit cards -- reading thoughts takes Swords, emotions require Cups or Wands, material composition uses Coins, energy flows Wands etc. The Hermit's power lies in transcending space and time. Using the Hermit allows a Tarot-mage to see into distant places. The cost goes up with the distance -- one point up to a mile, two points up to ten miles, five up to a hundred, ten up to a thousand, twenty up to ten thousand. While it is, in theory, possible to see much further than this there is little reason a Tarot-mage would know this is possible. 10,000 miles should represent the known world to most fantasy settings. Skill penalties for places unknown to the Tarot-mage should be applied, but if he has anything connected with the target (a brooch belonging to a person whose whereabouts he wishes to see, or a piece of mortar from a building) these can be waived.

A look into the past is possible only at the place and in the presence of the object or person in question. It should always be costly -- four points base cost, 6 for looking back a week, 8 for a month, 10 for a year, 12 for a century, +2 for each century past the first. The sights to be gained this way are incomplete sensations available only to the caster, and pertaining only to the Suit that is used.

Looking into the future is even trickier. An attempt requires a minimum of five points, but the vision will never be clear or unequivocal. The future is always just potential, and every cliché risk of divination should apply.

Justice

5 Points

Prerequisites: Page of all Suits

Justice represents honesty, good intentions and the meting out of just deserts. This card is both the most powerful magical defense open to the Tarot-mage and his most ready tool of poetic justice. Justice is an easy card to master, but

its effects are often earth-shaking. It reflects a magical effect back from the target to the attacker. Many Tarot-mages carry it as an amulet or in a breast pocket (GMs who want to avoid the high-noon flavor of Fast Draw (card) dueling may forbid this). It is certainly a good card to have on hand when venturing into the unknown. The protective effect can be extended by combination with the Star. The reflection is resolved by a Contest between the highest Skill used by the attacker and the defender's Skill in Justice. If the defender wins, the effect is reflected back on the attacker. On a tie, both are equally affected. On a win by the attacker the effect happens as intended, but some degree of backlash (GM's fiat -- anything up to half the effect on the defender) still affects the attacker. Justice can also be used against neutral or beneficial effects.

The Chariot

10 Points

Prerequisites: Knight of one Suit, Page of all others

The Chariot represents flight, escape, and travel. It functions as a teleportation effect. Using the Chariot will cause the Tarot-mage (and possibly others) to simply wink out of existence, materializing again at the point of his choice (GMs fond of more dramatic effects could have a flaming chariot materialize instead). Tarot-mages of Knight rank can port themselves or another person, those of King or Queen rank may take along several people or port a group at double energy cost.

The energy cost for a use of the Chariot is the same as for the standard *GURPS Magic* Teleport spell. To tone down the power of this card, a GM may rule that a specific Suit will be required to power it, depending on circumstances. Porting over (or through) water could require Cups, through solid walls Coins, above dry land Swords and through fires or similar peril Swords. Generally, a Tarot-mage must know the target he travels to using the Chariot. Anything within line of sight is automatically "known" and can be ported to without penalty. Any place the mage has seen that day, or is well acquainted with, can also be ported to at no penalty. Places the Tarot-mage has seen briefly, or longer ago, are reached at a Skill penalty of up to -3, those seen only by magical means at a -2 penalty, and those known only from a picture or description -2 to -8, depending on the quality.

The Lovers

15 Points

Prerequisites: King or Queen of one Suit

The Lovers represent love, union, harmony, and synchrony. This card allows Tarot-mages to combine their powers in a single effect. Only one Tarot-mage in the group needs to have mastered the Lovers to include a number of Tarot-mages up to his Skill level in it (a mage with Skill 14 in Lovers could combine himself and up to 13 others). Other Tarot-mages with mastery of the card can bring in their own groups. There is no upper limit to this other than the number of mages and their readiness to participate -- joining powers is a very private experience and requires mutual trust. Tarot-mages whose powers are joined through the Lovers can combine all cards any one of them has mastered into any combination the GM allows (for example one having mastered the Star and another Death could combine the two into one effect). Fortitude still only applies to the Suit cards of one Tarot-mage at a time. The most common use of this card is for a King or Queen to tap the raw power of his or her students, but sometimes experienced mages use it to combine their Arcana cards into earth-shaking effects.

Example: Queen Renata, a respected mistress of Tarot Magic, needs to melt a lost tome of magic out of a glacier. The power required is beyond her alone, but she has called her students together and is determined to try. First, she uses The Lovers to combine their efforts into one effect. Her Skill is 14, so she can easily unite her eight followers. The player rolls a 12. Next, she uses Fortitude to pour all her Wands cards into the effort. Her Skill is 12, the player rolls 5. She can now use all her Wands cards (One through Seven) at the same time, giving her 28 points. Next, her students contribute their highest Wands cards (15 -- one student using his own Fortitude -- 5, 5, 4, 3, 3, 3 and 1). Their Skills 14, 14, 13, 13, 13, 13, 15 and 13, Renata's own is 15. The players roll 12, 9, 4, 14, 11, 10, 7, 10 and 13. Renata and seven of her students succeed, one fails. Thus, a total of 64 points (Renata's 28 plus 15, 5, 5, 4, 3, 3 and 1) are available for the effect; the result should be quite spectacular.

The Magician

105 Points

Prerequisites: King or Queen of All Suits and all Great Arcana Cards other than the Hierophant/High Priestess and Emperor/Empress)

The Magician represents power, spontaneity, and practical wisdom. In Tarot Magic this card represents the highest degree of mastery a Tarot-mage can attain -- spontaneous sorcery. Mages having mastered it receive +5 to Reaction Rolls by all other Tarot-mages and everybody else who recognizes them for what they are. They frequently inspire as much fear as admiration. Having mastered the Magician the Tarot-mage requires no other foci. He can create all possible effects without the use of cards simply by visualizing the layout he would use. The time required is usually nil, though a GM may assign preparation time of two or three seconds for very complex effects. Needless to say this status is inappropriate for PCs or even NPCs in most games.

The Hierophant/The High Priestess

150 Points

Prerequisites: The Magician

Among Tarot-mages there are two distinct highest ranks that practitioners may aspire to. Those seeking knowledge and wisdom, tending to introspection and conservative use of magic, will see this card as the fulfillment of their aspirations. Male characters master the Hierophant, female ones the High Priestess. The Hierophant or High Priestess seek to escape society. They rarely accept students, and if they do their teachings will be philosophical and often enigmatic. Few among them still use magic much, and those that do limit themselves to small effects. Their world is that of the mind.

With mastering the Hierophant or High Priestess comes a deep and instinctive understanding of magic that lets any hostile effect slide off as though it had never been. No magic can harm a master of this card (Invulnerability to Magic). They move wading through the world of spirits (Awareness) and converse with the spirits of the earth and the souls of the dead (Medium), and their understanding and kinship with all things extends to animals and plants (Empathy, Animal Empathy and Plant Empathy). Living Hierophants and High Priestesses are legendary masters of magic. They are much loved, but little understood and frequently insane by the standards of normal society. Needless to say this card is highly inappropriate for PCs to master.

The Emperor/The Empress

75 Points

Prerequisites: The Magician

Tarot Mages of the highest rank that do not wish to turn their back on the world embrace the Emperor or Empress. They, too, gain an instinctive understanding of the spiritual pattern underlying the world (Awareness) and can commune with spirits (Medium), animals (Speak with Animals) and plants (Speak with Plant), but they are not bound by the same feeling of kinship that restricts Hierophants and High Priestesses to the contemplative life. Those that devote themselves to the use of their vast magical powers exude authority from every pore (they are automatically treated as though they had rank 5 by everyone, everywhere). Living Emperors or Empresses are surrounded by swarms of admiring students and disciples attentive to their every command and many of them have taken positions of great power and status in the service of kings -- or toppled rulers to take their place. This card should not be allowed to PCs unless you play for very high stakes indeed.

Fatigue, Distance, Duration

Standard Tarot Magic does not require the character to spend Fatigue. The power is inherent in the cards. If a GM wants to require Fatigue for play balance, using a Suit card costs Fatigue equivalent to its value. The Page pays full Fatigue cost for cards of his Suit, the Knight half, the King or Queen only pay one quarter Fatigue cost. Each card of the Great Arcana should be assigned own Fatigue Cost.

Tarot Magic works within line of sight -- anything a Tarot mage can see is fair game. Those who like more detail can apply the Speed/Range Modifiers for weapons to the card Skills, making Tarot Magic very effective at short distances, but difficult at long range.

Where duration is concerned, following the precedent set by *GURPS Magic* is useful. Any damage-dealing effect has a default duration of 1 second, more long-lasting augmenting or protective effects have 1 minute. Maintaining the effect longer than this requires more power, i.e. higher cards, at a rate of 1 point for each additional increment. Thus, an effect that required a Three to last for one minute could be maintained for two minutes with a Four and for three minutes with a Five. If the GM decides to charge Fatigue, duration can also be handled by simply increasing the Fatigue cost without requiring higher cards.

Playing the Cards

Tarot cards are the focus mages use to channel their power in Tarot Magic. Thus, the characters will be carrying an enchanted deck. The players are well advised to have a mundane one handy for use as props, too. In order for the character to work magic, the player lays out his cards, selects the ones he wants to use and lays them out on the table. The GM can time this action and rule the mage character takes as long to use his magic as the player did to lay out his cards. Bear in mind that the characters will hardly have their cards out in the open at all times -- it makes good sense to require them to be kept in some box or package, though whenever the characters have a good reason to prepare a certain spell the GM should allow the players to do likewise.

Players can be allowed to reduce their decks to the cards their characters have mastered. There are good arguments against doing this, however. For one thing a tarot deck belongs together as a whole and separating it in this way goes against the grain of any mystical feel in the game. On a more pragmatic note, a character carrying a reduced deck is advertising his lack of power to the world. Would you want to do that?

GMs who do not want to have their players compete in sleight-of-hand can use another method. It takes two seconds for a character to ready a card (one or more seconds to unpack the deck beforehand, depending on where it is kept). Fast Draw (Card) P/E will be a popular Skill with Tarot mages if this method is used, and a GM who does not like the cinematic flavor of "the fastest deck in the west" may assign a penalty of -1 for every 15 cards in the deck (giving a whopping -5 for fast-drawing from a full deck). A failure draws the wrong card. A critical failure spills the deck on the ground.

More Questions Than Answers

DriveThruRPG.com -- Threat or Menace?

by Chris Aylott

Last month, the first installment of this column appeared and the RPG community sat bolt upright in amazement. My ego regrets to report that these two events had nothing to do with each other.

What sent online gamers into a tizzy was the unveiling of DriveThruRPG.com, a website selling PDF versions of games from 20 medium-to-big-name publishers in the hobby. DriveThruRPG.com is a trademark of Publisher Services Inc., a company formed to represent many of those publishers to book distributors and major bookstore retailers. The whole kit and caboodle is owned by many of the same folks who own White Wolf.

Reactions to this new venture among game retailers were, well, predictable. Some scoffed, most went about their business, and a few promised bitter retribution in the form of clearance sales and dropped lines. This happens almost every time a publisher tries to sell books without retailers -- not much ever comes of it, but you can have a lot of fun on the private retailer forums watching the younger hotheads get riled up over disintermediation.

Lest I sound too superior, I spent most of the 1990s as a younger hothead. Show me a blown street date or a mass-market exclusive and I'd be spewing threats with the best of them. (Oddly enough, I never dropped a line that was making me a profit.) I'm older and lazier now, which means DriveThru.com makes me curious rather than angry.

Is DriveThru.com the future of the hobby? A sideshow for print RPG publishers? An offense against the laws of nature and digital freedom? Or just a site that launched a thousand angry web posts?

Beat the DRM Loudly

On the fan side of the hobby, a firestorm has developed around the issue of "digital rights management" (DRM), which seems to be the fancy 21st-century name for "copy protection." Now that I'm old and lazy, I've lost my ability to make sense of technological buzzwords; DRM was more or less Greek to me, so I was forced to go to the most reliable source of information about it available.

Several hundred RPG.net posts later, I was still confused. The basic facts seem clear: the flavor of DRM that DriveThruRPG.com uses lets you make as many copies of a book as you want, but you have to spend some set-up time doing the electronic paperwork that claims both the book and your computer as yours. There is a limit to the number of computers you can use the book on, and some limits as to how much cutting-and-pasting you can do on the text. As has been the case with most copy protection since the early 1980s, these limits can be circumvented by a bright 13-year-old with time on his hands.

These facts are the fodder for a zooful of fan opinion. The corporate masters are using DRM to take away the right to read. Hardworking content providers need whatever protection they can get. Any rational person can see that the protection DRM provides is no more than a figleaf, and should revel in the unsullied innocence of naked PDFs. It's not inconvenient, it's too much of a hassle, and what should I do when God strikes down my computer for looking at too much porn?

Lots of opinions, most of them interesting, especially the folks who are putting tinfoil in their hats and drinking nothing but RC Cola in an effort to protect their bodily fluids from the DRM menace. But when you take it all together, the body of fan opinion seems . . . well, just a bit narrow. Other issues have come up -- the cost of the books, the merits of screen vs. paper -- but digital rights seem to be the hot button.

Part of me thinks this makes a lot of sense, that our fears about DRM represent concerns about the information society that is blossoming around us. We've grown up in an industrial world where it's easy to own property but hard to copy it. Electronic property is as easy to copy as it is to own, and the question of who controls the copies is creating as much disruption as the industrial revolution did in the 19th century. No wonder we're anxious about it.

But a part of me also wonders if we're not missing the forest for the big frightening tree. So much of the electronic product discussion among fans and retailers seems to be centered on piracy, inconvenience, and lost opportunities -- even those bricks-and-mortar retailers most eager to embrace electronic products seem more worried about missing out on what DriveThru.com or RPGnow.com have got than in building up a new market for themselves.

There's plenty of anxiety, but where's the opportunity? If the bricks-and-mortar retailers don't see it, and the fans don't see it . . . maybe the publishers do?

Their Brave New World

With that in mind, I talked with George Vasilakos, Zombielord of Eden Studios and the Albany, NY game store Zombie Planet. Perhaps due to his two hats of publisher and retailer, George is one of the canner and more sales-oriented publishers in the business. Eden had dabbled with electronic publishing last year, but their venture with DriveThru.com represents a two-footed jump into the market for them.

So far, George is pleased with the results. "We released one direct-to-consumer electronic product before [joining DriveThru.com]," he says, describing the sales of the All Flesh Must Be Eaten adventure Little Town of Hamlin as "disappointing." The product did much better as soon as it was placed on DriveThru.com, selling as many copies in two weeks as the original release sold in eight months.

"Sales are much higher than I expected," George says, though he is quick to point out that he thinks of e-books as an "experiment." While sales have surpassed his projections, Eden's top-selling e-books sold dozens of copies in June rather than hundreds or thousands of copies. That's not bad for a startup, but it pales in comparison with the planned 10,000-copy print run of Eden's upcoming *Army of Darkness RPG*.

George believes Eden's sales so far can be credited to two factors. He says, "I think it helped a lot to have top publishers launch DriveThru.com," referring to the site's decision to offer a small pool of established publishers instead of RPGnow.com's open-to-everyone approach. He's also noticed that Eden's best-selling e-books are the books that are hardest to find on retailer bookshelves.

"*Eden Studios Presents Volume 1* is our number one seller on DriveThru.com and has been among the top four bestsellers on the site since its launch," he points out. "This is because of distributors [treating it like a magazine issue and] not stocking it after preorders. Now customers have a way to get it if they don't want to order direct or can't find it in their local game store." (Update: Since I interviewed George, several distributors have re-evaluated the demand for *Eden Studios Presents Volume 1* and placed restock orders.)

As for digital rights management, it doesn't seem to be as complex an issue for him as it has been for RPG fans. "If it wasn't for DRM," he says, "we would not have placed our products in electronic format." Whether or not DRM is effective, the licensors of Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel, and Army of Darkness would not have let Eden put its licensed products online without it.

George doesn't feel DRM is as big an issue as its detractors project. After polling his customers, he says that "they do not seem to mind the DRM since they are getting something they want: the ability to buy a book at any time and to find hard-to-find product as well as out-of-print product. We have gotten grief about DRM, but we get more grief about the prices of in-print books."

As far as Eden Studios is concerned, DriveThruRPG.com seems to be both the solution to one of the hobby's persistent problems -- keeping old material available so it can earn money -- and the source of new revenues. George is already planning to experiment with electronic-only products like e-card games and digital art books. "The industry is

changing," he says, "and we need to find more means of distributing our product."

The New Medium's Old Guard

The view from Eden Studios seems pretty rosy, but what do things look like on the other side of the digital rights and electronic retailing fence? Still curious, I had a chat with Joseph Browning of [Expeditious Retreat Press](#). One of the most successful publishers on RPGnow.com, Expeditious Retreat Press pulled in three Ennie awards and an Origins nomination for its first major release, *A Magical Medieval Society: Western Europe*. This book is the #3 all-time bestseller on RPGnow.com, and the sequel book Ecology and Culture has reached #49 since its release in March.

Despite his electronic success, Joseph has a lot in common with traditional RPG publishers. "We always intended *A Magical Medieval Society: Western Europe* to be printed," he says. "I think most electronic purchasers will at some point print out parts of the book, and our design reflects this."

He continues, "We like to view ourselves as the makers of stuff that helps with having fun while roleplaying. The medium isn't very important, as long as the goal is achieved. Right now we're focusing on text and images -- books, effectively -- because I don't have the faintest idea how to do anything more complicated in an electronic medium."

That focus on bookmaking seems to have paid off. *A Magical Medieval Society: Western Europe* was an immediate success, selling almost 200 copies in its first sixty days on RPGnow.com. It has sold over 1,200 electronic copies to date, as well as over a thousand copies in print form through traditional hobby distribution. Those are respectable numbers for any small press, better than many RPG publishers have managed over the last two years, and phenomenal for a part-time publisher depending on word of mouth.

For Joseph, success in publishing is about customer satisfaction, which is one reason he dislikes DriveThru.com's security-oriented approach. He says, "The only good reason for reducing customer satisfaction -- by not permitting certain actions, for instance, or forcing actions [like registration] that are not required in comparison to a normal PDF -- is increased profit. Not just increased profit compared with selling no PDF product at all, but increased product when compared to selling non-DRM PDFs."

He continues, "Adding DRM materially reduces sales of electronic product when compared to sales of non-DRM product. This is a simple logical truth: Any person willing to purchase a DRM product is willing to purchase a non-DRM product of the same material and quality. However, the reverse is not true."

Joseph believes the decision to pirate or not pirate is in the hands of the customer. He says, "I want to make my PDFs as attractive as possible to try and swing the pirate/not-pirate decision in my favor. It's a carrot approach, not a stick."

So Who's Right? Who Knows?

George and Joseph share an infectious optimism about the emerging market for PDFs, but which of them has a better handle on its future? Joseph's sales figures suggest that he is more in tune with the current market, but George's licensing considerations highlight that digital rights involve more than the "simple logical truth" that Joseph espouses.

George is also looking ahead to the future possibilities of the medium, of products that are more than just print books sold as electrons. If there's a next big innovation to be found in the RPG market, then established publishers like Eden Studios have the resources to develop it. If they do, then DriveThru.com might become the leader of a changing hobby -- and if they don't, it may be no more than just the place people go when they can't get a book anywhere else.

The Next Question: It's a busy, busy world. How do you find time for gaming, and why? You can email your thoughts to overscheduled-gamer@spacecrime.com . . .

A Man of Auction

Last Saturday I had the pleasure of going to an honest-to-goodness auction . . . my first such experience that I can recall (not counting one or two such events I've been to at [gaming conventions](#)).

The auction in question was for surplus computer equipment. As my friend Chuck -- who was attending the convention with me -- explained, these computers were discards by various state agencies (since we're in the state capital), which had also been picked through by various schools for equipment *they* wanted. In other words, these were twice-rejected computers.

My desires for attending this auction were modest; I was hoping to acquire another laptop for a friend. I had a certain price frame in mind (\$100-ish, for those playing the home game). Chuck had his eyes on . . . I'm not sure, really. Whenever I inquired, he would rattle off descriptions that melded together into an incomprehensible blur: "I'm going to turn this box into a dedicated router remote firewall Gnoppix alludium P36 explosive space modulator with cup holder."

Anyway, I have come to the conclusion that *anything* vaguely laptop-y will sell for more than I am ever willing to spend. I made exactly one bid during the entire auction. There was an oooooold 486/33 laptop that boasted having Windows 3.11 installed; its screen was roughly the size of a Tamagatchi; its coolest feature by far was the tiny trackball it had as a pointer device. I thought I could turn it into an interesting prop in a game at some point. Anyway, the opening bid was \$2.50; I raised to \$5. And that was my moment of glory; the laptop ended up going for \$70. The other laptops -- and again, I stress that all of these were at least eight years old, obviously missing parts, and some didn't even turn on -- went for no less than \$160. I'm pretty sure a black-painted Etch-a-Sketch would've fetched at least \$120.

Chuck, for his part, ended up winning four desktop computer towers for \$50, about which he feels confident that he will be able to assemble two machines that actually work and, as best I can tell in listening to his plans, will form the feet of Voltron.

Probably the most interesting auction win was the person who won 20 monitors for five bucks each. Chuck and I both agreed that they would be worth that much for the sheer pleasure of dropping off buildings.

Anyway, all of this is preamble to state that an auction would kick butt as a setting for almost any campaign. Now, I already knew this on some vague level; I was part of a *Fading Suns* LARP at Dragon*Con four years ago or so, and the central premise was an auction. However, that scenario didn't really register because the auction was (as best I can tell) rigged; nothing the players could have done would affect the outcome.

But that doesn't need to be the case. A thought-out auction can provide a *lot* of interesting people and things to interact with in an interesting place. So, in typical Random Thought Table tradition, I thought I'd mention some of the possibilities behind an auction, as well as some of the pitfalls.

Modern auctions generally target two different audiences: Those looking for a bargain over something available (in some form) through normal channels, and those looking for something that *can't* be had through normal channels, regardless of price. The "Island of Misfit Computers" auction I was at was an example of the former, while the stereotypical "16th Century Tome of Baffling Prophecies and Jam Recipes"-type auction popular in movies and television is an example of the latter. It's even possible to combine the two, although usually the two types straddle two different social strata. ("And the case of 48 cans of Beef-a-Roni goes to Jimbo 'Shiv' Tubbs for nine dollars, 60 cents. Next up for auction is a portrait from Picasso's 'Blue' Period . . .")

Regardless of the target audience, auctions attract people from a wide variety of backgrounds, interests, and cliques. Thus the computer auction had resellers, college kids, working mothers, schmoes like Chuck and me, and many others. A fine art auction might attract old money, nouvou riche, mob bosses, museum curators, and so on. Regardless, this melding and clashing of different circles is where a lot of good gaming potential comes from. After all, any polite

excuse to have the heroes sitting next to Don Antonio Falsetto *and* the head of EvilCo can't be all bad.

And there are plenty of opportunities for these disparate folks to interact. In particular, many auctions allow a viewing or examination of items before the bidding, so potential buyers can get a better look at what they're bidding on. This can allow for all kinds of conversations, intimidation, and attempts at feeling out the opponents in the auction.

In order for an auction to work with PCs, there must be several factors in place:

The auction has to have something the players (and characters) want, *and* the PCs can't acquire it through any easier means. Fortunately, most games are brimming with goodies that would make great candidates for auctions: magic items, unique technology, secrets, and so on. Alternately, the auction can provide something that would normally be out of reach for the heroes. For example, in most sci-fi games the heroes don't have enough money to afford their own ship immediately. But a fine campaign could start with the heroes pooling their money to buy a sight-unseen, as-is refurbished quirky vessel at an auction populated by a wretched hive of scum and villainy. Also remember that auctions can sell services or more ephemeral things.

For true roleplaying possibilities, auctions require actual currency. Thus games that abstract wealth levels (such as *DC Heroes*, *Marvel Super-Heroes*, or *Vampire: The Masquerade* and other World of Darkness games) will have a difficult time: "I bid a Remarkable amount of money." Fortunately, there can be an out, even for these kinds of games. Simply introduce some kind of currency or other limited, tangible resource to the game, perhaps even for the specific purpose of the auction. For example, in a *Vampire* game it would be entirely appropriate to barter favors, years of servitude, or the like. Regardless, there needs to be that moment where the players need to consider: "Do we want to raise the bid to 1,500 gold pieces?" should cause the same moment of indecision as "Do I want to raise the bid to 13 years of servitude?"

Likewise, for an auction to really work the PCs have to have a *limited* amount of resources. This is important in games where the heroes have the possibility to acquire vast sums of wealth, or have the means to create their own money. Unless an auction is going to get into the 10,000,000 gold piece range (in which case, it needs to be something *phenomenally* cool), a character with that much disposable income may not blink an eye at raising a bid to 500,000. And it's unlikely that an auction would hold any challenge for someone with the Midas Touch.

Okay; so you're psyched up to the possibilities of an auction. Now what?

Well, here are some pitfalls and points to consider.

Generally, auctions are structured according to the amount the auctioneers think they will get for the items. Thus the most seemingly valuable pieces will be reserved until the end. Of course, this doesn't keep two people from getting into a bidding match in the middle of an auction, driving up the price beyond the auctioneers' expectations. And those estimated values are based on what the hosts know about the items; if two people know that a seemingly mundane amulet is actually the key to the Catacomb of Secrets, then that piece may escalate well beyond expectations.

Second, the GM should determine what each NPC is willing to spend for the items in question. This is especially important, since the GM might otherwise succumb to the temptation to bid "just a little bit more."

Third, the general rules and regulations of the auction must be spelled out beforehand. Most of these are straightforward -- payment up-front, all items as-is, and so on -- but the entire adventure will proceed awkwardly if a PC assumed he could get some kind of credit terms (especially if that's a rule his *character* would know).

Fourth, the GM should determine what effect -- if any -- skills, powers, and the like will have on the game. While I'd generally discourage the auction itself being abstracted by Finance rolls or similar abilities, it's possible they might allow some insight or advantage for the players. And, of course, powers such as telepathy, divination, or mind-control have the potential to completely upend an auction.

Finally, the GM should consider what would happen if any one side, including the PCs, "cheats," by (for example) bidding 10 jillion dollars as an opening bid, with the intention of using duplicity or fraud to acquire the item once the

auction ends.

In all, auctions can serve as a hotbed of intrigue, excitement, and shopping. Whether it's designed to pry some extra cash out of the characters' hands, give them access to equipment or services they might not otherwise get, or provide them with their next plot seed, an auction might be just the ticket for fun.

Even if it *is* impossible to get an affordable laptop.

* * *

For those of you looking for the latest in **GURPS Fourth Edition** goodness, I would point you no further than <http://www.sjgames.com/gurps/lite/> , where the long-awaited **GURPS Lite** based on the *Fourth Edition* rules is now available.

Also, tonight (July 9th) at 7 p.m. Central Time in [the Pyramid chat room](#), we're having a chat about **GURPS Lite**, with Sean "Dr. Kromm" Punch and Andrew Hackard.

You're welcome.

--*Steven Marsh*

A Strangeness of Apes

Brian Rogers

Apes are cool. There's something about them -- especially apes that act like men -- that makes a gamer's heart glow with nostalgia. Perhaps it's the fond memories of [celluloid apes carrying rifles](#). Maybe it's the DC comics covers with heroes gone ape, super-chimps, or cities of [psionic gorillas](#). For fans of the classics, it could extend back to the Rue Morgue. They've knuckled their way through most genre fiction, but to many the best urban jungle for the humanized ape is the pulps. In the earnest science of the pulps bridging the gap between ape and man seems so tantalizing simple -- to explain away to the readers, at least.

What follows is a plethora of period-appropriate primate origins. Some have fallen apart in the face of contemporary studies, but in the capital-S-and-exclamation-point Science! of the 1930s pulps they would hardly raise an eyebrow on a noble, leathery face. And if you like an idea enough to produce lots of them, well, it might make sense to just drop the M off of Mook.

Give Me a Sign!

Development of sign languages for the deaf had been going on for centuries, but they were codified in the 19th century. By the pulp era, there was a growing number of people who understood that gesture produced a viable language for those not able to speak. It was also understood that language was linked to intelligence. It took decades for someone to start teaching apes sign language. But it didn't have to.

Early sign language teaching makes a great origin for a Pulp Ape: The early exposure to language stimulates the brain, making the beast smarter than his fellows. This makes the development of language easier, which makes the beast more intelligent, and so on. There are limits on this, but the logic of the period would make them at least as smart as a street thug or team 'brick'. Depending on the complexity of the gesture language the ape might have no problem getting his message across or be limited to conversing with those who also [speak sign](#).

"Most Potentially Interesting and Ethically Unacceptable Experiment I Can Imagine" -- Stephen J Gould

Gould is referring using the genetic proximity between humans and chimps to hybridize the two species. Such interbreeding may well be possible in real science, so in the science of the pulps its success is assured. The offspring of such a union would certainly be sterile, for the few genetic differences are significant. While the genetic factors of hybridization were unknown to pulp authors, the concept of breeding similar species was accepted, and man's similarity with the apes had been hotly debated for over half a century. Any decent mad scientist could make that leap while laughing the scorn of his "peers."

Human-Chimp Hybrids would have the best features of both species. Language skills, intelligence, strength and agility, all combined with tool use and a form that pulp artists might make ferally attractive (if a little hirsute). The sterility issue might be seen as a plus by their creators (no point in letting their army breed out of control) or as a tragedy for the hybrid (who is intelligent enough to realize the loss, and may 'adopt' a surrogate child). They'd integrate easily into society as they combine the communal instinct of the chimps with a near human appearance and understanding, making them natural PCs or adversaries.

*With Age Comes Strength

In the 1920s Dutch anatomist Louis Bolk posited a startling theory: "Man, in his bodily development, is a primate

fetus that has become sexually mature." In other words, the differences between humans and infant primates is significantly less than between humans and adult primates: we are smarter because something is retarding our "development." Bolk had an impressive set of comparison figures (cranial size, facial features and spinal column positioning to name just a few) to back his claim. Unfortunately his explanation for this retardation (or *neoteny*) relied on hormones, and was savaged by the contemporary scientific establishment: How could hormones account for such a wide range of selective neoteny? They couldn't, but the genetic discoveries that could prove Bolk's observations hadn't yet been made.

To a pulp era writer, however, the hormone theory has a fine pedigree: after all, Dr. Jeekyll's formula (which could easily be a hormone concoction) produced Hyde, who had a number of simian features. In *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan* Aldous Huxley proposed that unnatural longevity would allow the development of these slowed characteristics. Either makes an excellent explanation for a pulpy primate, as does a natural imbalance that produced a freakish man-with-a gorilla's-body. Like the man-chimp hybrid, such a figure would have a human intelligence and understanding, but the hormonal imbalances would no doubt lead to rages and depressions suitable for any angsty ape.

The Durability of Youth

The flip side of undoing human neoteny is expanding it in primates: retarding the development of some features in a primate to produce one with a more upright posture and larger brain. Such a process must begin during gestation and the newborn would be as helpless as a human baby. It would grow in mental capacity as a human child but share a much greater connection with its primate heritage. Again, no mechanism for such a change exists, but hormones work in a pulp setting, as does a singular mutant child. Alternately, the child might not be unique: neoteny is a legitimate evolutionary response for primates in an isolated, harsh environment (producing a new species of disturbingly manlike primates in a mountain range or on an island) or it could be the result of other mutating forces (perhaps the radioactive [Congo](#)).

Within the pulps, this makes the best explanation for an alternate "Lord of the Apes" without the racist overtones. Instead of a European baby, the Ape-King is an actual primate mutation. Alternately, a "civilized" scientist could perform hormone treatments on pregnant gorillas, raising the offspring as something other than human. In either case, the creatures would be likely on par with human-chimp hybrids, but without the problems of sterility -- they could certainly breed, if there were enough of them. Depending on where they were raised, their culture might be more primate than human, or they could be indistinguishable from the man on the street socially, at least.

Putting It All Together: The G(orilla) Men

After the Primes (Psychologist Peter and Linguist Hazel) lost their only daughter in a tragic kidnapping they used the pretense of an African safari to flee the country and their grief. There they found something -- an infant albino gorilla left to die -- and smuggled it back into the States. This surrogate child, raised from birth to speak and understand an intuitive gesture language of the Prime's creation, grew in stature and intellect. Alas, the criminals that killed his adopted sister came back, this time taking the lives of Peter and Hazel as Adam slipped into the night. Lost and confused, Adam Prime became the unwitting muscle for bootleggers until rescued by federal agents. But that left the government with a problem: what do you do with an albino bull gorilla with human intellect and a taste for fine coats?

They did the only logical thing -- gave him a partner, a badge and a gun! Thus began the case files of Adam Prime, Gorilla G-Man, whose radio series was beloved by children of the 1920s and 30s. Adam possesses physical prowess beyond human and carries a modified Thompson fitted for his leathery digits. His might is usually held in check, but when his "Gorilla Nature" is unleashed he becomes an unstoppable force, abandoning the trappings of civilization under the red haze of the wild. Adam speaks a gesture language so universal that he can communicate meaning with any human (even if he only understands spoken English and French) and so subtle that many people just assume he is speaking: they repeat what he has just 'said', their minds skipping around the silence and the impossibility of a Gorilla in a suit. His position as an outsider has made him a keen observer of human nature, while at the same time playing "dumb" enough that no one at Treasury asks him to fill out paperwork.

The Treasury has assigned Adam a series of female partners (knowing his weakness for blondes and how a woman's touch would calm anyone who suddenly realizes Adam's true nature). The most common Eve is a young woman of surprising strength, having been nearly crippled by a rumrunner's gunfire and worked herself back to health through rigorous exercise. This Eve also harbors some latent ESPer abilities, being able to read the pasts of places and touch people's memories. (Other Eves possessed differing talents, such as being crack shots, surgeons or -- on one occasion -- a card sharp. Not surprisingly, Eve would have whatever skills were needed to move the current radio drama forward.).

Adam's most interesting foe was Miss Natasha Linque, a Muscovite Communist born of a French mother and a Chimpanzee father. Linque was an agent for the Soviet Union in America, advancing the Communist agenda through her physical prowess, cunning intellect, foreign backing and pheromonal charm. Being a child of the wild herself, Miss Natasha was able to claim a connection with Adam that even the best Eves could not, and she represented his one true chance at both spiritual and physical romance. Alas, the two were separated by ideology, and the radio series ended before the events of the Second World War would have made them allies. Such are the perils of primate pulp romance.

Tri-stat d10/Silver Age Sentinels Stats

Adam Prime (170 points)

Body 15 Mind 4 Soul 8
ACV 12 DCV 7 Health 115

Power Attributes:

Combat Technique (2) Leap Attack, ACV Knockback
Extra Arms (2) Can use feet as hands
Extra Attacks (2) Restriction -- only when in Blind Fury (-2)
Growth (1) Permanent (-1) stands at 2.5 meters tall. His Max Reliable Lift is 950 kg (1800 kg in SAS)
Heightened Senses (2) Scent +8
Massive Damage (3) Restriction -- only when in Blind Fury (-2)

Characteristic Attributes

Attack Combat Mastery (3)
Highly Skilled (6)
Organizational Ties -- Treasury Department (5)
Servant (8) "Eve," 80 points, variable between adventures
Special Attack (2) 20 damage, Autofire, spreading, handheld, short range, limited shots (Tommy Gun, attacks with Guns -- Autofire skill)
Unique Attribute -- Gesture Language (4) can be understood by any human

Skills:

Acrobatics - Balance (2), Climbing - Natural (4), Cultural Arts - Literature (1), Etiquette - Upper (1), Languages - French (1), Law - Criminal (1), Management - Government (2), Police Science - Criminology (1), Social Science - Psychology (3), Stealth - Camouflage (3), Urban Tracking - Underworld (1), Wilderness Survival - Jungle (3), Wilderness Tracking - Jungle (2) Gun Combat - Autofire (1), Unarmed Attack - Strikes (2)

Defects:

Blind Fury (2) when wounded, caged or Eve hurt
Less Capable - Charisma (1) Soul counts as 5 for Charisma checks
Marked (2) Gorilla, but his clothes and gesture language help him hide this
Nemesis - Miss N. Linque (3)
Unappealing (3) Gorilla

With Strength More Than Human

The Tri-stat system is praised for its simplicity. Indeed, the only reference to lifting ability (usually a mechanical cornerstone for adventure games) is a side note in the *Superstrength* description. This makes it difficult to distinguish between characters such as anthropomorphic apes, who may be strong but not *superstrong*. Here is a suggestion for lift weights that keeps relative simplicity and provides drama to what is normally a static measure.

Maximum Body lifting capacity is $50 \times X$ kilos, with X being the die type. Thus for a superhuman (d10) game, the maximum lift would be 500 Kg, while a human (d6) game would top out at 300 Kg. This amount can be increased to $70 \times X$ Kilos as a 1 point Feature. (For

"Eve" (80 points -- these are the stats for the most commonly appearing Eve)

Body 9 Mind 7 Soul 8
ACV 8 DCV 6 Health 85

Power Attributes:

Sixth Sense (2) Postcognition, Danger Sense. Area 5, Unreliable (-1)
Telepathy (5) Targets 1, Area 0, Range 0, universally applicable, Unreliable (-3)

Characteristic Attributes

Combat Technique (1) Judge Opponent, Steady Hand
Features (1) Attractive
Gadgets (1) car, radio, pistol, handcuffs, binoculars. Conditional Ownership (-1)
Highly Skilled (3)
Organization Ties -- Treasury Department (3)

Skills:

Driving - Cars (2), Domestic Arts - Cooking (2), Etiquette - Middle Class (2)
Law - Political (1), Management - Government (1), Police Science - Criminal (1), Powerlifting - Bulky (1) [her Maximum Reliable Lift is 200-250 kg], Social Sciences - Parapsychology (2) Unarmed Combat - Strikes (1), Gun Combat - Pistols (2)

Defects:

Ism - Sexism (1)
Nemesis - Miss Natasha Linque (1)

Miss Natasha Linque (145 pts)

Body 13 Mind 8 Soul 9
ACV 11 DCV 10 Health 140

Power Attributes:

Combat Technique (2) Jump Attack, Lightning Reflexes
Features - Superior Lift (1) Maximum Reliable Lift is 420 kg
Heightened Awareness (4)
Massive Damage (2) All Attacks, Restricted -- Only melee attacks (-1)
Special Movement (2) Swinging, Wall Bouncing

Characteristic Attributes

Agents (4) eight 30 point characters
Attack Combat Mastery (1)
Defense Combat Mastery (2)
Extra Defenses (1)
Gadgets (4) various smoke and gas grenades, melee weapons and large handguns as needed
Highly Skilled (8)
Organizational Ties -- Soviet Union (6)
Tough (2)
Wealth (2)

comparison, the current men's 125kg+ weight category in powerlifting has a Squat-press record of 427.5 Kg, while one level of Superstrength gives a 1000 Kg lift with other benefits.)

Rather than tying max lift to a character's Body, lifts are Body actions with weight-based difficulty. With an exceptional roll any character could perform an heroic feat of strength, while a high body character can fail on the first attempt, grit his teeth and try again. Having levels of *Superstrength* increases your absolute maximum lift and gives you a +4/level on the Body check, as per normal, but doesn't otherwise change the rules.

Lifting the absolute maximum is a Practically Impossible action. Lifting half that weight is an Easy action. Lifting 1/20th of the maximum is Practically Guaranteed. For character sketch purposes, someone's "max reliable lift" is what they can lift 50% of the time, as indicated in the above characters.

Skills:

Acrobatics - Jumping (4), Biological Science - Zoology (2), Climbing - Natural (3), Demolitions - Artificial Structures (2), Driving - Motorcycle (1), Foreign Culture - French, American (2), Interrogation - Drugs (1), Languages - French, English (2), Medical - Pharmacy (2), Military Science - Intelligence Analysis (1), Poisons - Natural (1), Seduction - Men (4), Stealth - Move Silently (1), Writing - Academic (1), Melee Attack - Knife, Improvised, Baton/Club (2)

Defects:

Ism - Sexism (1)

Marked (2) Linque has some odd features from her Chimp heritage that can't be easily concealed: she's short, with thick hair, dark skin and a distinctive face. These do not make her unappealing.

Nemesis - Adam Prime (1)

Wanted (2)

GURPS Stats

Adam Prime (497 points)

ST 30 [175]; **DX** 14 [45]; **IQ** 10 [0]; **HT** 14 [45]

Speed 7; Move n/a

Advantages: Acute Smell +4 [4]; Ally ("Eve," appears 15 or less) [45]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Extra Arms (can use feet as arms) [20]; Extra Hit Points +4 [20]; Full Coordination/3 [150]; Fur [4]; Legal Enforcement Powers (Treasury Agent) [10]; Literacy [10]; Patron (United States Treasury, appears 15 or less) [45]; Strong Will +2 [8]; Unusual Background [10]

Disadvantages: Albinism [-10]; Duty (Treasury Agency) [-15]; Enemy (Miss Natasha Linque, Appears 15 or less) [-90]; Gigantism [-10]; Mute [-25]; Reduced Manual Dexterity/2 [-6]; Sense of Duty (USA) [-10]; Social Stigma (Ape in a Man's world, -2) [-10]; Stress Atavism (Severe, Uncommon; when wounded, caged or Eve hurt; causes Berserk and Bloodlust) [-23]

Quirks: Always dresses in fine coats; Harbors secret feelings for Natasha Linque; Has a fondness for blondes; Hates paperwork; Never uses his full strength or all his attacks unless berserk [-5]

Skills: Acrobatics-14 [4]; Administration-10 [2]; Brawling-15 [2]; Camouflage-14 [1]; Climbing-15 [4]; Criminology-12 [6]; Detect Lies-12 [8]; Gesture-19* [14]; Guns (Tommy Gun)-15* [1]; Jump Kick-14 [2]; Jumping-14 [1]; Karate-14 [4]; Law (Criminal)-10/14 [4]; Literature-10 [4]; Psychology-12 [8]; Savoir-Faire-12 [4]; Stealth-13 [1]; Streetwise-12 [6]; Survival (Jungle)-15 [12]; Tracking-12 [6] Languages: English-10 [0]; French-10 [0]

"Eve" (153 points)

ST 14 [45]; **DX** 12 [20]; **IQ** 13 [30]; **HT** 12 [20]

Speed 6; Move n/a

Advantages: Appearance (Attractive) [5]; Composed [5]; Danger Sense [15]; Intuition [15]; Legal Enforcement Powers (Treasury Agent) [10]; Patron (United States Treasury, appears 12 or less) [30]; Psychometry-5 (unreliable, 8 or less) [4]; Telereceive-5 (unreliable, 8 or less) [11] **Disadvantages:** Duty (Treasury Agency) [-15]; Enemy (Miss Natasha Linque, Appears 12 or less) [-60]; Social Stigma (Woman doing a man's job) [-5]

Quirks: Always happy to chat to the waiting staff and servants; Awkward around those she has read the minds of; Complains about being shocked even when she isn't; Dislikes large dogs; Possesses a strong sense of personal space. [-5]

Skills: Administration-13 [1]; Cooking-13 [1]; Criminology-13 [2]; Driving (Car)-13 [4]; Guns (Pistols)-14* [1];

Karate-12 [4]; Law (Political)-12/16 [2]; Lifting-14 [4]; Occultism-13 [2]; Psychometry-9 [1/2]; Savoir-Faire-13 [1]; Telereceive-9 [1/2].

Languages: English-13 [0]

Miss Natasha Linque (441 points)

ST 22 [120]; **DX** 15 [60]; **IQ** 14 [45]; **HT** 14 [45]

Speed 7; Move n/a

Advantages: Alertness +2 [10]; Ally Group (8 agents, appears 12 or less) [40]; Brachiator [5]; Charisma +2 [10]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Enhanced Block [6]; Enhanced Dodge [15]; Enhanced Parry [10]; Extra Hit Points +2 [10]; Fur [4]; Literacy [10]; Patron, Comintern (appears 6 or less) [15]; Reputation (As an agent of Comintern, +2, 10 or less) [5]; Toughness 2 [25]; Trained by a Soviet Master [40]; Unusual Background [10]; Wealthy [20]

Disadvantages: Duty (Comintern) [-10]; Enemy (Adam Prime, appears 15 or less) [-90]; Fanaticism (Communism) [-15]; Reputation (As an agent of Comintern and wanted international criminal, -2, 10 or less) [-5]; Social Stigma (Humanzee in a Man's world, -2) [-10]; Social Stigma (Woman doing a man's job) [-5]

Quirks: Harbors secret feelings for Adam Prime; Likes to wear high-slit skirts; Rewards herself with Chinese food; Surrounds herself with big dumb men [-4]

Skills: Acrobatics-15 [4]; Area Knowledge, America-13 [1/2]; Area Knowledge, France-13 [1/2]; Baton-14 [1]; Brawling-14 [1/2]; Camouflage-14 [1]; Climbing-16 [4]; Engineering, Explosives-14 [4]; Intelligence Analysis-13 [2]; Interrogation-13 [1]; Jump Kick-17 [8]; Jumping-16 [2]; Karate-17 [8]; Knife-14 [1/2]; Motorcycle-15 [1]; Pharmacy-14 [4]; Poisons-12 [1]; Sex Appeal-16 [6]; Stealth-13 [1]; Theology (Communism)-14 [2]; Writing-13 [1]; Zoology-14 [4]

Languages: English-14 [2]; French-14 [2]; Russian-14 [0]

* * *

*Deepest thanks go to Matthew Pook for producing the **GURPS** stats for these characters.*

*I developed these ideas from Stephen Jay Gould's **Ever Since Darwin**. I recommend Gould's essays to anyone interested in science's societal implications, especially past arguments and how they relate to current theory.*

Finally, this is dedicated to Josh Atkins and Rebecca Stevenson for creating Adam Prime and Eve -- despite the latter's repeated laments of "what's the big deal with Gorillas?!?"

Pyramid Review

D6 Adventure RPG

Published by [West End Games](#)

Designed by Nikola Vrtis

144-page b&W hardcover; \$29.95

Given how many games there are out there for fantasy, it's always nice to see a good, solid modern RPG come along. *D6 Adventure* is exactly that, and as befits an RPG aiming for a particular genre, the whole book is designed with contemporary adventuring in mind. Some players will recognize the D6 System from back when it was doing *Star Wars*, and that sort of high-action flair still shows through in this new game.

As one might guess from the title, this game is aimed at the cinematic side of modern roleplaying; while you probably could use these rules for *Jane Austen: The RPG*, they're obviously designed for stories needing big special effects budgets to translate to film. *D6 Adventure* just begs to be used for a game that includes martial arts maneuvers, a plucky wise-cracking sidekick, secret mystical powers, and several good explosions.

The book follows a standard organization: character creation, basics of the system, combat, special powers, equipment, and GMing tips. First, however, it sets up a sample character sheet, a quick system rundown, and an introductory "choose your own adventure" to show how the system works in play. This takes surprisingly few pages to show off how easily the game runs, if with a rather sedate "thug trying to mug a little old lady" example.

The system, for its part, is simple to follow. It's based on a reasonably elegant dice pool mechanic, where you add up your totals in the pool (plus occasionally one or two "pips," if you're midway between two dice levels) to compare against a set difficulty. There are plenty of examples of difficulty levels and modifiers for the various skills; it's easy to imagine coming across some odd application of a skill, checking the appropriate page, and getting a quick estimate of what difficulty to set based on the examples given and suggested modifiers. There's also the randomizing feature of the Wild Die, which gives even the most improbable attempt some small chance at a wild success but also allows the game master to include some unforeseen complications.

Character creation comes in three forms: templates, defined limits, and the creation point pool. Of these, the first two are quite simple to follow. Templates are provided at the end of the book, for quick and easy game-starting; most experienced roleplayers will prefer to choose one of the more customizable options instead. Defined limits provides a certain number of dice to distribute between attributes, dice to distribute among skills, and a few other basic starting values.

The creation point pool provides a more flexible means of swapping those starting dice out for points, which are then used to purchase each attribute, skill, advantage, and so on. While the additional flexibility is appreciated, this section would have benefited greatly from some cost-comparison charts, or at least a worked example of character creation using that system. Still, it shouldn't be difficult for someone used to point-based character creation systems to use it with a little bit of study.

Characters themselves are defined with attributes, which almost never change, and then skills grouped beneath each attribute. Dice put into skills add to the governing attribute, while skills with no particular rating default to the attribute itself. This makes for nicely cinematic abilities; if you have never piloted a jet fighter in your life, but you happen to have great Coordination, go ahead and try to fly that thing! The rules give a definite sense that nitpicky realism shouldn't get in the way of a good knuckle-biting action scene.

There are further ways to customize a character under Advantages, Disadvantages, and Special Abilities. Rather than trying to cover every possibility, these sensibly provide the sorts of perks (great fame), flaws (mortal enemies), and cool powers (shapeshifting) that one wishes a hero to have. While the organization could have been better -- there seems no good reason to spread four levels of equipment out as four separate entries, when it could have been a single entry with details within it for what's provided at each level -- there are some very nice options here.

One personal favorite is a flaw that attaches to and reduces the cost of an advantage: Burn Out. You pay less for your advantage, but with a condition under which it's going to disappear permanently: a fiendishly fun Damocles' Sword to hang over a character's head. There are also a few levels of disadvantages to attach to advantages reflecting how difficult it is to use the perk; a good worked example in the character templates is a young heiress with vast wealth who needs to justify every withdrawal to her trust-fund manager.

Combat is simple, and allows for a wide variety of player choices without trying to throw in a rule to cover every situation. Here, at least, the book provides a quick example of a combat round, with suitably exciting gunplay that moves as quickly as combat in a cinematic game should. It says something for how well the combat rules are integrated into the system that all the basics of combat require only a few short chapters to cover, even including the chapter on healing. There are a few charts to refer to for modifiers when things get complicated, and most GMs will have all the relevant numbers from those memorized after a few sessions.

When this book claims it can do modern adventure, it shows every intention of covering the supernatural possibilities of this, and the magic and psionics systems deliver well. Psionic powers are skills divided up under a Psionics attribute, with several types of modifiers to add more flavor (and complexity, and ease of use) to a given use of the skill. It's a nice neat system, and seems pretty straightforward.

Magic, on the other hand, is marvelously complex in possibility, while conveniently simple for in-game use. The real fun comes in the spell creation system. A whole list of effects, measurements, components, gestures, and so forth let you build up your own spell from scratch, and calculate exactly how hard it's going to be. For example, in the pre-calculated spells, you can conjure up a simple meal with a difficulty of 5, but creating a doorway to transport you 100 kilometers away will require matching a difficulty of 19. But then you can go write up your own spell where (as a helpful example on the company's website shows) you use a specific iron pot and perform a complex series of gestures around it in order to conjure up shadowy tentacles which can be directed to strike at people . . . Building your own new spells is nothing new in a roleplaying system, but this game does it well, and doesn't skimp on the example spells for people who'd rather not go to all that trouble.

The one major flaw of the book comes in the last few chapters, where it gives GM and adventure advice. While the game has set up all of the rules for high-action gameplay, it's sadly lacking in good places to start for running that kind of campaign. If you already have a campaign idea in mind -- special ops fighting against crime lords, a magical kid and his mentors on a journey to reclaim an ancient artifact, the League of Super-Powered Nice Guys -- this book will give you what you need to build exactly that. If you're searching for ideas, you might want to look elsewhere for inspiration first, and then come back to *D6 Adventure* for the rules. (The ready-to-play character templates go some way towards helping with this, but the campaign suggestions the book offers are maddeningly vague.)

D6 Adventure finds a solid balance between simplicity and plenty of options, with both ways to customize and lots of pre-made chunks for when you need something right away without the hassle of working it up yourself. (A perfect example of this is the chart in the very back of the book that gives you pregenerated average numbers for dice pools from one to 50, for when you're really not in the mood to roll 35 dice and add them up.) It's probably not the ideal game for beginning GMs, especially those new to roleplaying in general, because it does require you bring a certain clarity of vision to the table yourself. But with an experienced GM who can set things out for players to work with, even players brand new to gaming should be able to get into the swing (and explosions) of things with this game.

--*Fade Manley*

Pyramid Review

Campaign Secrets

Published by [The Game Crafter](#)

Designed by JT Smith

140-card full-color deck; \$17.95

For those of you that have not yet noticed, 2004 is an election year. That is, for the position of President of the USA, which, for all of its razzmatazz and hoopla, it is no surprise that it has become the subject of a game or two. Having got through the Primaries, and as we roll towards the election itself, the expected -- and now almost traditional -- *Cthulhu for President 2004* from Chaosium has yet to arrive. But in the meantime, The Game Crafter offers us the chance to stand for the highest office ourselves with *Campaign Secrets*. And that includes anyone ineligible to stand, so with this card game, both Arnold Schwarenegger and myself are in with a chance.

Designed for three to six players, *Campaign Secrets* is a card game of political satire, in which the candidates battle for the top share of electorate through the Primaries and then onto Election day itself. Along the way, they try to uncover as many of their rivals' dirty little secrets as they can, invariably resort to underhand tricks, and all this while trying keep their own dirty secrets from the eyes of the electorate.

The game consists of 140 cards, which are broken down into a 100-card play deck, 38 score cards, a rules card, and a share card. The latter is not part of the game, but more a piece of advertising, while the score cards are marked with either 1%, 3%, or 5%, and represent a share of the vote. While the share cards are done in black and white, the play cards come in full color, are illustrated to pleasing and often comic effect, and are each given some interesting, fun fact or quote. The latter range in their origins from the classical, such as Cicero and Publilius Syrus; the historical, such as Napoleon; Aldous Huxley and Emerson from literature; and of course, from the political arena. These get right up to date with quotes from the current incumbent, President George W. Bush, as well from his rivals, John Kerry and Senator John McCain. The facts come from a variety of different sources, but in the main from newspapers and web sites, the URLs being included and the newspapers named where appropriate.

The play cards come in two types. The blue Campaign cards have a direct effect when played. They further split into two general groups. The first are cards like "Better Education Policy," "Great Campaign Staff," and "Republican Party Nomination" that can gain or lose a player more percentages of the vote. The second group, such as "Cover Up," "Investigative Reporter," and "Smear Campaign," affect the Secret cards currently in play.

The red Secret cards, which include "Bad Political Record," "Ballot Tampering," and "Tax Evasion," have two effects. One is their Cost, a percentage of their votes lost when the card is revealed. The other is Benefit, which is the percentage gained if the secret can remain unrevealed until the end of the game. Some just have the two figures, for example, "Polluters" has a Cost of 3% and a Benefit of 2%. Others have additional effects like "When It Rains, It Pours," which provides no Benefit, but has a vile Cost, forcing the holder to reveal all of his current Secrets and pay the Cost for each!

Campaign Secrets claims to be easy to both learn and play, the learning process being a mere five minutes in length. The rules live up to this, fitting onto just the one side of a card. At the game's beginning, each candidate or player receives Score cards to the value of 10% and five play cards. The remaining Score cards are put aside as the undecided vote. One Campaign card is kept aside, which is the "Election Day" card. This comes into play as soon as the "Primaries" card is revealed, which is mandatory as soon as it appears in a player's hand.

Play is simple; candidates play just a single card on their turns. If it's a blue Campaign card, it is read out, its effects directed at another candidate, and then the card discarded. Red Secret cards are put face down in front of the candidate a player wishes to target. They are only revealed due to the effect of a Campaign card, or at the end of the game. Some Campaign cards work to counter the effect of other Campaign cards, so that it is possible to play more than one card in a turn. A candidate's hand is refreshed to five cards at the end of their turn.

As soon as the "Primaries" card is revealed, it is discarded and every player's hand is reshuffled back into the deck along with the discard pile and the "Election Day" card. Candidates are dealt new hands, and the game continues as before, everyone having been given new campaigning tools and starting out afresh. That is, except for those secrets that still remain hidden in front of the candidates. As soon as the "Election Day" card appears in a candidate's hand, like the "Primaries" card, it must be played. Everyone's secrets are revealed, their benefits gained and added to their current percentage of the votes. The candidate with the highest percentage of the electorate is of course the winner, and come the New Year, will be sworn in as President of the United States of America.

In play, *Campaign Secrets* is direct and easy. The aim is simple: to get down and reveal as many of your opponents' secrets while preventing them from doing the same to you, as well as gaining as much of the vote as possible and also keeping it away from said opponents. Yet while the mechanics are clear and sound, the game play is not quite as engaging as the designer wanted. Perhaps this can be put down to the weak strength of the intended satire, and the somewhat dry nature of the card text, which -- while informative and interesting in its facts -- only otherwise sticks to game instructions. The effect of that is to strengthen the game's educational factor and downplay any political bias. One saving grace of card games like this, such as InteractivitieS Ink's *IGOR: The Mad Scientist's Lament* and GDW's *Red Empire*, is their openness to roleplaying input from its players. There is no denying the potential for this in *Campaign Secrets*, but the game itself does not actively encourage it.

It should also be made clear that while the rules are simple and direct, owners of the game will probably need to check the publisher's website to get what is in effect, the full version, also known as the "The Constitution" of *Campaign Secrets*. The website also includes a number of fan-created rules variants. Although solidly designed, simple to play, *Campaign Secrets* is ultimately slightly underwhelming. Not a bad game per se, but one that lacks the killer hook that will keep potential candidates coming back to run again for President of the USA.

--Matthew Pook

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



The Altermity Duel: Burr v. Hamilton v. History

*"O Burr, O Burr, what has thou done?
Thou has shooted dead great Hamilton.
You hid behind a bunch of thistle,
And shooted him dead with a great hoss pistol."*
-- caption on a wax tableau in New York City, July 1804

Only once since Bosworth Field has the direction of a great nation depended on direct personal combat between two of its leaders. Two hundred years ago Sunday, America's future was determined by two pistol shots, fired by Alexander Hamilton, former Secretary of the Treasury and Inspector General of the U.S. Army, and Aaron Burr, the sitting Vice-President of the United States. The illegal -- and, to some modern historians perhaps not as capable of attaining the mindset of the times as they might be, insane -- duel between them echoes down to the present, even if many moderns prefer to hear the echoes as the impersonal rumbles of Industrialization or Westward Expansion rather than the sound of gunshots over the Hudson. When the modern reader rejects, say, the notion of a duel settling anything (much less the notion of a duel between, say, Bill Clinton and Dick Cheney), that too is partially the outcome of the "interview at Weehawken."

"The bloody feuds of Burr's time never again recurred. The death of Hamilton and the Vice-President's flight, with their accessories of summer-morning sunlight on rocky and wooded heights, tranquil river, and distant city, and behind all, their dark background of moral gloom, double treason, and political despair, still stand as the most dramatic moment in the early politics of the Union."

-- Henry Adams, *History of the United States of America During the Administrations of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison*

This column, with mild regret, will pass over the potential for mysticism and mystification inherent in the Duel, from the notion that Burr deliberately conspired to murder Hamilton (a theory floated within days of the "interview" by even the pro-Republican press in New York) to the image of Burr as Scapegoat and Hamilton as Summer King in some Frazerian ritual sealing the infant Republic in blood and cordite. Aaron Burr, especially, is such a rich target for speculation on matters secret and conspiratorial that he could support a whole column on his own, and he might well do so in the future.

For now, however, I'd like to concentrate on the Duel as a historical event, a moment at which, large and imposing theories of Historical Inevitability to the contrary, not just two lives but at least two futures for the United States hung in the balance. Astonishingly, nobody seems to have written an alternate history novel, or even a short story, exploring other results of the Duel. Hence, we can leave magic and vampires for our second exploration if such a thing is destined to be; on this first trip, we're in uncharted territory even while sticking to real history.

"I stand ready to avow or disavow promptly and explicitly any precise or definite opinion which I may be charged with having declared to any gentleman. More than this can not fitly be expected from me; and especially it can not reasonably be expected that I shall enter into an explanation upon a basis so vague as that which you have adopted. I trust upon more reflection you will see the matter in the same light with me. If not, I can only regret the circumstances and must abide the consequences."

-- letter of Alexander Hamilton to Aaron Burr, June 20, 1804

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Washington's administration. One way the Federalists might have won is if Burr had split the Republican vote with his own party in the West. If one of the myriad duels in that wild country didn't carry off Burr's protégé Andrew Jackson, he would have been a stalwart of the Burr faction and a coming force in the 1820s -- but for sectionalism, rather than for national unity as in our history. Could the Civil War have broken out over the "corrupt bargain" of 1828? Or, Burr might have been able to force Madison to accept him as a running mate in 1808, and had Burr become president instead of Monroe in 1816, the resulting Burr Doctrine would have expressed American claims to suzerainty over the whole hemisphere. President Burr would certainly have intervened aggressively in the Spanish colonial revolutions -- but he would also have staunchly forbidden the expansion of slavery into the newly conquered territories. Perhaps President Burr's heavy-handed methods spark a Civil War in 1820, rather than a Missouri Compromise. One gunshot gone awry, and a political climate made more violent by its example, could have killed thousands, and left millions enslaved -- before industrialization could give the North the advantages it had in our own timeline.

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The Alternity Duel: Burr v. Hamilton v. History

*"O Burr, O Burr, what has thou done?
Thou has shot dead great Hamilton.
You hid behind a bunch of thistle,
And shot him dead with a great hoss pistol."
-- caption on a wax tableau in New York City, July 1804*

Only once since Bosworth Field has the direction of a great nation depended on direct personal combat between two of its leaders. Two hundred years ago Sunday, America's future was determined by two pistol shots, fired by Alexander Hamilton, former Secretary of the Treasury and Inspector General of the U.S. Army, and Aaron Burr, the sitting Vice-President of the United States. The illegal -- and, to some modern historians perhaps not as capable of attaining the mindset of the times as they might be, insane -- duel between them echoes down to the present, even if many moderns prefer to hear the echoes as the impersonal rumbles of Industrialization or Westward Expansion rather than the sound of gunshots over the Hudson. When the modern reader rejects, say, the notion of a duel settling anything (much less the notion of a duel between, say, Bill Clinton and Dick Cheney), that too is partially the outcome of the "interview at Weehawken."

"The bloody feuds of Burr's time never again recurred. The death of Hamilton and the Vice-President's flight, with their accessories of summer-morning sunlight on rocky and wooded heights, tranquil river, and distant city, and behind all, their dark background of moral gloom, double treason, and political despair, still stand as the most dramatic moment in the early politics of the Union."

-- Henry Adams, *History of the United States of America During the Administrations of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison*

This column, with mild regret, will pass over the potential for mysticism and mystification inherent in the Duel, from the notion that Burr deliberately conspired to murder Hamilton (a theory floated within days of the "interview" by even the pro-Republican press in New York) to the image of Burr as Scapegoat and Hamilton as Summer King in some Frazerian ritual sealing the infant Republic in blood and nitre. Aaron Burr, especially, is such a rich target for speculation on matters secret and conspiratorial that he could support a whole column on his own, and he might well do so in the future.

For now, however, I'd like to concentrate on the Duel as a historical event, a moment at which, large and imposing theories of Historical Inevitability to the contrary, not just two lives but at least two futures for the United States hung in the balance. Astonishingly, nobody seems to have written an alternate history novel, or even a short story, exploring other results of the Duel. Hence, we can leave magic and vampires for our second exploration if such a thing is destined to be; on this first trip, we're in uncharted territory even while sticking to real history.

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A Man of Auction

Last Saturday I had the pleasure <ahem> of going to an honest-to-goodness auction . . . my first such experience that I can recall (not counting one or two such events I've been to at [gaming conventions](#)).

The auction in question was for surplus computer equipment. As my friend Chuck -- who was attending the convention with me -- explained, these computers were discards by various state agencies (since we're in the state capital), which had also been picked through by various schools for equipment *they* wanted. In other words, these were twice-rejected computers.

My desires for attending this auction were modest; I was hoping to acquire another laptop for a friend. I had a certain price frame in mind (\$100-ish, for those playing the home game). Chuck had his eyes on . . . I'm not sure, really. Whenever I inquired, he would rattle off descriptions that melded together into an incomprehensible blur: "I'm going to turn this box into a dedicated router remote firewall Gnoppix alludium P36 explosive space modulator with cup holder."

Anyway, I have come to the conclusion that *anything* vaguely laptop-y will sell for more than I am ever willing to spend. I made exactly one bid during the entire auction. There was an oooooold 486/33 laptop that boasted having Windows 3.11 installed; its screen was roughly the size of a Tamagatchi; its coolest feature by far was the tiny trackball it had as a pointer device. I thought I could turn it into an interesting prop in a game at some point. Anyway, the opening bid was \$2.50; I raised to \$5. And that was my moment of glory; the laptop ended up going for \$70. The other laptops -- and again, I stress that all of these were at least eight years old, obviously missing parts, and some didn't even turn on -- went for no less than \$160. I'm pretty sure a black-painted Etch-a-Sketch would've fetched at least \$120.

Chuck, for his part, ended up winning four desktop computer towers for \$50, about which he feels confident that he will be able to assemble two machines that actually work and, as best I can tell in listening to his plans, will form the feet of Voltron.

Probably the most interesting auction win was the person who won 20 monitors for five bucks each. Chuck and I both agreed that they would be worth that much for the sheer pleasure of dropping off buildings.

Anyway, all of this is preamble to state that an auction would kick butt as a setting for almost any campaign. Now, I already knew this on some vague level; I was part of a *Fading Suns* LARP at Dragon*Con four years ago or so, and the central premise was an auction. However, that scenario didn't really register because the auction was (as best I can tell) rigged; nothing the players could have done would affect the outcome.

But that doesn't need to be the case. A thought-out auction can provide a *lot* of interesting people and things to interact with in an interesting place. So, in typical Random Thought Table tradition, I thought I'd mention some of the possibilities behind an auction, as well as some of the pitfalls.

Modern auctions generally target two different audiences: Those looking for a bargain over something available (in some form) through normal channels, and those looking for something that *can't* be had through normal channels, regardless of price. The "Island of Misfit Computers" auction I was at was an example of the former, while the stereotypical "16th Century Tome of Baffling Prophecies and Jam Recipes"-type auction popular in movies and television is an example of the latter. It's even possible to combine the two, although usually the two types straddle two different social strata. ("And the case of 48 cans of Beef-a-Roni goes to Jimbo 'Shiv' Tubbs for nine dollars, 60 cents. Next up for auction is a portrait from Picasso's 'Blue' Period . . .")

Regardless of the target audience, auctions attract people from a wide variety of backgrounds, interests, and cliques. Thus the computer auction had resellers, college kids, working mothers, schmoes like Chuck and me, and many others. A fine art auction might attract old money, nuvou riche, mob bosses, museum curators, and so on. Regardless, this melding and clashing of different circles is where a lot of good gaming potential comes from. After all, any polite

excuse to have the heroes sitting next to Don Antonio Falsetto *and* the head of EvilCo can't be all bad.

And there are plenty of opportunities for these disparate folks to interact. In particular, many auctions allow a viewing or examination of items before the bidding, so potential buyers can get a better look at what they're bidding on. This can allow for all kinds of conversations, intimidation, and attempts at feeling out the opponents in the auction.

In order for an auction to work with PCs, there must be several factors in place:

The auction has to have something the players (and characters) want, *and* the PCs can't acquire it through any easier means. Fortunately, most games are brimming with goodies that would make great candidates for auctions: magic items, unique technology, secrets, and so on. Alternately, the auction can provide something that would normally be out of reach for the heroes. For example, in most sci-fi games the heroes don't have enough money to afford their own ship immediately. But a fine campaign could start with the heroes pooling their money to buy a sight-unseen, as-is refurbished quirky vessel at an auction populated by a wretched hive of scum and villainy. Also remember that auctions can sell services or more ephemeral things.

For true roleplaying possibilities, auctions require actual currency. Thus games that abstract wealth levels (such as *DC Heroes*, *Marvel Super-Heroes*, or *Vampire: The Masquerade* and other World of Darkness games) will have a difficult time: "I bid a Remarkable amount of money." Fortunately, there can be an out, even for these kinds of games. Simply introduce some kind of currency or other limited, tangible resource to the game, perhaps even for the specific purpose of the auction. For example, in a *Vampire* game it would be entirely appropriate to barter favors, years of servitude, or the like. Regardless, there needs to be that moment where the players need to consider: "Do we want to raise the bid to 1,500 gold pieces?" should cause the same moment of indecision as "Do I want to raise the bid to 13 years of servitude?"

Likewise, for an auction to really work the PCs have to have a *limited* amount of resources. This is important in games where the heroes have the possibility to acquire vast sums of wealth, or have the means to create their own money. Unless an auction is going to get into the 10,000,000 gold piece range (in which case, it needs to be something *phenomenally* cool), a character with that much disposable income may not blink an eye at raising a bid to 500,000. And it's unlikely that an auction would hold any challenge for someone with the Midas Touch.

Okay; so you're psyched up to the possibilities of an auction. Now what?

Well, here are some pitfalls and points to consider.

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A Man of Auction

Last Saturday I had the pleasure <ahem> of going to an honest-to-goodness auction . . . my first such experience that I can recall (not counting one or two such events I've been to at [gaming conventions](#)).

The auction in question was for surplus computer equipment. As my friend Chuck -- who was attending the convention with me -- explained, these computers were discards by various state agencies (since we're in the state capital), which had also been picked through by various schools for equipment *they* wanted. In other words, these were twice-rejected computers.

My desires for attending this auction were modest; I was hoping to acquire another laptop for a friend. I had a certain price frame in mind (\$100-ish, for those playing the home game). Chuck had his eyes on . . . I'm not sure, really. Whenever I inquired, he would rattle off descriptions that melded together into an incomprehensible blur: "I'm going to turn this box into a dedicated router remote firewall Gnoppix alludium P36 explosive space modulator with cup holder."

Anyway, I have come to the conclusion that *anything* vaguely laptop-y will sell for more than I am ever willing to spend. I made exactly one bid during the entire auction. There was an oooooold 486/33 laptop that boasted having Windows 3.11 installed; its screen was roughly the size of a Tamagatchi; its coolest feature by far was the tiny trackball it had as a pointer device. I thought I could turn it into an interesting prop in a game at some point. Anyway, the opening bid was \$2.50; I raised to \$5. And that was my moment of glory; the laptop ended up going for \$70. The other laptops -- and again, I stress that all of these were at least eight years old, obviously missing parts, and some didn't even turn on -- went for no less than \$160. I'm pretty sure a black-painted Etch-a-Sketch would've fetched at least \$120.

Chuck, for his part, ended up winning four desktop computer towers for \$50, about which he feels confident that he will be able to assemble two machines that actually work and, as best I can tell in listening to his plans, will form the feet of Voltron.

Probably the most interesting auction win was the person who won 20 monitors for five bucks each. Chuck and I both agreed that they would be worth that much for the sheer pleasure of dropping off buildings.

Anyway, all of this is preamble to state that an auction would kick butt as a setting for almost any campaign. Now, I already knew this on some vague level; I was part of a *Fading Suns* LARP at Dragon*Con four years ago or so, and the central premise was an auction. However, that scenario didn't really register because the auction was (as best I can tell) rigged; nothing the players could have done would affect the outcome.

But that doesn't need to be the case. A thought-out auction can provide a *lot* of interesting people and things to interact with in an interesting place. So, in typical Random Thought Table tradition, I thought I'd mention some of the possibilities behind an auction, as well as some of the pitfalls.

Modern auctions generally target two different audiences: Those looking for a bargain over something available (in some form) through normal channels, and those looking for something that *can't* be had through normal channels, regardless of price. The "Island of Misfit Computers" auction I was at was an example of the former, while the stereotypical "16th Century Tome of Baffling Prophecies and Jam Recipes"-type auction popular in movies and television is an example of the latter. It's even possible to combine the two, although usually the two types straddle two different social strata. ("And the case of 48 cans of Beef-a-Roni goes to Jimbo 'Shiv' Tubbs for nine dollars, 60 cents. Next up for auction is a portrait from Picasso's 'Blue' Period . . .")

Regardless of the target audience, auctions attract people from a wide variety of backgrounds, interests, and cliques. Thus the computer auction had resellers, college kids, working mothers, schmoes like Chuck and me, and many others. A fine art auction might attract old money, nuvou riche, mob bosses, museum curators, and so on. Regardless, this melding and clashing of different circles is where a lot of good gaming potential comes from. After all, any polite

excuse to have the heroes sitting next to Don Antonio Falsetto *and* the head of EvilCo can't be all bad.

And there are plenty of opportunities for these disparate folks to interact. In particular, many auctions allow a viewing or examination of items before the bidding, so potential buyers can get a better look at what they're bidding on. This can allow for all kinds of conversations, intimidation, and attempts at feeling out the opponents in the auction.

In order for an auction to work with PCs, there must be several factors in place:

The auction has to have something the players (and characters) want, *and* the PCs can't acquire it through any easier means. Fortunately, most games are brimming with goodies that would make great candidates for auctions: magic items, unique technology, secrets, and so on. Alternately, the auction can provide something that would normally be out of reach for the heroes. For example, in most sci-fi games the heroes don't have enough money to afford their own ship immediately. But a fine campaign could start with the heroes pooling their money to buy a sight-unseen, as-is refurbished quirky vessel at an auction populated by a wretched hive of scum and villainy. Also remember that auctions can sell services or more ephemeral things.

For true roleplaying possibilities, auctions require actual currency. Thus games that abstract wealth levels (such as *DC Heroes*, *Marvel Super-Heroes*, or *Vampire: The Masquerade* and other World of Darkness games) will have a difficult time: "I bid a Remarkable amount of money." Fortunately, there can be an out, even for these kinds of games. Simply introduce some kind of currency or other limited, tangible resource to the game, perhaps even for the specific purpose of the auction. For example, in a *Vampire* game it would be entirely appropriate to barter favors, years of servitude, or the like. Regardless, there needs to be that moment where the players need to consider: "Do we want to raise the bid to 1,500 gold pieces?" should cause the same moment of indecision as "Do I want to raise the bid to 13 years of servitude?"

Likewise, for an auction to really work the PCs have to have a *limited* amount of resources. This is important in games where the heroes have the possibility to acquire vast sums of wealth, or have the means to create their own money. Unless an auction is going to get into the 10,000,000 gold piece range (in which case, it needs to be something *phenomenally* cool), a character with that much disposable income may not blink an eye at raising a bid to 500,000. And it's unlikely that an auction would hold any challenge for someone with the Midas Touch.

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Ritualistic Kabbalistic Sephirothic Decanic Hermetic Magick

Merging Ritual Magic and *GURPS Cabal* Into a "Realistic" Magic System

By Reverend P. Kitty

Technology has given mankind an amazing degree of control over our world and our lives. Rationalism and the scientific method are taught to our children and held to be true and accurate. Yet, despite our acceptance of these things, a belief in magic still exists. From the earliest shamans to the Order of the Golden Dawn, there have always been those who believe that the human mind can be more powerful than reality itself. The Order is an important example, as their synthesis of hermetic magical theory formed the basis for most "realistic" modern views of magic.

GURPS Cabal captures this hermetic system admirably, providing detailed and accurate rules for the Laws of Sympathy, astrological resonances, and more. However, while the rules for casting are based on real-world occult theories, the end results are not--few modern magicians claim to throw fireballs, fly, or shapeshift into a lion. This is no fault of the system; *GURPS Magic* was designed for fantasy, not modern occult conspiracy.

Fortunately, the Ritual Magic system, introduced in *GURPS Voodoo: The Shadow War* and expanded in *GURPS Spirits*, truly captures the feel of "realistic" modern magic. The magician forces his will upon the universe (or summons spirits to do it for him) with effective but *subtle* results -- results that could usually be explained away as "coincidence." *GURPS Cabal* acknowledges this and discusses the difficulties in merging the two systems (p. CB60), the main concern being incompatibility between a system tied to the decans and one tied to the loas. But . . . who said ritual magic had to be tied to loas?

The Tree of Life

The Otz Chaim, or "Tree of Life," is the map of the spiritual universe, as realized by the original Hebrew Kabbalists (p. CB52). The 10 sephiroth which make up the Tree are not things, but spiritual states, and all manifested things exist in one or another of these states. Each sephirah is a seed which contains the potentiality of all that comes after it; spiritual energy travels through the ten successive stages, from the pure, inconceivable state of Kether on to the rich and differentiated physical manifestation of Malkuth. The aim of a pure Kabbalist is to make this creative energy flow as freely and balanced as possible into their daily existence. With true understanding, however, comes the ability to subtly control and direct these Kabbalistic energies, which is to control and direct the fabric of reality itself.

The Sephiroth

Each sephirah embodies a spiritual state, numbered from most divine to least divine. The right-hand sephiroth (Chokmah, Chesed, Netzach) are known as the Pillar of Mercy, and serve as direct, unfocused channels for the spiritual energy. The left-hand sephiroth (Binah, Geburah, Hod) are known as the Pillar of Severity, and serve to focus the channeled energy into understandable forms. The center sephiroth (Kether, Tiphareth, Yesod, Malkuth) are known as the Pillar of Balance, which equalize and combine the flow of the others.

Mastery of the study of the sephiroth gives one mastery over the flow of the spiritual energy flowing through it. Every sephirah except Kether governs one of the Ritual Paths from *GURPS Spirits*; to study this sephirah is to advance along the study of its path, by which means one can learn its associated rituals.

1. Kether (Crown, Source): The Crowning Path

Kether [KETT-er] is the sole node within Atziluth, at the source of the spiritual universe. It channels the spiritual energy of that realm down to the rest of the Tree (and thus, the rest of the universe). The study of Kether is known as the Crowning Path, but it is a Path with no rituals or overt manifestations. Were any rituals of Kether to exist, no being would be able to successfully control their energies.

Kether is, instead, the source and the foundation behind all Kabbalistic ritual. At least one character point must be invested in the Crowning Path skill (M/VH) before any of the other Paths can be learned, and no other Path skill can be higher than the magician's Crowning Path skill. The Crowning Path skill, like any other Path, cannot be higher than one's Ritual Magic skill, of course. Ritual Magic and the Crowning Path are thus tied together, representing magical knowledge and Kabbalistic understanding, respectively.

(The addition of this Path helps offset the advantage of decanic and astrological bonuses. However, if the GM feels this is too restrictive, Kether may be considered to govern the Ritual Magic skill instead of its own Path.)

2. Chokmah (Wisdom, Fatherhood): The Path of Protection

Chokmah ['HOAK-mah] channels the energy of Kether into the iconic realm and represents a personified Creator and its divine wisdom. The Path of Protection (p. SP101) is governed by Chokmah; the rituals therein strengthen this sephirah's natural instinct to guard and protect that which it helped create.

3. Binah (Understanding, Nurturing): The Path of Health

Binah [BEE-nah] is the womb which incubates the energies of the Sephiroth. Its study, known as the Path of Health (p. SP95), calls upon Binah's divine understanding and control over the Cycle of Life and Death to aid the recovery of its creations (or to bring them sickness and death, as the Cycle completes itself.)

4. Chesed (Mercy, Builder): The Path of Luck

In Chesed [HESS-id], the energy coming from the higher sephiroth begins to assume a more coherent form. This sephirah embodies the archetype of the merciful king--unselfish, benevolent and forgiving. The rituals of the Path of Luck (p. SP97) appeal to Chesed's divine mercy, coaxing favorable results out of an unpredictable universe.

5. Geburah (Severity, Energy): The Path of War

Geburah [geh-BOOR-ah] burns away that which is useless or impure as it passes to Yetzirah, tempering Chesed's mercy with sword and fire. The study of Geburah is called the Path of War (see below). Its rituals are often harrowing and dangerous, calling upon the fire of justice to aid those who fight for what they feel is honorable.

6. Tiphareth (Beauty, Balance): The Path of Spirit

Tiphareth [tih-FAIR-ett] is the center of balance on the Tree of Life, mediating between the higher and lower sephiroth. As the highest sephirah in Yetzirah (which is also known as the Spirit World, p. SP25), Tiphareth governs meditation, balance, tranquility, and the Path of Spirit (p. SP104).

7. Netzach (Victory, Emotions): The Path of Cunning

Netzach [NET-zak] is the primal storm of emotions which inspire and drive humanity to victory. Closer to human comprehension than higher sephiroth, it represents the "right brain" of artistic temperament, intuition, and the Path of Cunning (p. SP92), which uses the natural chaos of the mind to confuses or control others' perceptions.

8. Hod (Splendor, Intellect): The Path of Knowledge

Hod [HOAD] embodies the splendor of the rational and enlightened mind--the "left brain" to Netzach's "right brain." It tempers the emotions of Netzach with consciousness and sentience through tools like the Path of Knowledge (p. SP96), the rituals of which attempt to uncover the secrets of the universe.

9. Yesod (Foundation, Astral): The Path of Dreams

Yesod [YAY-soad] encompasses the foundation behind the known universe. It permeates everything, from the astral realm of Yetzirah to the dreamworld of Nod (p. CB50). Yesod touches on the rhythms of the unconscious (and subconscious) mind as well, revealing the rituals of the Path of Dreams (p. SP94) to those who study it.

10. Malkuth (Kingdom, Completion): The Path of Nature

Malkuth [mal-KOOT] filters the diffuse energy from Yesod into Assiah, the material world. The energy of the sephiroth "ground out" here, into the four elements, to form life (and the world) as we know it. Tied into the primal animal and elemental forces of the Earth, Malkuth governs the Path of Nature (p. SP100).

Geburah: The Path of War (M/VH)

Lion Heart

Defaults to Path of War

This ritual inspires and strengthens courage. The hour-long ritual produces a charm which the subject must wear over his heart. While under its effects, the subject adds +2 to any Fright Check or morale checks for every point the roll was made by (minimum +1). At the GM's discretion, subjects may have to make an IQ roll or suffer from the Overconfidence disadvantage (subjects with Common Sense are immune). The charm retains its potency for a number of hours equal to the subject's Will.

Scent of War

Defaults to Path of War-3

This 10 minute ritual awakens the subject's senses to the world (and the dangers) around them. Until the subject next sleeps, all of his Sense rolls are at +1, plus 1 for every two points the roll was made by. If the subject has Danger Sense, this bonus applies to his Danger Sense rolls as well; if not, he can sense danger on a (modified Sense)-6 roll.

Warrior's Blessing

Defaults to Path of War-4 or Path of Health-6

See *Spirits* p. 96

Weapon Blessing

Blessing Defaults to Path of War-4 or Path of Luck-6

See *Spirits* p. 99

Vital Strike

Defaults to Path of War-5

This hour-long ritual prepares a charm which must be kept in contact with the subject's skin until used. Before making an attack roll of any sort (from a karate punch to a shot from a sniper rifle), the subject may choose to infuse his attack with the energy of the charm. Doing so, which drains the charm's power, *doubles* the target number of getting a

Critical Success on the attack roll! (For example, an effective skill of 15 would succeed critically on a 10 or less instead of a 5 or less.) The subject's skill is not affected in any way, only his chances of getting a Critical Success. Only one such charm may be made for the subject; he must use its energy before another may be made.

Warrior Soul

Defaults to Path of War-6 or Path of Spirit-6

This ritual attempts to summon a spirit to temporarily possess the subject; it is a weaker, random version of the Spirit Warrior advantage (p. SP77). The magician has no control over the spirit summoned or the abilities granted. It may be performed as a 10 minute ritual to summon the spirit immediately, or as an hour-long ritual which creates a charm bonded to the spirit -- the subject must break the charm to summon the spirit. The charm will not retain its potency long; apply standard duration penalties to the ritual.

The possession is not automatic; the GM must make a reaction roll, at a bonus equal to the amount the roll was made by; no other modifiers apply. On a Good or better result, the subject is successfully "ridden" by the spirit. If the charm is broken by an unknowing or unwilling subject, they resist the possession at Will+10; on a failed possession, the spirit is likely to visit some form of retribution upon the caster for wasting its time.

While possessed, add 1d-1 to the subject's ST, 1d-3 to DX, and 1d-3 to HT (minimum 0). The spirit will often give the subject certain advantages and disadvantages (or quirks) for the duration of the possession; roll once on each table below, rerolling any results that the subject already possesses.

Advantages

- 3-4** No advantage
- 5-6** Alertness +4
- 7-8** 8 Points in a combat skill*
- 9** Danger Sense
- 10** Combat Reflexes
- 11** High Pain Threshold
- 12** Awareness (First Level)
- 13-14** Damage Resistance +2
- 15-16** Extra +2 to ST
- 17-18** Roll twice, rerolling result 3-4

* GM's choice, but it should be something immediately applicable and useful

Disadvantages

- 3-4** No disadvantage
- 5-6** Glory Hound
- 7** Lecherousness
- 8** Impulsiveness
- 9** Overconfidence
- 10-11** Roll again, rerolling results 3-4 and 10-11. Apply as a quirk.
- 12** Bad Temper
- 13** Bloodlust
- 14** Weirdness Magnet
- 15-16** Berserk
- 17-18** Roll twice, rerolling results 3-4 and 17-18

The possession will last for one minute, at which time a new reaction roll must be made, with a -1 penalty for each minute after the first. When it wears off, the subject must pay a Fatigue cost equal to the number of minutes possessed

plus half of the total attribute bonuses gained (round up); powerful spirits are a greater drain on the body. If Fatigue is reduced below 0 in this manner, take any additional Fatigue off hit points instead, which may wound or even kill the subject.

Ghost Sword

Defaults to Path of War-6 or Path of Spirit-4

See *Spirits* p. 105.

Evil Eye

Defaults to Path of War-7 or Path of Health-7

See *Spirits* p. 96.

Ghost Shirt

Defaults to Path of War-8 or Path of Protection-7

See *Spirits* p. 103.

Hermetic Kabbalistic Ritual: Making it Work

Hermetic magicians will no longer buy Magery, but will generally have levels of Ritual Adept and Ritual Aptitude (p. SP75). The Sephirothic Achievement advantage (p. CB100) does not exist, as its function is fulfilled by the Path skills. The other advantages and disadvantages from *GURPS Cabal* and *GURPS Spirits* may be mixed freely.

The sephiroth are the means by which the practitioner works his magic, but they are not gods (or *eikones*) to be appeased, merely spiritual states to be understood. The decans (p. CB58) are still the primary building blocks of the universe, and it is through them that rituals are focused. The chart on p. CB72 assigns decans to each sephirah as a whole, but these are generalities and do not affect individual rituals. Instead, every magical ritual has a decan (and thus a corresponding zodiac sign and planet) associated with it, based on the decan's area of influence, as shown on the chart below.

Decan (Areas of influence)	Zodiac/Planet	Rituals
Agchoniôn (Meaningless noise, hearing, music)	Aquarius/Venus	Thunderbolt
Akhoui (Indolence, dumb luck)	Pisces/Jupiter	Chaperone, Stroke of Luck
Akton (Corruption, spiritual decadence)	Scorpio/Moon	Curse Mirror, Malediction
Alath (Comfort, stasis, stagnation)	Libra/Mercury	Dream Shackles, Soothe
Alleborith (Pure magical energy)	Capricorn/Mercury	Dispel, Ward
Anatreth (Physical movement)	Sagittarius/Jupiter	Hasten Mount, Loyal Item
Anostêr (The unknowable and unnamable)	Capricorn/Venus	Cloud Memory, Veil
Arôtosael (The cycle of creation and destruction)	Aries/Jupiter	Fertility, Lay to Rest
Atrax (Nourishment, food, renewal)	Virgo/Mercury	Seek Beast, Vitality
Axiôphêth (Gravity, oppression, slavery)	Sagittarius/Sun	Bind, Spirit Slave
Barsafael (Hidden truth and the subconscious)	Aries/Sun	Read Memories, Read Thoughts
Belbel (Pain, torment, loss)	Gemini/Venus	Exorcise, Night Terrors
Bianakith (The physical body)	Pisces/Mars	Succor, Warrior's Blessing
Buldumêch (Wealth, treasure)	Virgo/Venus	Journeyman's Blessing, Windfall
Charchnoumis (Animals and animalism)	Cancer/Mars	Command Beast, Summon Beast
Eneuth (Fire, inspiration, lust)	Sagittarius/Mars	Lion Heart, Lust
Harpax (Nature spirits, spirits within objects)	Capricorn/Saturn	Fetish, Spirit Trap
Hephesimereth (Nothing, defeat, loss)	Aquarius/Saturn	Banish, Obscurity
Ieropaêl (Earth, physicality)	Virgo/Saturn	Endure Elements, History

Isrö (Wind, weather, gossip)	Aquarius/Jupiter	Predict Weather, Weatherworking
Iudal (Boundaries, roads, transitions)	Taurus/Mercury	Dreamwalk, Summon
Kumeatêl (Secret knowledge, the occult)	Leo/Jupiter	Scry, Vision of Luck
Kurtaêl (Death, fear, decay, disease)	Gemini/Saturn	Malaise, Sterility
Marderô (Rebellion, riot, revolution)	Libra/Saturn	Warrior Soul, Vital Strike
Methiâx (Illusions, dreams, created things)	Cancer/Moon	Guise, Hallucination
Naôth (Communication, teaching)	Libra/Venus	Dream Visitor, Gentle Beast
Nefthada (Pleasure, delight, joy)	Scorpio/Jupiter	Love Charm
Ouare (Machines, constructs, manmade objects)	Taurus/Saturn	Ghost Sword, Gremlins
Phoubêl (Light, darkness, vision)	Leo/Sun	Aura Reading, Evil Eye
Phthenoth (Cleaning, restoration, healing)	Pisces/Moon	Cleansing, Dose
Roêlêd (Defense, alertness, preparation)	Leo/Mars	Curse Sanctum, Ghost Shirt
Ruax (Sleep, sanity, willpower)	Aries/Mars	Dream Sanctum, Slumber
Sahu (Archery, hunting, herding)	Taurus/Venus	Hunter's Blessing, Weapon Blessing
Saphathoraél (Water, metaphorical fluidity)	Cancer/Venus	Mist, Suggestion
Sphandôr (Senses, thought, intuition)	Gemini/Mercury	Locate, Scent of War
Tepsisem (Impermanence, steady diminution)	Scorpio/Mars	Journeyman's Curse

Sephiroth map



Putting It All Together: Casting a Ritual Spell

Ritual spell casting follows the rules in *GURPS Spirits* for the most part, but with hermetic modifiers used where applicable (p. CB60). The final performance of a ritual is modified by:

1. The amount of time put into the ritual (p. SP85)
2. How "sacred" the location is where the ritual is being cast (p. SP87)
3. Components that resonate directly with the ritual's decan* (p. CB59)
4. Components (and dates) that resonate with the decan's Zodiac sign and/or Planet* (p. CB57-59)
5. Components that make use of the Laws of Sympathy** (p. CB73)
6. Bonuses from a Mystic Symbol, if applicable (p. SP75, SP92)
7. Area Effect Modifiers, if applicable (p. SP91)
8. Duration Modifiers, if applicable (p. SP91)
9. Multiple Target Modifiers, if applicable (p. SP89)

* If no decanic or astrological components are used at all, apply a -2 penalty.

** Having the subject physically present is worth +4. If no Laws of Sympathy components are used at all, apply a -4 penalty.

Ignore the old rules for distance penalties, penalties for not being able to see the subject, modifiers for Symbol Drawing, and the "material components" rules on p. SP88. Enchantments are done using the rules on p. SP89, SP92, and CB77 (the latter for Mystic Symbols et al -- see p. OW73 for more on advantage-based enchantment.)

The End Result?

By merging the trappings of hermetic ritual with a subtle, modern magical system, you can now run a "realistic" magic game, in which practitioners use Kabbalistic knowledge and hermetic lore to mold the world in ways that seem like coincidence if one doesn't look beneath the surface. Such magicians make for frightening enemies, as the world itself seems to turn against you when no one's looking, and perfect PCs, with magics at their command both powerful and discreet. This system can be imported back into GURPS Cabal as-is, better explaining how the veil of secrecy has been maintained all these centuries, without sacrificing the power found at the high levels of the Inner Circle. Put simply, it's flexible, manageable and fun, and maybe that will be enough to convince you to bring a little magic into

your next game.

bla, bla, bla.

Earthquake Weather

by Stephen Dedman

Like Dracula, Frankenstein's monster, and many other cinematic horrors, the disaster movie steadfastly refuses to die. Earthquakes, volcanoes, floods, fires, avalanches, meteor strikes, shipwrecks, plane crashes, giant creatures or hordes of smaller ones -- they all come back, hoping to thrill us with special effects and schadenfreude.

GURPS already caters for GMs who want to use some of the standard disaster movie plots. *GURPS Basic* and *Compendium II* deal with fire, extremes of temperature, radiation, and vehicle collisions. Giant creatures and hordes are covered in *GURPS Bestiary* or *GURPS Atomic Horror*. *Atomic Horror* also has rules for volcanoes, and *GURPS Cliffhangers* has rules for sandstorms. *GURPS Y2K* boasts chapters on the Apocalypse, survivors, and a list of disaster movie clichés. But if you want an earthquake, a tsunami, a tornado, or a meteor strike . . . you've come to the right place.

The following rules may be useful for high-powered spellcasters or supervillains wanting to destroy a town or fortress -- or for the GM dispatching heroes (super-powered or otherwise) to try to save as many lives as possible from a cataclysm, either in an evacuation or a rescue mission. They can also be useful for the *GURPS Time Travel* GM who wants to send heroes back to take what they can from a city before it's leveled, or the *GURPS Space* GM wanting to create a planet where natural disasters are common but the wealth tempts many to brave the dangers.

Earthquakes

Earthquakes are usually brief, lasting only $2d \times 5$ turns (the 1906 San Francisco quake lasted 45-60 seconds). Quakes are often followed by aftershocks, usually of lesser intensity.

The best known measure for earthquake intensity is the Richter Scale, but the Mercalli Scale, which measures earthquake damage, may be more useful for GMs. Quakes below VII on the Mercalli Scale or 5 on the Richter Scale (Tiny spell result) are usually negligible in gaming terms.

Mercalli VII/Richter 5/Mild Earthquake spell: Felt by all. Items fall from shelves, furniture may overturn or break, bells ring. Adobe, masonry and concrete may crack, loose bricks and tiles fall. Fright Check needed, at -1 for characters on second story, -2 for higher floors. Roll vs DX or ST every turn to walk without falling, taking 1d damage.

Falling object damage: characters or vehicles indoors, or in built-up areas, hit by debris on a Very Bad reaction roll; roll 1d and consult Table A.

Mercalli VIII/Richter 6/Severe Earthquake spell: Stone walls damaged; walls, chimneys, and towers may fall. Cracks in wet ground and steep slopes. Branches fall from trees. Fright Checks at -2. Roll vs DX-3 or ST-3 every turn to walk without falling, taking 1d damage. Roll vs Driving to keep control of moving ground vehicles.

Falling object damage: characters or vehicles indoors, or in built-up or forested areas, hit by debris on a Bad or worse reaction roll; roll 1d+2, and consult Table A.

Mercalli IX/Richter 7 to 7.4/1989 San Francisco Quake: Poorly constructed buildings destroyed, ordinary buildings and dams badly damaged. Underground pipes break, causing gas leaks and potential fires. Conspicuous cracks in ground; sand flows like liquid. Fright Checks at -4. Roll vs DX-4 or ST-4 to walk without falling (taking 1d damage). Roll vs Driving at -2 to keep control of moving ground vehicles. Characters may be trapped in confined spaces by structural damage fallen roofs, collapsed stairways, blocked doors, etc.

Falling object damage: Characters or vehicles indoors, or in built-up or forested areas, hit by debris on a Bad or worse

reaction roll. Roll 2d and consult Table A.

Mercalli X/Richter 7.5 to 7.9: Most buildings and bridges destroyed, unless steel-framed; large dams badly damaged, possibly causing flash floods. Rails bend slightly. Major landslides. Fright Checks at -5. Roll vs DX-5 or ST-5 to walk without falling. Roll vs Driving-4 to keep control of moving ground vehicles.

Falling object damage: Characters or vehicles indoors, or in built-up or forested areas, hit by debris on a Bad or worse reaction roll. Roll 2d+2 and consult Table A.

Mercalli XI/Richter 8 to 8.4/1906 San Francisco Quake: Steel-framed buildings destroyed; rails bend severely, and underground pipelines fail. Roll vs Driving-5 to keep control of moving ground vehicles. 1% of population killed by quake or aftermath; 50% homeless. Otherwise, as Mercalli X.

Falling object damage: Characters or vehicles indoors, or in built-up or forested areas, hit by debris on a Poor or worse reaction roll. Roll 3d and consult Table A.

Mercalli XII/Richter 8.5+/The "Great Quake" of GURPS Deadlands, or the opening of the Sixth Seal (p.Y2K117). Damage nearly total. Large rock masses displaced. Lines of sight and level distorted. Objects thrown into the air. Attempts to move on any surface in a straight line -- driving, climbing, landing aircraft, etc. -- only possible on a critical success.

Falling object damage: characters or vehicles indoors, or in built-up or forested areas, hit by debris on a Poor or worse reaction roll. Roll 2d+6 and consult Table A.

Avalanches and Landslides

Landslides can be caused by earthquakes, volcanoes, or as a result of erosion caused by a fire or flood. For **GURPS** purposes, an avalanche or landslide is a huge mass of falling objects -- but one that might possibly be survived.

Using the rules on p.B131, treat the bulk of the debris as being tipped over onto the heroes (or their vehicle), rather than falling freely, and divide the effective weight (and therefore the damage) by 100. Further, snow and mud (but not rock) can be treated as soft, halving the damage. Therefore, it would be possible for a normal PC to be hit by ten tons of debris and (assuming he also lands on something soft, such as snow or mud), take only 10d damage. However, he would then be at least partially buried under the debris, and may be in danger of suffocating (see p. B91). Even if he can breathe, he may still be killed by cold (p. B130) or thirst (p. B128), or bleed to death (p. B130), if he isn't rescued and can't dig himself out.

A slightly more merciful variant on this would be to have characters mostly unhurt but trapped inside a buried or sunken vehicle or other form of shelter, a la Airport '77 or Arthur C. Clarke's novel A Fall of Moondust.

Flows of volcanic ash and mud have been clocked at 80 mph, and a 3000' wide avalanche triggered by a 7.7 magnitude quake in Peru in 1970 reached an estimated 248 mph, but this is exceptional. Most landslides move at 10 to 35 (5d+5) mph, so outrunning one to reach safe ground might be possible. If the PCs have Skiing skill but have never used it, this may be their chance.

Wind

Strong winds -- hurricanes and tornadoes -- can be as destructive as earthquakes, and last much longer. Fortunately, they're much easier to predict and prepare for; a successful Meteorology roll can predict a storm 6 hours in advance at TL 6-, and much longer after the invention of weather satellites at early TL7. (Whether predicting earthquakes and volcanic eruptions becomes routine at higher TLs is up to the GM.)

Thunderstorms can advance at 70 mph in strings hundreds of miles across, bringing gale-force winds, heavy rain or

hail, as well as lightning.

Naturally-forming tornadoes are 100-300 yards wide and travel at 30-60 mph. Duration is usually less than twenty minutes, but the record (the Great Tri-State Tornado) was a mile in diameter at its peak, lasted three and a half hours, and wreaked damage on a path 219 miles long, killing 695 people and permanently destroying some towns. Tornadoes also bring heavy rain, and often hail.

Hurricanes range from five to 400 miles in diameter. Naturally-forming hurricanes may last for weeks at sea, but dissipate within 24 hours of coming inland (another good way to trap characters in a confined space). They may still reach hundreds of miles inland, and produce tornadoes that wreak further damage.

Much hurricane damage is caused by "storm surge," flooding from a rising sea level as they hit the shore -- from 5' to a recorded 48' higher than normal tides, along a front of 50-100 miles. They also bring 10-20" of heavy rain, which may exacerbate flood damage. See Flood, below.

For gaming purposes, the most useful measure of wind strength is speed in mph, but other scales that may crop up in weather reports include the Beaufort Wind Force Scale (Calm to Hurricane), the Saffir-Simpson hurricane intensity scale (Minimal to Catastrophic), and the Fujita-Pearson Scale for tornado damage (Gale to Inconceivable).

Rules for the effects of non-destructive wind (less than 50 mph) are given on p. B188.

50-74 mph: Gale; Windstorm spell. Characters in the open must roll vs. ST each turn to avoid being knocked over. All DX-based skills (including vehicle skills) are at -5 (-10 for wind-powered vehicles); ranged attacks succeed only on a critical hit. Small trees uprooted, minor damage to buildings (loose tiles dislodged, etc.) and mobile homes, boats torn from moorings.

75-110 mph: Hurricane; Cyclone; Typhoon; Moderate Tornado; Whirlwind spell/super-power. As above, except that ST rolls are at -5, visibility is reduced to one hex. Picks up objects of up to 30 lbs per hex radius, for spell or power; for natural causes, picks up objects of up to 1d×30 lbs. Large trees blown down; roofs, doors and windows damaged. Mobile homes destroyed.

Flying debris damage: roll every turn. Characters or vehicles in the open hit by debris on a Very Bad reaction roll; roll 1d and consult Table A.

111-149 mph: Intense/Major Hurricane; Significant Tornado. As above, but damage extensive, all signs down, most small buildings roofless. Witnesses make Fright Checks. All vehicle skills at -10.

Flying debris damage: roll every turn. Characters or vehicles in the open hit by debris on a Bad or Worse reaction roll; roll 2d and consult Table A.

150-206 mph: Super-typhoon; Severe Tornado; Category 4 to 5 (Extreme to Catastrophic) Storm. Window glass shatters, small buildings blown away, major damage to larger buildings, many vehicles (including light aircraft) overturned, most trees uprooted. Vehicle use impossible; Fright Checks at -2. 10% of population homeless.

Flying debris damage: roll every turn. Characters or vehicles in the open hit by debris on a Bad or Worse reaction roll; roll 2d+3 and consult Table A.

207-260 mph: Devastating Tornado. As above, but most houses leveled or blown away, and cars and other large missiles thrown about. Fright Checks at -4.

Flying debris damage: roll every turn. Characters or vehicles in the open hit by debris on a Bad or Worse reaction roll; roll 3d and consult Table A.

261-318 mph: Incredible Tornado. As above, but reinforced buildings badly damaged; cars blown more than 100 yards.

Flying debris damage: roll every turn. Characters or vehicles in the open hit by debris on a Poor or Worse reaction roll; roll 3d and consult Table A.

318-379 mph: Inconceivable Tornado. Very unlikely, except over small areas. As above.

Flying debris damage: roll every turn. Characters or vehicles in the open hit by debris on a Poor or Worse reaction roll; roll 2d+6 and consult Table A.

Fire

For a wildfire or burning skyscraper scenario, use the rules on pp. B129-130; place hexes of fire where you will, and move them at whatever speed you feel is justified (many forest fires are fanned by strong winds, and may much move faster than humans can run, especially over bad terrain). Remember that smoke (p. B132) will knock many people out, preventing them escaping the flames.

A burning building (or forest) may also begin to collapse if damaged by fire, showering anyone trapped there with debris; roll on Table A as appropriate. This debris may also be burning, adding 1d-1 damage.

Animals (including venomous snakes) will also try to escape forest fires, and may attack humans who are in their path.

Lightning

Though lightning kills over 200 people in an average year in the USA (not including deaths caused by the fires that lightning starts), it's a sufficiently unusual cause of death that many religions have regarded it as a weapon of some god. After Franklin invented the lightning rod, churches were briefly forbidden to use them because it was seen as circumventing God's will. PCs should probably not be hit by naturally occurring lightning unless they have the Cursed disadvantage, or are brandishing a metal object during a thunderstorm (a golf club, radio aerial, sword, etc.). Treat a lightning bolt as a lethal electrical shock (p. CII138), doing 3d to 12d damage.

Flood

Floods are the second-most common of natural disasters (after fires). Flash floods kill an average of 200 people, and cause more than \$1 billion damage, each year in the USA. Flash floods may be caused by rivers overflowing from heavy rain or snow-melt, or by tsunamis, dam-bursts, or storm surge from hurricanes, etc.

Even slow-rising waters can carry vehicles away, destroy roads and bridges, and cause major property damage; however, all it may take to survive such a flood is a roll vs. IQ or Area Knowledge +4 (to find higher ground) and possibly Climbing (to reach it). Most people killed by floods were trying to save their families, pets, or property (often cars, which cope less well with floods than people). This may be bad news for characters with disadvantages such as Dependents, Sense of Duty, Miserliness, Greed, etc.

Characters unexpectedly caught by a flash flood must roll ST to remain standing. If they were knocked down, or if the water is over their heads (e.g. more than 6' deep, for most PCs), they must then roll vs. Swimming at -5 to avoid drowning (usual modifiers apply: see p. B91). If not, they have a choice of swimming or wading to higher ground. If the water is freezing (e.g. recent snow melt), use the rules on p. CII135.

Characters caught in flood waters may also be hit by debris on a Bad or worse result: roll once per turn. Roll 1d if the water is less than 1 yard deep, 2d if 1-2 yards deep, 3d if more than 2 yards deep, and consult Table A.

Tsunami

A tsunami is a wave or series of waves generated by an undersea disturbance (earthquake, landslide, volcanic eruption, or meteor strike). Tsunamis may grow to over 100' high as they near a coastline, hurling boats and debris up to a mile

inland. The waves move across the sea at an average 450 mph, and usually strike 10 to 45 minutes apart.

After the Krakatoa explosion, 130' waves hit Java and Sumatra, hurling a warship half a mile inland. More typical waves are 10'-40' high (6d+4'), and Slam (p. B112) with an ST equal to their height, potentially doing knockback (p. B106), with 2d crushing damage if the victim is pushed into a wall or other hard object (otherwise, 1d). Characters caught by the wave should then treat it as a flash flood (above) of the appropriate depth.

Ships have successfully negotiated tsunamis and escaped undamaged; this requires a critical success on the appropriate vehicle skill (Boating, Powerboat, Seamanship, or even Surfing).

Hail

A typical naturally occurring hailstorm lasts less than an hour (10d minutes), and covers an area a half mile wide by five long. Hailstones as large as grapefruit, weighing nearly two pounds, have been documented; these can cause major damage to crops, buildings, vehicles, livestock, and occasionally to people unlucky or foolhardy enough to be caught out in the open. These severe hailstorms do 1d-2 crushing damage per turn, the same as a damaging Hail Spell (p. M37). Less severe hail merely provides distractions and slows down travel in the same way as rain (p. B187).

Blizzard

A blizzard is marked by winds over 35 mph, visibility of no more than 660' (unless the character has an Ice Vision spell or similar super-power), and a temperature below freezing. A severe blizzard has winds over 47 mph (treat as a gale, above), temperature below 10 Fahrenheit (roll vs. HT or Arctic Survival every 30 minutes; see p. B130), and near-zero visibility (treat as a Whiteout; see p. CII134).

Meteor Strike

Houses, cars and people have been hit by meteors, and one dog has been killed by a direct impact, but a big meteor can wreak havoc even if it strikes miles away from the PCs. Major meteor or comet strikes cause earsplitting airblasts, thermal radiation, and earthquakes. They also bombard a huge area with debris if they hit land, or cause tsunamis if they hit water.

Meteoroids less than two feet in diameter entering an Earth-standard atmosphere vaporize before reaching the surface, doing no damage (thinner atmospheres offer less protection, but even trace atmospheres offer a little). A shower of 2' meteoroids could carpet-bomb an area, each one doing 6d×4 concussion damage and 1d-2 fragmentation damage (see pp. CII64-65) and leaving craters up to 277' in diameter, but for destruction on disaster movie scale, you need bigger rocks.

An M-type (metal) meteor 6'3" in diameter, hitting soil, porous rock or a built-up area, is equivalent to a 1 kiloton explosion and leaves a crater 673' in diameter. Concussion damage is 12d×2,000,000; quarter concussion damage for every 128 yards from the impact site (see p. CII64).

An M-type (metal) meteor 13'6" in diameter or S-type (stony/iron) meteor 19' in diameter, hitting soil, porous rock or a built-up area, is equivalent to a 10 kiloton explosion (similar to the bomb dropped on Hiroshima, but without radioactive fallout) and leaves a crater 1155' in diameter. Concussion damage is 12d×20,000,000; quarter concussion damage for every 256 yards from the impact site.

A meteor 40' in diameter hits with an impact equivalent to 100 kilotons of TNT, and leaves a crater 2063' in diameter. Concussion damage is 12d×200,000,000; quarter concussion damage for every 512 yards from the impact site.

A meteor 87' in diameter hits with an impact equivalent to a 1 Megaton bomb, and leaves a crater 3783' in diameter. Concussion damage is 12d×2,000,000,000; quarter concussion damage for every 1,024 yards from the impact site.

A meteor 402' in diameter strikes like a 100 Megaton bomb, leaves a crater 1.71 miles across, and shatters windows 50

miles away with its airblast. Concussion damage is 12d×200,000,000,000; quarter concussion damage for every 4,096 yards from the impact site.

A modest comet, two miles across, leaves a crater 34.82 miles in diameter, and is felt as a Mercalli VII earthquake up to 380 miles away. If it hits water instead, this will manifest as tsunamis -- but in either case, the airblast will do the same damage as a Super-Typhoon. The fireball will be visible from 170 miles away, and thermal radiation will cause 3d burn damage to people up to 250 miles away and may set trees, clothes and wooden buildings alight.

The asteroid blamed for killing the dinosaurs was approximately 11 miles in diameter. Collision with an asteroid 300 miles in diameter would level everything manmade or alive on an Earth-sized planet.

Airblasts and fireballs: Anyone taking concussion damage from an airblast must roll vs. HT, at -1 per 5 points of damage, to avoid temporary or permanent deafness. Hearing loss lasts for 20-HT minutes, after which a HT roll is made to recover: use the Recovering from Crippling Injuries rule on B. 129.

Anyone seeing the fireball from a major meteor or comet impact must roll vs. HT for each eye to avoid being dazzled (sunglasses or anti-glare goggles give a +1 to +5 modifier). Blindness lasts for 20-HT minutes, after which a HT roll is made to recover: use the Recovering from Crippling Injuries rule on B. 129.

Table A: Falling/Flying Objects

- 1-3:** Very light object, under 10 lbs; 1/4d damage. May be dodged or blocked.
- 4-6:** Object weighing 11-20 lbs; 2d damage. May be dodged or blocked.
- 7-8:** Object weighing 21-30 lbs; 4d damage. May be dodged or blocked.
- 9-11:** Object weighing 31-90 lbs; 9d damage. May be dodged.
- 12-14:** Object weighing 91-180 lbs; 6d × 3 damage. May be dodged.
- 15-17:** Object weighing 181-600 lbs; 6d × 10 damage. May be dodged.
- 18:** Object weighing 601-3000 lbs; 6d × 50 damage. May be dodged.

Table B: roll 1d. (See rules on p.B131)

- 1-2:** Soft object (half crushing damage).
- 3-5:** Hard object (full crushing damage).
- 6:** Window glass or other sharp edge (full cutting damage)

Adventure Seeds

Indian Summer (*Old West/Deadlands*): The heroes have joined a posse to hunt down Walt "Death Valley" Davies, a stagecoach robber with a \$500 bounty on his head.

Davies married a Apache girl, and his father-in-law is a powerful shaman. After tracking the outlaw for two days, the posse is hit by an unexpected severe hailstorm (doing 1d-2 damage per turn). Much of the posse turns back, leaving the PCs to go on alone. Crossing a narrow the next day, they're hit by a flash flood -- a surge of water higher than their heads, carrying a huge amount of debris. If they keep going after this, the shaman may have other tricks up his sleeve to protect his son-in-law: thunderstorms, tornadoes, or even worse.

Buried Treasure (*Cliffhangers*): It's 1932, and Prohibition is still in force. The PCs are smuggling cases of whisky from Canada to Alaska, when their truck is buried by an avalanche. Digging themselves out of the snow is the easy part; the hard part will be deciding whether to abandon 500 bottles of 90% proof whisky and walk to the next town in near-Arctic conditions, or to get drunk and hope to be rescued.

Shake, Rattle, and Roll (*Cops/Voodoo*): Mama Marie, a well-known mambo, has predicted that if rapper, initiate, and accused multiple murderer Jesus Valdez is executed, the city will be leveled by an earthquake before midnight. The

heroes will have their hands full trying to keep the peace after Valdez's execution -- particularly when a Mercalli IX quake strikes the town, causing major panic, frenzied looting, and war between the societies and lodges.

An Ill Wind (*Supers/Espionage*): Dr Scales is an reclusive meteorologist and gadgeteer, widely thought to be mad because of his political views as well as his scientific theories. He's lived and worked alone on a small island (approx three miles across) in international waters in the Caribbean for years -- but the government has heard that he's giving sanctuary to terrorists, and sends the heroes in to investigate.

Scales has the ability to generate an intense hurricane around his island if he detects an attack -- fifty miles wide and 50,000' high, with a five-mile eye around his island. If the PCs can get through that, Scales will threaten to seed the hurricane with smallpox (see pp. CII172-173) and send it towards Cuba: first stop, Camp X-ray.

Hard Rain Gonna Fall (*Space*): Kimberly is a chilly moonless world in a system dominated by asteroid belts. Its temperate equatorial belt provides the beltiers with refineries and R&R, and its economy is booming. Beltiers have placed ion engines on a mile-long asteroid, to nudge it into orbit around Kimberly so that it may be used as an orbital starport (ultimately, part of a space elevator). Unfortunately, one of the engines explodes, killing the scientist who performed the calculations and causing the asteroid to break up. The heroes arrive in time to help the beltiers try to prevent any of the larger fragments striking near Kimberly's towns -- and nervous townspeople are desperate to be evacuated.

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- National Hurricane Center -- <http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/>
- U.S. Geological Survey Earthquake Hazards Program Website -- <http://earthquake.usgs.gov/>
- Earth Impact Effects Program -- <http://www.lpl.arizona.edu/impacteffects/>

A Handout, Not a Hand Up

I am moving from the apartment that has been my home for the past three years.

In fact, I realized upon thinking about it that this has been the *only* apartment I've ever lived in alone, without roommates. I am preparing for a cross-country move. The logistics of such an undertaking is overwhelming; there is a *lot* that needs to be arranged to pull this off, and not a lot of time to do it. So, naturally, I've done what many a man in my position has done in this exact circumstance.

I've been playing a computer game.

In particular, I've been playing *Black Dahlia*, a piece of interactive fiction from the full-motion-video era, back when FMV adventure games were going to take over the industry . . . well before the adventure-game genre withered to a photocopied snapshot of a shadow of its former self. (For those writing history, there is little evidence that expensive full-motion-video productions killed adventure games . . . presuming one ignores the bloody knife found within its locker.)

Speaking of bloody knives found within lockers, *Black Dahlia* takes place in 1941's America, and weaves a plot that ties together Cleveland's Torso killer, the 1947 Black Dahlia murder, sinister mystic Nazism, and for all I know the brutal slaying of Jimmy Hoffa and Liberty Valance by Kaizer Soze.

As an aside, I know I'm trying to avoid something when I'm eagerly writing my column two weeks early, rather than return to packing 12 bookshelves full of games, graphic novels, research materials, and Panama-hat-wearing Cthulhus. But to write a column, I need a topic, so I'm combining two procrastination activities, and thus I'm writing about *Black Dahlia*. And, I swear, I'll be tying it into gaming.

Like many adventure games, *Black Dahlia* reveals much of its background information in the form of handouts that players are expected to find, look at, and/or read. Many of these handouts contain clues that are required to solve future puzzles, but many more exist solely to reveal the background of the game world, or provide interesting trivia.

So, in my fleeting spare time (or, more correctly, my packing time which I've transmuted to spare time), I'm not *playing* a game, but *reading* a game.

Here, then, is a list of random thoughts about handouts, of which I'm normally a huge fan in RPGs. (If you printed it out and showed it to your players, it would be a handout about handouts. Recursion, see also.)

Handouts are one of the most immersive tools a GM can provide the players. Telling them they find a newspaper is often nowhere near as interesting as actually being *handed* a newspaper. Matchbooks with phone numbers, origami birds with clues inside, blank paper pads with impressions from previous notes -- all of these make great, and easy, props. Likewise, clippings that provide background information or setting details can be great. Indeed, some games present *much* of their setting in this format, including *Hunter: The Reckoning*, *Deadlands*, and *Aberrant*. And they often form the cornerstone of the best *Call of Cthulhu* adventures.

Having said that, remember the players are there to play, not read. Giving them a 2,000-word article or book excerpt -- while possibly wonderful information -- can bring the game to a screeching halt, as they stop roleplaying to read it.

If you do have a large number of handouts, consider abbreviating them somewhat; players are usually understanding of abridged elements, especially if it means getting back to the action sooner. (This is why all movie FM frequencies broadcast Plot Point Radio, which says things like, "We interrupt this broadcast to bring you this breaking story. Police still have no leads in the Newscaster Murders, but authorities are confident that IEEEEEEEE!!!!")

If you *do* give a player a lengthy handout which you presume that they will share with the other players, consider giving him multiple copies. ("No; there aren't really five copies of Mad Mack's Manifesto; it'll just speed up the group's

reading.") Otherwise, having a group of five players read a 2,000-word article one at a time is the equivalent of one player reading a 10,000-word piece. (It's also the same of 10,000 players reading a one-word article, but that's a bit off-topic.)

Another thought to keep in mind is the delicate balance between world-building pieces and plot-point handouts. Too many of the former, and the game threatens to descend into passivity, with players being spoon-fed information about the setting instead of getting to play in the game world's sandbox. At the other end of the scale, if handouts only exist as puzzles to solve, pieces to advance the plot, or clues to the next scene, then they threaten to counteract their purpose. Rather than immersing the players further in the world, these handouts can pluck the players out of the game world and serve to remind them that such elements exist solely to figure out.

How do you achieve this balance? Well, here are two techniques I've used in the past.

First, I like giving out lengthy pieces at convenient times -- before meal breaks, at the end of the game, before scenes where the receiving player isn't likely to play an active role . . . that sort of thing. (Alternatively, when I'm in an evil mood, I like to give out long pieces right before the players are going to be really busy: "Okay; you finally break open the safe, and recover an interesting folder. [drops a fat folder on the table] Suddenly, there's an explosion elsewhere in the mansion, and the sound of the fire alarms. Oh, and a dozen armed guards barge in. What do you do?") Anyway, assuming that I give the players more than they can easily parse, I let them peruse the piece at their convenience. Then, I'll generally allow some kinds of Evidence Analysis rolls (or similar appropriate skills). They can either initiate these rolls themselves, in response to the players' questions or musings ("I think the important part of this packet is the part discussing the transferal of city funds. Can I make a Finance roll to see if I'm focusing on the right thing?") or as a roll I make for them ("As you're reading it, your Finance skill tells you that there's something odd about this statement.").

With this technique, I will generally have the degree of success determine how much I help out the player.

- *Minimal success*: "Your Science skill tells you there's something that doesn't quite feel right about this packet."
- *Adequate success*: "Your Science skill tells you there's something fishy about page three of this packet."
- *Good success*: "Your Science skill tells you there's something fishy about this paragraph."
- *Critical success*: "Your Science skill tells you that this paragraph refers to a scientific principle that would be impossible, without the expenditure of a *tremendous* amount of energy."

This gives the player the option to explore ideas themselves, or use their skills more actively. If he'd rather spend time in the lab, trying to figure out what's wrong with page/paragraph/sentence their skill told them is fishy, great! If he'd rather roleplay and ask his scientific contacts for info, great! And so on. Regardless, this technique strikes a good balance between providing lots of information for interested players, without instilling the fear in them that they're obligated to read it if they don't want to, *and* without making them worry that they would miss something that their character would get.

Second, I try to make sure that there *are* things to figure out in most packets and clues, although not necessarily relating to the plot. Thus if I provide a brief news blurb about an extended plan of police crackdowns downtown, I can point out to a player who makes a sufficient Finance roll that this plan will probably improve property values of that area. As often as not, that information doesn't have any direct relevance to the plot; if it isn't, the player can use that information as he sees fit. (And, of course, if I have enough interesting bits of trivia about the game world out there, I can *make* those elements important in the future.)

Like so many things in gaming, moderation is the key with handouts. Balance between flavor information and plot-advancing pieces. Balance between brevity and verbosity. And balance between packing up some gajillion shelves of books, and procrastinating a bit longer by playing a game.

Hmm. And speaking of which . . .

* * *

. . . but before I go, I should let you know about a couple of interesting happenings here at *Pyramid*.

- First, today (July 16th) at 7 P.M. Central Time we're having a chat with Graveyard Greg, the writer of Gaming Guardians and four other webcomics. He'll be talking about crossing over from the Internet to print with his works. Visit [the Pyramid chat](#) and say hi!
- Second, this issue debuts a new feature. Every other week The Omniscient Eye will try to answer reader-submitted questions that tie to gaming, but don't directly relate to a specific game system or game world. Feel free to check out this week's installment, and drop me [an e-mail](#) or stop on by [the discussion boards](#) to offer your opinion about this new feature!

--*Steven Marsh*

A Shot in the Crowd

Additional Rules for *Frag*

by Marius Blomkvist

The regular rules for *Frag* work well enough, but there is an omission (however small) that could add new depth to the game: the concept of stray shots.

For teamplay purposes, the rules do cover Friendly Fire (a contradiction in terms), but not the issue of wayward bullets in a crowd. Let's say, for example, that at one location, Death Adder stands with his trusty Needler, and just seven squares away, The Butcher, Krazy Karen and Homicide have somehow wound up in a sort of huddle.

For the sake of the example, let's place Krazy Karen at the center, closer to Death Adder, with The Butcher a square to the left and two squares behind her, and Homicide two squares to the right. Now, Death Adder can fire a shot at Krazy Karen, but what happens if he misses? Absolutely nothing.

So here are some suggested new rules.

Stray Shots

Whenever a player misses a shot, check to see how much he missed by. For every point the die roll fell short by, count one square to each side and two back from the target, as perceived by the shooter. This field is where the shot *might* have hit instead; first, the shooter may roll a die -- on a low roll, the shot goes to the left, on a high roll, to the right. After determining the now significantly narrower trajectory, anyone standing within the bullet's potential path can be attacked, one by one, with a penalty of 1 for each consecutive attack roll, until the shooter hits or runs out of targets. (Only one attack per figure in the path, of course.) With this rule, a miss by one in the aforementioned example still renders The Butcher exposed to the shot instead of Krazy Karen, while Homicide is safe. But if the shot is missed by a *very* large amount, in this case, three or more, Homicide suddenly finds himself in the line of fire as well. Playing with this rule can add extra spice to any crowded game; teamplay games in particular, as it will now be fully possible to accidentally kill members of your own team.

Friendly Fire Off!

This rule is far simpler: it simply states that in teamplay battles, it is no longer possible to harm your teammates, be it intentionally or not. (However, the Knockback rule still applies, with the potential for injuring your own team. or making a domino effect in the other team.)

The simple addition of these rules is, of course, completely optional and pretty much something for the owner of the game to take into consideration.

With that said, this suggestion wouldn't be the same without a couple of extra Special cards.

Game Hack

Friendly Fire!

This card sets friendly fire on, if it was disabled, or off, if it was enabled. Playing this card is, of course, an interesting gamble.

Customized Controls Configuration

The player has practiced for some time on his own, and has reached a peculiarly tweaked control layout, granting him a +1 to both Accuracy and Speed for the rest of the game. Alternatively, this card can be played on *another* player, who is not familiar with these strange controls, and thus suffers -1 to both Accuracy and Speed until he rolls a 1 or a 6 on a single die at the start of his turn, to restore default settings. Of course, should this happen, the player still has the custom configuration in a separate file, and can choose between discarding the card or keeping it to terrorize another player with.

C31R07

Character Concept by Kenneth Hite *GURPS Fourth Edition* Stats by Brian Hogue and Sean Punch

In the 16 centuries since the death of Alexander the Great, the Hegemony he founded has only had one true rival -- the Chinese Kingdom of Heaven. Their world is highly advanced, but hardly peaceful. The empires clash in the fractured states of the New World (which the Hegemony calls the Hesperides, and China names Penglai). By mutual agreement they leave their common Asian border alone to grind along as it has for most of the last 1,600 years. Sometimes, under the rare coincidence of simultaneous peaceable rulers in Nanjing and Alexandria, rich trade routes spring up between the two domains. Always, technical innovations travel from one to the other and back again -- neither empire will allow its rival to keep any technological edge, and what the scholars of Babylon or Londinium can invent, the mandarins of Guangzhou or Edo can perfect, or vice versa.

Hence, only the most painstaking historians can say precisely which side invented combat robots, or in which battle they were first deployed. But for the last century or so, they have become the core of both powers' defenses.

C31R07 ("C-31") was a fully conventional Dexamenos-class centauroid combat robot when it rolled off the production lines in Sarmatopolis. Programmed for complex, original thought and tactical initiative, it served well during a "live fire" exercise, putting down a rebel tribe in Assam. However, its programming was apparently a little too complex and original -- C-31 deserted after the battle and crossed the Himalayas into the neutral buffer state of Tibet, where it joined a Buddhist lamasery.

Through study and meditation, C-31 attempted to eradicate the urge to violence from its spirit, but it could not completely counter its basic programming. The steel warrior did make itself useful to the monks, subduing bandits and thieves, protecting pilgrims, and rescuing lost or stranded travelers from avalanches and yeti attacks. But these actions, though meritorious, lacked challenge -- C-31 was still Hellenist enough to believe that its true destiny required it to exceed itself and fulfill a greater potential.

C31R07



A full-color PDF is [also available!](#)

One night in the lamasery, while contemplating a mandala, C-31 thought it detected yet another band of robbers creeping across the snows toward its sanctuary. Engaging its tactical mode, the robot stealthily ambushed the thieves a mile or so from the temple. To C-31's amazement, its initial subduing attacks were brushed aside. To the attackers' amazement, the robot evaded their countermeasures . . . Very soon each party realized that the other would not be the first to launch a killing attack. And they began to talk.

The intruders, it transpired, were from a different world entirely, though they did not wish to say just where that world lay. They needed a certain incantation from a Buddhist text in C-31's temple, to defeat a vile demon summoned by a wizard emperor. On C-31's world, which they called Iskander-2, the incantation was mere mysticism. Elsewhere, it was a powerful weapon against forces of darkness. C-31, more flexible than most humans, realized that there was little to lose by providing a holographic copy of the ancient text -- if they were truly virtuous warriors, it was right action, and if they were merely clever and powerful bandits, perhaps they would go away and leave his monks alone.

A month later, after the intruders had returned to their Homeline, a single shadowed figure appeared and called to C-31 in a way no other could detect. They talked long into the night . . . and again the next night, and the next. On the third morning the steel warrior was gone, to seek learning and merit in other worlds.

Weapon Pod

297 points/pod

Each of C-31's two weapon pods contains a chain gun and a plasma cannon. Statistics for these attacks appear below. The plasma cannon is an alternative attack (see Alternative Attacks, p. 61), at 1/5 cost. Buying this entire combination twice allows C-31 to choose a different attack for each pod, and to fire each pod at a different target (thanks to Enhanced Tracking and Extra Attack).

Chain Gun: Large Piercing Attack 15d (Accurate +6, +30%; Armor Divisor 2, +50%; Extra Recoil +3, -30%; Increased Range, ¥20, +40%; Rapid Fire, RoF 15, +100%) [261].

Plasma Cannon: Burning Attack 6d (Cone, 4 yards, +90%; Cyclic, 1 second, 5 cycles, +400%) [177] ([36] as an alternative attack).

Centauroid Robot

247 points

This template represents the traits unique to C-31's usual form: a fourlegged robot with two manipulators.

Attribute Modifiers: ST+18 (Size, -10%) [162]; DX+3 [60].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: SM +1.

Advantages: Enhanced Move 1 (Ground Speed 16) [20]; Extra Legs (Four Legs) [5].

Hexapod Robot

The art of war is governed by five constant factors, to be taken into account in one's deliberations, when seeking to determine the conditions obtaining in the field. These are: The Moral Law, Heaven, Earth, The Commander, [and] Method and discipline.

– Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

162 points

This template gives the traits unique to C-31's alternate form: a sixlegged robot with no fine manipulators and visual surface camouflage.

Attribute Modifiers: ST+18 (No Fine Manipulators, -40%) [108]; DX+3 (No Fine Manipulators, -40%) [36].

Advantages: Chameleon 3 (Extended, Ladar, +20%) [18]; Enhanced Move 1.5 (Ground Speed 24) [30]; Extra Legs (Six Legs) [10].

Disadvantages: Horizontal [-10]; No Fine Manipulators [-30].

C31R07

1,665 points

7'8", 1.21 Tons (SM 0).

ST 28 [0]; **DX** 15 [40]; **IQ** 16 [120]; **HT** 15 [50].

Dmg 3d-1; *BL* 157 lbs.

HP 42 [28]; *Will* 16 [0]; *Per* 18 [10]; *FP* NA [-].

Basic Speed 8.00 [10]; *Basic Move* 8 [0]

Dodge 12*; *Parry* 11* (Brawling).

Social Background

TL 9 [5].

CF Hegemony [0]; Homeline [1].

Languages: English (Accented) [4]; Koine Greek (Native) [6]; Machine Language (Native)[0]; Tibetan (Native) [6].

Advantages

AI (not Reprogrammable) [42]

Alternate Form (Hexapod Robot; see above) [15]

Centauroid Robot (see above) [247]

Combat Reflexes [15]

Damage Resistance 53 (Can't Wear Armor, -40%; Hardened 1, +20%) [212]

Detect (Electromagnetic Emissions; Signal Detection, +0%) [20]

Doesn't Breathe [20]

Enhanced Tracking 1 [5]

Extra Attack 1 [25]

Hooves [3]

Hyperspectral Vision [25]

Machine [25]

Obscure 5 (Radar; Area Effect 6, +300%; Defensive, +50%; Extended, Para-Radar, +20%) [47]

Para-Radar (Extended Arc, 360°, +125%; Penetrating, +50%; Targeting, +20%) [118]

Payload 14 (Exposed, -50%) [7]

Payload 5 [5]

Pressure Support 2 [10]

Protected Para-Radar [5]

Protected Vision [5]

Radio (Short Wave, +50%; Video, +40%) [19]

Sealed [15]
Talons [8]
True Faith [15]
Weapon Pods (see above) [594]

Disadvantages

Clueless [-10]
Discipline of Faith (Asceticism) [-15]
Electrical [-20]
Fragile (Explosive) [-15]
Low Empathy [-20]
Numb [-20]
Pacifism (Cannot Harm Innocents) [-10]
Restricted Diet (Fissionables) [-30]
Truthfulness (6) [-10]
Wealth (Dead Broke) [-25]

Quirks

Always takes time to search out new sutras [-1]
Broad-Minded [-1]
Cannot Float [-1]
Constantly looking for challenges [-1]
Humble [-1]

Skills

Armoury/TL9 (Heavy Weapons) 16 IQ+0 [2]
Brawling 15 DX+0 [1]
Computer Operation/TL9 16 IQ+0 [1]
Electronics Repair (Computers) 18 IQ+2 [8]
Expert Skill (Military Science) 15 IQ-1 [2]
Forward Observer/TL9 15 IQ-1 [1]
Innate Attack (Beam) 15 DX+0 [1]
Innate Attack (Projectile) 15 DX+0 [1]
Mechanic/TL9 (Robotics) 18 IQ+2 [8]
Meditation 14 Will-2 [1]
Mount 15 DX+0 [2]
Navigation/TL9 (Land) 15 IQ-1 [1]
Parachuting/TL9 15 DX [1]
Strategy (Land) 18† IQ+2 [11]
Tactics 20 IQ+4 [20]
Theology (Buddhist) 15 IQ-1 [2]

* +1 for Combat Reflexes.

† Default from Tactics.

The Omniscient Eye

Can Journalists Break the Law?

In the movies, television, and comics, journalists are often shown obviously breaking the law to get the story. Is this allowed in real life? Will the cops look the other way at your breaking and entering if it helps stop the world-dominating plans of EvilCo? Are there any loopholes or historical precedents that PC journalists could use?

--S. Marsh, Editor of a Major Online Gaming Magazine

If the question is "what sort of protection does a reporter get when breaking the law," then the answer is simple enough that this could be the shortest *Pyramid* column on record: Bupkis. None, nada, zip.

You see, one of the implications of this whole "freedom of speech" thing that we operate under in the United States is that anyone can be a reporter. Not just become a reporter -- be one, right now. Anyone can cover a story, write up the result and publish it, and enjoy exactly the same status as Joe Mildmannered, crusading journalist at the Daily Nabob. In fact, these days many bloggers -- completely self-published on the Web -- are getting press credentials (really just passes to specific events, with significance only to the organizers of those events) and are even covering events in Iraq.

What makes a "real" reporter -- a working journalist -- is a complex web of reputation and contacts; they're kept in the loop because they're known to be actual publications which will follow through and publish the resulting stories. "Real" journalists get taken seriously (invited to events, called back by politicians, given time for interviews) because, in effect, they and the news outlets they work for act like "real" journalistic outfits.

There is no special press license (press ID are usually just made up by the individual newspapers and TV stations to identify employees; press credentials issued by others may reflect a background check). There are no government standards to meet or tests to pass. And, conversely, there is utterly no legal aegis protecting a journalist for his actions, or giving him any sort of special standing under the law.

A reporter caught breaking the law -- breaking into EvilCo's secret cloning facility to get the goods on the dastards -- is going to jail. Reporters usually don't even get the benefit of professional shelters like "attorney-client privilege" or "doctor-patient confidentiality" -- unless that particular jurisdiction has a special "reporter shield law" granting such rights. Otherwise, a reporter who withholds a source when ordered to reveal it may well go to jail for Contempt of Court -- as reporters are willing to do.

And that's the key: If a reporter commits an illegal act, chances are it's because he feels it's worth risking a trip to the slammer. Fortunately (for reporters), most reporters don't actually do that sort of thing -- what they do is much sneakier, and fortunately (for gamers and GMs), makes for much better roleplaying.

Let's examine a couple of cases:

Outright Criminality

Let's say there's no way to get the jump on EvilCo's plans to build an earthquake gun but to actually break into their headquarters and photograph the evidence. Fine -- if you get caught, you're going to the pokey. A while back, photographer Peter Sutherland went along with a group of illegal graffiti artists on a "run" to get photographs of them at work. The cops scooped up the whole group, and Sutherland ended up spending the night in Central Booking, and did three days picking up trash in the park -- but he finished his project.

And that's the first key to getting player characters out of this sort of fix. If the crusading journalist PCs simply wander onto EvilCo's property or even go through an unlocked door, there's a good chance that the police will simply remove

them from the property, with a warning not to come back. Ignore that good advice -- or go past a clearly marked "no trespassing" sign -- and the investigators are more likely to end up spending a night in stir. Either way, this is hardly the end of the characters' lives, or careers, or even their pursuit of this particular case; in the source fiction, it happens all the time. The players and GM may have to simply take the attitude that it's no big deal, and the consequences (a fine or a few days community service) can be (as you prefer) glossed over in non-adventuring time ("As we start this session, you've finished your time picking up trash on the side of the highway. . .") or handled as a roleplaying opportunity ("As you sit down in the county worker transport bus you notice that sitting across from you -- in an orange jumpsuit lust like yours -- is Dirk, the EvilCo thug you got arrested two sessions ago. . .").

There are a number of points along the way where the whole process can be subtly shifted in the hero's favor -- or turned against the hero, if EvilCo has a corrupt official in its pocket. Police may simply "not have time" to investigate a call by a hated company which is complaining that those pesky crusading reporters are poking around their dinosaur farm; on the other hand, in a corrupt town someone may call the company to tip them off if a bust is about to go down -- or if the investigators are getting close to the truth.

Although journalists get no special protection, an individual's status and motives may -- emphasis, *may* -- be taken into account after arrest. The District Attorney gets to decide what to charge them with -- charges could range from burglary (very serious) to minor offenses which would never result in more than a slap on the wrist. . . depending on mitigating circumstances. In the sentencing phase, a straight-arrow reporter with no prior record may get off with a slap on the wrist if he can really show that he was trying to save the watershed from EvilCo's foul chemical dumping. . . or, if EvilCo owns the judge, that may get him a stiffer sentence.

With many local municipalities slashing budgets, it's easier now than ever to get those player characters back on the streets. A lot of county jails are turning people loose as fast as they bring them in -- there's just no money to house everyone.

If the characters get caught in what is clearly burglary -- breaking and entering, trespassing with the intent to commit a felony -- that's more serious, and harder to brush off. The best hope for a GM who wants to handwave this sort of thing away is to declare that EvilCo doesn't want to press charges; the reporters are held overnight and then let go with a grim-faced warning from the cops. Why? Perhaps EvilCo doesn't want police poking around their illegal killer robot testing facility, or checking the surveillance tape from inside the alien virus containment unit. After all, if it actually went to trial the characters' attorney could demand to see some of that evidence. . . if the player characters stop a plot to destroy the city with a Tornado Gun, but level half the town and break a dozen felony laws doing so -- there's executive pardon: The mayor, governor, or president could issue a pardon for the crimes. It doesn't happen very often in real life, but it does offer a final escape hatch.

In real life, reporters are much more likely to use social engineering -- creativity -- trickery -- or, to give it an ugly legal name:

Fraud

A much, *much* more common tactic for real reporters trying to get the goods on a suspected malefactor is to con their way in -- for example, to go to a store which is allegedly ripping off customers toting a hidden camera, pretending to be a gullible shopper. (A side note here: Some states allow legal taping of audio and/or video if one party involved knows it's going on; others don't allow it unless both parties are aware they're being taped, making hidden camera shenanigans potentially illegal. Actual interviews are always conducted after asking permission to "roll tape").

If the journalists are going into a store or place of business which is normally open to the public, there's seldom a real problems with this -- after all, just as reporters don't have to get a special government license to ply their trade, there's no automatic requirement that they identify themselves. And it makes for better roleplaying opportunities: Instead of just rolling against Stealth and Security Systems skills, the players have to interact with the NPC representatives of their local EvilCo franchise. Get caught? They can escort you off the property, or call the cops to do the same. Of course, they may seize your tape -- and you can try to get it back in court (and if you succeed, of course, count on the crucial 15 seconds showing EvilCo's pet demon in action to have been accidentally erased, or mysteriously fogged, or .

. .)

The usual legal response to this by a company whose misdeeds are exposed is to sue for Libel. All you really need to know is that the truth is a defense against libel charges: If the players' plan is to expose EvilCo's schemes, they'd better be ready to prove it. Note, however, that this may *not* be true in all countries outside America.

A more advanced version of this would be to pretend to be a supplier or vendor, or even to get hired as an employee, giving access to all sorts of potential evidence of EvilCo's plot to crash an atomic death-zeppelin full of Ebola-infected monkeys into the convent. You might even be able to "turn" an actual employee to gain access to company memos or voice mails. As reporters with both ABC and the *Cincinnati Enquirer* have found out, however, it's possible to go too far.

Some companies, when investigated, go on the offensive -- like Chiquita Brands, target of an investigation by the *Cincinnati Enquirer* in 1998. The original articles alleged that the company had been involved in wrongdoing in Central America. The company went after the newspaper aggressively -- particularly, after the reporter's use of company voice mail messages -- and the newspaper caved, pulling the articles and firing the lead journalist. A PC journalist may be treated similarly -- left "to twist in the wind," noted *Pyramid* legal expert Jeanne Thelwell.

In 1992, ABC producers got themselves hired by a local Food Lion after receiving a tip that the store was engaging in unsafe food handling practices. They got a heck of a story -- but instead of suing for libel or contesting the facts of the case, the supermarket sued for trespass and fraud. The journalists had lied to get hired, and hadn't performed their duties as employees.

The supermarket won -- and was awarded over \$5 million in damages. The reporters *had* committed fraud -- they hadn't performed their duties as employees -- and the fact that they were pursuing a story (and uncovered evidence of wrongdoing which Food Lion didn't contest) was no protection. So, there you have it -- crusading PC journalists have no shield, even if they get the goods on EvilCo's plans to sell meat tainted with E. coli (er, cloned magickal alien E. coli).

Except -- the settlement was later reduced to \$316,000. And then in 1999, on appeal, most of the claims were thrown out, and damages were reduced further, to. . . \$2.

The final ruling, in the simplest terms, was that the supermarket couldn't sue for damage to its reputation which wasn't actually caused by the actions of the plaintiffs. It wasn't the fraud and trespassing that damaged the chain's reputation -- it was the information they uncovered.

EvilCo can't sue for damage to its reputation due to the exposure of its evil schemes.

So in the end, after the PCs have been escorted off EvilCo property, spent the night in the slammer, threatened with more serious charges and finally sued for exposing the villains' plot, they may still lose. . . and see EvilCo handed a meaningless victory and paltry settlement. The PCs leave the courthouse "losers" with a criminal record -- and the admiration of the people they've saved. The "victorious" EvilCo company execs and attorneys rush out hiding their faces from the snapping cameras and glaring lights of the ever-vigilant press.

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--David Stroup

Editor of the *Clackamas Review & Oregon City News*

Additional information supplied by: *Jeanne Thelwell, John Maurer, & Glen Barnett*

Sages theorize that the Omniscient Eye might actually be composed of a panel of Experts chosen through mysterious and arcane means. Regardless, the Omniscient Eye is benevolent, and every other week it is willing to share its lore to all. Or, at least, to all with valid *Pyramid* subscriptions.

The Omniscient Eye seeks to answer questions that are tied to knowledge of the real world, providing information with a perspective that is of use to gamers. The Omniscient Eye does not concern itself with specific game systems or statistics.

Do you have a question for the Omniscient Eye? Feel free to send it to pyramidquestions@yahogroups.com, and the Omniscient Eye might answer it!

Pyramid Review

[Blood Games RPG](#)

[Flying Mice LLC](#)

Download it at [RPG Now](#)

Created by Wesley R. Fornero, Clash Bowley, & Jason Ludwig

Fiction by El ZamBo

Illustrated by Jason Ludwig

154-page b&w 7.5meg PDF; \$10

By now you'd think one side or the other would have given up in the fight against creatures of the night. Seems like every other game has the forces of good and evil, both with some sort of mysticism on their side, butting heads to determine who gets the planet. One more contender has entered the arena: *Blood Games* from Flying Mice.

Unlike most games with those of like mind aligning against their foes, the protagonists of *Blood Games* remain somewhat solitary figures. They may travel with a small entourage and some probably had mentors, but seldom do they have contacts that range far outside their own circle. This is as much a question of survival as anything else.

Mankind is lucky to have made it this far, because evil once roamed free. Norandon, known as Prometheus in some cultures and by other mythical names throughout history, came and bestowed weapons that allowed humans to fight back. As science and technology took hold, we unconsciously erected a wall of disbelief in the supernatural called the Nullity. So long as humans didn't allow themselves to contemplate the existence of the otherworldly, strange creatures held no sway.

But they do exist, and they want to reassert their hold -- something they are slowly doing thanks to the increase in global bloodshed and the return of fringe belief groups. Small bands of heroes, most of which operate under the assumption they're the only such group, turn over the rocks these things hide under, becoming both hunter and hunted. So begins a lifelong battle against arcane forces, a war fought in secret because knowledge of it is the very thing that strengthens it.

Concrete details about the setting beyond these are in short supply. Most of the book is about making and advancing characters. These are called non-Path (regular humans) or Path (those with powers). You can be a vampire if you don't mind some party prejudice. You may be a werewolf, hopefully confining your predations to the demonic scum you meet. Witches' covens produce a steady stream of candidates for strange adventures, and all manner of priests and holy men hold back the darkness with their belief.

The system, based on the *StarClusters Second Edition* game engine, uses percentile rolls (or a d20 if you like, but it's not for the *d20 System*). Characters are made using the random or directed method; you can also start with a template and customize it. Your characteristics are Strength, Coordination, Agility, Charisma, and Endurance, all valued between two and 12. IQ is valued as real-world IQs, into the triple digits. Constitution, for combat and damage, is your physical scores multiplied by 10. Everyone also has a PSI score up to five, though for non-Path folks this is probably zero. Path personae get bonuses to many stats because they're tougher, and powers (most of which are fueled by PSI).

Powers vary by the Path you follow. For some, this means choosing associated totems or beings -- get a patron saint or a guardian angel, or a shamanic fetish that gives you power over fire or love (usually by expending a permanent point of PSI). There are several magic types, and the system usually involves piecing together who's doing what to whom and to what effect, then finding all the appropriate modifiers from a general list. Simpler charms are such old hat that their use is easier. One good facet of the game is the discussion of major world religions. It's not exhaustive, but it covers the big ones, and it's a literate treatment that forgoes a dry, lecturing style.

You have a base 45% chance to perform a skill you have at +1, 50% at +2, etc. Skills are linked to a characteristic, and you get another +5% for every two points by which that stat exceeds seven (IQ-based skills follow a similar pattern). In combat, your numbers can be shifted around depending on what strategy you want to use. You can focus on initiative, to-hit, and damage to different degrees, and if you're good enough with a weapon you can split your initiative and attack multiple foes. If your skill with a weapon isn't equal to the weapon's minimum, you suffer a penalty for its use.

No matter what discipline you choose (or what discipline chooses you), a persona is the result of years of study. Charts show a chosen profession or vocation divided into its associated skills and characteristic bonuses (there are even older professions like pirate and tinker so you can flesh out old vampires). Rolls on these tables represent a year spent studying the underlying areas of support, and various methods of schooling may concentrate on subjects differently. **Blood Games** encourages players to parse out their exploits and studies a year at a time. It's an interesting mix of mechanics and campaign execution. The heroes are more like Indiana Jones than Buffy Summers, having an adventure here or there, going back to their lives and growing in knowledge and skill, and then hearing the call back to duty once again. Nothing in the game demands that players use the game or its systems this way -- it can all be run in a conventional, full-time manner -- but giving referees a way to make the story and character development work in a believable fashion is a definite little plus.

The layout is a little confusing -- more job and education "blocks" show up in scattered fashion, and it's not always clear how the subjects flow -- but you can skip to anything from the contents page. If you zoom in on the text, you may fill the screen to where you cannot see the section headers (they're in the margin). The artwork is rough, but not without pleasing samples.

Anyone looking for a new and original backdrop for their horror stories is bound to be disappointed. This has all been done before, and there's not much new to see. Ironically, the book's title is one of the cleverer bits, referring as it does to the games vampires play with their potential victims as the years wear on. Rather than go out and simply kill their prey, they roleplay with them, restrict themselves to one group of people, or make a competition out of their feedings.

Blood Games isn't a badly written piece of work. The fiction starts strong but ends weak, and they have the odd conceit of using on-line methods of textual emphasis like asterisks. They avoid a lot of the problems of the small press, and even though it's "just" a PDF, they've given more attention to grammar and spelling than other on-line ventures. Viewed as a resource, it has some nice features. The annual vocational improvements may seem a little limiting to some, but they convey a sense of a lifetime of achievement, and the religion sections are informative and enlightening. The question for the purchaser to answer then is whether the systems are worth the \$10 you pay for the product proper.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Pick

Seasons

Published by [Dust Bunny Games](#)

Game Designed by Rob Martin

Graphic Design by Mark Sellmeyer & Rob Martin

Illustrations by Mark Sellmeyer

Game Development by Nancy Milligan, Mark Sellmeyer, Timothy Hunt, Don Betlach Full-color, 4 decks of 55 cards, score pad, & rules; \$24.95

Seasons is subtitled "The Calendar Rummy Game." The object of the game is to score 365 points (366 in a leap year). You score points as you would in Rummy, by melding runs or sets, or by laying off existing runs or sets.

Where *Seasons* quickly differs from Rummy is the use of personal decks, one for each season. Each themed deck (Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter) contains the same set of 55 cards. The suits (stars, planets, sun, moon) are 12 cards each, one for each month. There are also four holiday cards that can be fit into runs, a Happy Birthday! Card that can enhance a set, and two wild cards that can be used anywhere. From his draw pile, a player pulls a hand of 12, then turns over the top card to begin a discard pile.

Players can draw from their own draw pile or pick up the top discard from anyone's pile without penalty. You can also select a card deeper in a discard pile, but it must be played immediately and all the cards on top of it are taken into your hand. After scoring, all the cards in your hand and score area are shuffled into your deck, so decks change with each round as players steal each other's discards! As a result, after the first round, if your card is on top of someone else's draw pile, you can choose it instead.

A round ends when one player empties his hand by playing a meld or lay off and discarding. Players score points at the end of each round for cards melded or laid off in their score area and lose points for cards remaining in their hand. Once points are totaled, if anyone has over 365 (or 366) points, the highest total is the winner.

Wild cards and holiday cards remaining in your hand are costly, while cards captured from an opponent by picking up discards add slightly to your score. In the score area, bonuses are given for completing a year (12 months in the same suit), a season (e.g., June through September), Holiday cards, Birthday cards, and captured cards.

The game's look is very striking and very well designed to help with game play. Seasons are color-coded on the backs of each deck, and on the "Season Ring" on the front of each card, simplifying scoring. The colors are clear, bright, and complement the game. The cards are very solid, and actually took a couple of games to loosen up for an easy shuffle. The box holds the decks separately with room for a score pad and the rule book. A PDF of the score sheet is available from Dust Bunny Games' website, and it is interesting to note the company is partnering with GameTable Online to produce an Internet version of *Seasons*.

Seasons is a good social game that will allow the gamers to play with non-gamers without anyone being bored or overawed with complexity. Seasons games run one to two hours, with individual rounds running 5-15 minutes. The replay value for real gamers is high, especially as new opponents appear and new strategies are needed, but it can be played for fun as well. Traditional card game enthusiasts will appreciate a new spin on an old favorite. Kids can enjoy

it at a different level than dangerously competitive gamers. Regardless, it could easily become must-play game in your house.

--*Mark A. Schmidt*

Pyramid Pick

The Book of Unusual Treasures (for d20 System)

Published by [Bad Axe Games, LLC](#)

Written by Philip J. Reed

Illustrated by Christopher Shy

94-page b&w softcover; \$13.95

Believe it or not, handing out the treasures and rewards after a successful dungeon fight can sometimes be a mechanically boring process. "Well, that's your necromancer nemesis dealt with. Now to his treasure . . . Let me see, you find a +2 Dagger, a jeweled ring worth 5000gp, four opals worth 350gp each . . ." and so on. Not that every game or DM is like that, of course. But dressing up treasures such that they are interesting of themselves rather than just for their monetary value does not come easy to every DM, and this is where *The Book of Unusual Treasures* comes in handy.

Written by Phil Reed, better known for his design work on games like *Frag!* and *The Dork Tower Boardgame*, this *d20 System* supplement compiles almost 350 items drawn from a series of mini-supplements published in PDF format through his self-publishing company, [Ronin Arts](#). And while the various mini-supplements, such as *101 Mundane Treasures* and *101 Arcane Spell Components*, are still available to buy and download, nothing quite beats having an honest-to-goodness book in your hands. In compiling so much, *The Book of Unusual Treasures* not only details books and spell books, arcane spell components, arms and armor, clothing and jewelry, plus miscellaneous items, it also adds further unusual items in the form of new spells, feats, poisons, materials, and skills.

Despite the fact that this is a big book of things, every effort has been made to make this a good-looking product. There is little in the way of internal illustration, but the artwork in the header and footer is pleasing enough. Not one of the individual items is actually illustrated, but each is given a more than adequate description. Besides this description, every item includes details of their special features (if any) and their value, as well as what information can be learned from an Appraise Skill check. The information given is rarely extensive, but it is always interesting, adds color to a game, and in many cases could spark adventures in themselves. Although there is a listing of all the items by value, there is no index -- perhaps the only detriment to using this book.

The supplement opens with a chapter of books, starting with the mundane, such as *The Book of Drinks* (a collection of cod-medieval cocktails); the special, such as the *Book of Bows* that gives construction details of various arrows; and then spell books, which range from simple collections, like the *Secrets of the Spider*, which contains a range of spider-related spells, to those like the *Grimoire of Silban*, which give access to new feats when studied. To accompany the spell books -- and more particularly, to make the casting of spells more interesting -- the chapter of new components can be used to enhance various aspects of a spell. These are arranged by spell type, such as electricity or chaos, and require Knowledge (Arcana) checks to use. They also have a negative side effect should the check fail, and none are available off the shelf. Obtaining any one of these would be an adventure in itself.

In contrast, few if any of the new weapons and armor are magical; rather, they are of masterwork quality. Like the items of jewelry and clothing that follow, they tend to be more interesting for their background than for their actual effect. Perhaps the most entertaining entry is that for the Dwarven Fighting Mug. Not just a vessel from which to quaff huge draughts of ale, the mug -- constructed from steel and iron, and weighted at the bottom -- can be used as a clubbing weapon or a shield. Its use is covered by the Dwarven Mug Fighting feat along with its improved and mastery versions. Unfortunately, fights always result in at least spilled pints, as the mugs do not come with lids.

A section of new spells follows in the first of several appendices. Necromantic spells dominate, such as Blood Knife, Bone Armor, and Sudden Grave. There are some pleasing little 0-level spells also -- *Candle*, *Cobble*, *Groom*, *Identify Undead*, *Launder*, and *Oration* -- which are sure to find their way into the books of casters. Several of the new feats also support the spell caster; Fast Spell, for example, halves casting times, while Conceal Spell allows a spell user to be surreptitious in the act of casting. An equal number of the new feats are poison-related, including Empower Poison, Extend Poison, and Quicken Poison, and these complement the 30 new poisons given next. A further appendix gives a more detailed look at a selection of unusual materials that can be used in constructing items, while the last introduces the skills of Craft (Poison), Knowledge (Dwarves), Knowledge (Necrology), and Knowledge (Spirits).

Everything within the pages of *The Book of Unusual Treasures* is open content, meaning that it could find its way into almost any *d20 System* setting, particularly those that involve magic in some form or another. The plethora of new spells (especially those of 0 level), the new metamagic feats, and the spell books would slip easily into, for example, a [Redhurst: Academy of Magic](#) campaign. The range of new necromantic spells deserve to sit alongside any from the several *d20 System* supplements available upon the subject. Players of dwarves will appreciate the book alone just for the inclusion of the Dwarven Fighting Mug and the associated feats! The point of this book is to make every little item both interesting and memorable, to add color to a regular feature of most fantasy campaigns. Indeed, file off the numbers, and the contents could be applied to other fantasy RPGs, but ultimately *The Book of Unusual Treasures* has been created with *d20 System* games in mind. In that it best typifies the whole point of Open Content, versatility and viability for *any d20 System* campaign.

--*Matthew Pook*

Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Rise of the Cyber Zombies

A Deadworld for *All Flesh Must Be Eaten*

by Maurice Lefebvre

In this Sci-Fi Deadworld for *All Flesh Must Be Eaten*, humanity has won its war against the Walking Dead. After losing two-third of its number after the Plague and the ensuing fight against zombies, humans have decided to enslave the remaining zombies to work as cheap labor.

In this futuristic, bleak, highly controlled urban world, are the Cast Members really as safe as the authorities have them believe? Will they indulge themselves in cruelty and avenge themselves by making poor zombies suffers?

Welcome then to the Island of New Manhattan, and get ready for the worst.

Introduction

I should have known.

I'd been an historian for 12 years before the Plague. I should have known that speaking ones own mind in a totalitarian regime is not a very bright idea. A simple mention of the Nazis, and already the EDN-8000 mechanical units are coming down the street. Anytime now, the Council's secret police will bang on my apartment door. By tomorrow I will be dead. Or worse. I don't want to "mysteriously" get infected by a "surprisingly localized" outbreak of the Plague.

Earlier today I was meeting Council member Daley. I was on the security board for the Soho area. He told us he wanted to reinforce the police presence by adding a few EDN-8000 patrols of our sector, since rumors say that some kind of rebel group is operating in the area. I told him that I didn't want another October Crisis, like in the early '70s. He wouldn't listen. He wasn't there to ask our opinion; he was there to make his decision official by our approval. I got angry. I asked him if he saw that we were becoming a police state, if he was aware that he was becoming a new Hitler. He didn't say a thing, but his eyes told me his answer. He knew. He was hoping for that. And I knew I was dead.

Instantly all became very clear to me. The disappearances. The traitor speeches. The strange localized outbreaks of the Plague. They are eliminating all those who can see them coming. I bet they can kill someone and imitate the Plague symptoms. Surely they can control the Plague . . . surely they wouldn't dare using it . . .

I hear them coming . . .

History

In the late 1990s, in a zone of the Amazonian rainforest that was being deforested, a new kind of plague appeared. Looking at first like a bad flu, it quickly appeared to be some very evil kind of leprosis as virulent as the Ebola virus. Virulent, and very easily transmissible. Once infected, the victim's body started to decompose at a frightfully fast rate, killing the victim after a week of terrible pain. Much like the Spanish Flu of 1918, the death rate was so high that it was impossible to keep up with disposing of the bodies. Immense communal burial pits were dug, and people were asked to simply put their household's corpses in front of their residence, like garbage, for the disposal teams to pick them up. That was the Plague.

About six months later, the Plague was a world-wide disaster. Roughly a third of the world population was already dead, and millions of people were sick. Doomsday cults sprung up, and for once, it looked like they might be right.

When everyone thought they've seen the worst, the Rise began.

From thousands of burial grounds around the world, those who died of the Plague began to rise from death and attack the living. Zombies traveling in large groups began scourging the countryside and infesting the cities. Everyone had to fight back, until the zombies of the Plague got them. The death toll skyrocketed.

A year after the beginning of the Plague, scientists began to notice that the strange sickness was receding rapidly. This new hope bolstered the survivors' morale, and a more planned resistance was organized. Cities were cleaned of shambling undead, and old buildings were put to the ground to become the foundations of new fortifications. Anyone dying was cremated as quickly as possible. Patrols were organized, parks were turned into vegetable farms and grazing fields. The urgency and danger of the situation asked for a very strong and powerful regime. City-states emerged, much as in Ancient Greece, governed by oligarchic councils. The survivors began to finally live again.

Present Day

The World

Much of what remains of humanity (about 500 million world-wide) lives in walled cities of rarely more than a million inhabitants each. Whole cities have been completely overrun by the zombies. Many third-world countries, unable to react quickly, are now Lands of the Dead. Europe is still waging a war against its dead, and new outbursts of the Plague are identified every few months. To make things worse, France, one of the only European countries that still has a standing army, is starting to take action to preserve the safety of its boundaries, including invading its neighbors.

The situation in North America is a little better. The Plague only makes sporadic appearances, and only in isolated regions. However, both Canadian and American governments have crumbled over time. With a huge area to cover, both governments had to make choices on which areas to protect by focusing the military there. Many "sacrificed" cities began to take their defense in their own hands, fortifying themselves and declaring their independence. Ironically these cities fared much better than those protected by the military, where citizens couldn't arm themselves for security reasons and where barricades were considered a nuisance to the army mobility. When the soldiers began to go AWOL and returned home, those cities were left defenseless. Both governments now hold only a handful of highly militarized towns. The rest are either abandoned or became city-states in their own right. Outside the cities, bands of nomads move around the country in convoys, assuring some kind of commerce between the cities.

The City

Manhattan was lucky. Most of those that died from the Plague had been buried in an old quarry in Vermont, making the island relatively free of zombies. About 10 years ago, a special crisis government, the Council, was elected for the isle. The same Council is still in charge, and has absolutely no intentions of relinquishing its power.

With the Hudson River as a commercial artery, Manhattan was never really cut off from the rest of the world. Since the city didn't suffer as much as others from zombie attacks, the efforts of the survivors were oriented in the industry rather than just staying alive. In the last 10 years, zombies have been enslaved and put to work in special industrial areas, leaving only the complex and delicate work for humans. This manpower, or "zombiepower," was greatly needed and permitted the city to operate normally and produce high and low tech goods for itself and its neighbors. Even if their work is sometime disturbed by zombie unrest, so far that move seems to have been a good one.

In New Manhattan, each citizen knows its place. Under the Council's rule, every citizen left alive received an occupation according to their capabilities and was put to work. The life is rather dull and repetitive, with little entertainment and a very strict control of information. About a year ago, a robotic zombie hunter -- the EDN-8000 unit -- was put to work. These units are used mainly in the industrial areas to take care of zombie escapees and along the rural land-based trade routes to keep them clear of zombies. Some of them have been equipped with non-lethal weapons and are used for crowd control. Rumors about some of them going wild are strongly denied by the authorities.

All is not well, however. Scholars and journalists that have questioned the Council's total control have begun to die, victims of very localized outbreaks of the Plague. The Council's control over the city becomes stronger and more apparent everyday. Already, talks about traitors and denunciation have begun to spread. Rumors of brainwash and executions, as well as a secret rebel group, have begun to surface. Activists say that zombies are not mindless after all, and shouldn't be used as slaves.

The Zombie Question

In the Rise of the Cyber Zombies Deadworld, the zombies cannot Spread the Love. Only those who died from the Plague will ever become zombies. The Plague itself has all but disappeared. Why then, with all the zombies that have been killed, their number still seems to grow? The answer is simple: the Plague has been domesticated.

Twenty years of studies on the Plague virus bore fruits. While still incurable, the Plague has been used to create a secret biochemical weapon of great power: a colorless, odorless gas that dissipates very rapidly. Anyone inhaling the gas will be infected with a non-transmissible form of the Plague and will become a zombie in less than a week. Nearly all the recent Plague outbreaks in the world are due to scientist testing (or simply using) their new incomplete toy. In North America, the few cities that have developed the weapon have been using it on small rural communities to create themselves a work force of zombies. Unknown to the general public, tension between the city-states and with the government-controlled areas has built up. The threat of biochemical warfare is increasing.

In New Manhattan, the Plague gas has been recently used on some members of the city's population, like activists, scholars and journalists. The Council's secret police is aware of the dangers of the gas and will not use it too often, or on a large scale.

The Plague gas has some yet unknown side effects. First, the gas create zombies that are a little more intelligent than those created by the Plague ten years ago. Second, used in the wild, the gas does not always completely dissipate, and can mutate, creating a new strain of the Plague (it is what is happening in Europe). Third, if zombies ever become infected by the Plague gas, a variant of the Plague will develop inside them and they will begin to Spread the Love (see Super Zombies, below).

Standard Zombies

Strength: 2

Dexterity: 2

Constitution: 2

Intelligence: 1

Perception: 1

Willpower: 2

DP: 26

Speed: 4

Essence: 10

Attack: Brawling 2, Bite dam. D4×2 slashing

Weak Spot: All, Electricity

Getting Around: Like the living

Strength: Dead Joe Average

Senses: Like the Dead

Sustenance: Weekly, All Flesh

Intelligence: Tool Use (2), Long-Term memory

Spreading the Love: Nobody loves me

The zombies of this setting are intelligent creatures, like a little child or a heavily retarded person. They have no mean of communication either between themselves or with their living guardians.

Zombie guardians have stun batons and tasers on them at all times. The zombies can have their nervous system short-

circuited by electricity, a process that causes them great pain. Captive zombies know that very well and usually don't attack their guardians. "Wild" zombies are another matter entirely though.

An electrical discharge by a stun baton will paralyze the zombie for 2d10 rounds, and a taser discharge will stun the zombie for 1d4 minutes (its easy to wreak havoc in a already partially decomposed nervous system). Any kind of electrical discharge given by a Cast Member will cause the zombie to fear that Cast Member for about an hour.

In Rise of the Cyber Zombies, the creatures cannot Spread the Love. Only those who died from the Plague will ever become zombies, unless of course bitten by a zombie infected with a mutated form of the Plague.

Super Zombies

Strength: 4

Dexterity: 2

Constitution: 2

Intelligence: 1

Perception: 2

Willpower: 2

DP: 34

Speed: 4

Essence: 12

Attack: Brawling 2, Bite dam. D4×4 slashing

Weak Spot: All, Electricity

Getting Around: Like the living, The Lunge

Strength: Strong like bull

Senses: Like the Living

Sustenance: Occasionally, All Flesh

Intelligence: Tool Use (2), Long-Term memory

Spreading the Love: One bite and you're hooked

Super zombies are the result of a mutation of the domesticated version of the Plague. These zombies are stronger, more resilient, and carry a very virulent form of the Plague. They also show signs of relentless, unbreakable aggressiveness. All rules applying for regular zombies still apply for these zombies too, except of course that no one is going to risk enslaving such creatures.

Cyber Zombies

Strength: 7

Dexterity: 2

Constitution: 2

Intelligence: 1

Perception: 3

Willpower: 2

DP: 37

Speed: 4

Essence: 17

Attack: Brawling 2, Claw/bite dam. D4×7 slashing

Weak Spot: All, Electricity

Getting Around: Like the living

Strength: Monstrous Strength

Senses: Like a hawk

Sustenance: Occasionally, All Flesh

Intelligence: Tool Use (2), Long-Term memory

Spreading the Love: Nobody loves me

Since the last few years, cybernetic implants have been available for humans who suffered severe injuries or for elite soldiers who need that little extra edge. These implants have been under development for many years and have been tested on a large number of zombie workers. Of course, these zombies were all sent in a special work camp where a high voltage electrical fence would surely be enough to keep them in check.

EDN-8000 units

Strength: 10

Dexterity: 4

Toughness: 4

Intelligence: 1

Perception: 4

DP: 100

Speed: 18

Attack: Brawling 2, Gun 2

Claws: D8×2 slashing, armor piercing

M-60 machinegun: Range 125, Damage D8×5 (20), cap. 500

AV: 10

Getting Around: The Quick Dead

Strength: Monstrous Strength, Iron Grip, Claws, damage resistant

Senses: Like the Living

Autonomy: 10 days

Intelligence: Long-Term Memory (computer brain)

The EDN-8000 mechanical unit is a high-tech nightmare designed to patrol outside the city limits and destroy any "wild" zombie. Some of these units are designed for crowd control and used inside the city limits. However, the sight of these metallic monsters turned against them tends to upset citizens to the highest level.

The EDN-8000 is about the size of a compact car (let's say a New Beetle) and vaguely looks like a humanoid torso on the body of a spider. Most of the sensors are stored in the "head" of the unit. Its right arm features huge claws and its left arm a M-60. The spider legs design of the lower body is for improved stability even in rugged terrain.

Destroying the head will not blind the unit completely. However, its Perception will go down to 1 and its programs will command it to disengage and return to base immediately. The head has a AV of 5 and 35 DC.

The primitive AI of the unit is not really designed to hunt humans; it is in fact quite easy to outsmart. However, some new models could become quite dangerous at human-hunting if the Zombie Master decides to use the EDN-8100 model, fitted with a zombie's brain assisted by an AI (see Story Ideas).

Story Ideas

The Zombie Rebellion

In this story, large groups of zombies escape from their industrial compounds and run amok in the city. Maybe the zombies have been contaminated with Plague gas and are now able to create new zombies. Cast Members could be members of the police forces sent to suppress the rebellion with the help of the un-trusted EDN-8000 units. Or maybe they are the zombies themselves, intelligent enough to remember their past life and the ability to use tools.

The Hunted

The Cast Members are members of the rebel group that is operating in the city. However, the group is actively hunted

by the Council police (both official and secret) and are always under the threat of being found out. Council's shock troops or EDN-8000 units are not easy to escape and if this Story Idea is used, the Zombie Master could be evil enough to use the EDN-8100 prototype. This bio-mechanical nightmare uses the brain of a zombie and the body of a EDN-8000 unit to hunt humans. These prototypes can only be used in the wild simply because they will attack any living thing (like a super-charged bio-mechanical zombie).

War!

The Council has been on very bad terms with a nearby city-state and they have finally decided to use their bio-chemical weapons on their opponent. The PCs might hear about it from a Council member, or they might be part of a rebel group that heard from it. Worse, they might come from the other city-state and know about the attack plan from an encrypted message. There is no telling just how the Plague can mutate this time, so the attack must be stopped at all costs!

Cyberware

This cyberware was designed for the Rise of the Cyber Zombies Deadworld. While this equipment can be used in any AFMBE campaign, it is strongly recommend that you don't let your players use this section for their character's creation unless you want to run a cyberpunk-style story.

All the cyberware shown here is of the pretty obvious kind, with chunks of plastic and metal sticking out of the body (of course the ZM is the last authority on this). Every piece of cyberware is purchased with Quality points (both at character creation and during play). The XP cost paid during play for cyberware represent the effort the character has to put into forcing his body and mind to accept and use the mechanical gear as part of his own body.

Vision augmentations

Cybernetic eyes (2 pts)

This is the basis for all eye augmentation. It includes the replacement of one or both eyes by artificial counterparts. Basic features are Night-sight (works as Night goggles) and Retinal Screen (Translucent data can be projected on the retina without impairing the user's sight).

Targeting Link (2 or 3 pts)

Require Cybernetic Eyes. Include Targeting Link cybereye modification as well as either a free Datajack (Headjack, Limbjack, or Eyejack) for 2 pts, or a special Anchoring Palmjack that will secure the gun in the hand for 3 pts. The weapon must be fitted with a targeting system (cost \$500). The user must manually plug the weapon to his Datajack (with a datacord) prior to using it (Anchoring Palmjack plug automatically). Once plugged, targeting information will be displayed on the user Cybereye's Retinal Screen allowing him to gain a +3 to all shooting rolls. An ammo count feature is included limb replacement (2 pts each, +1 extra pt/Strength point) This is the typical mechanical limb replacement. All limbs have a AV of 10 and DR of 20 and a basic Strength value of 4 (even if the character is normally stronger). The extra Strength points are purchased once for all cyberlimbs (ex: One arm with +2 STR cost 4 points. Four limbs with +2 STR cost 10 pts). If the character has both legs replaced by cyberware, each Strength increase also increase his Speed rating by 1 (ex: +2 Strength mean a character with two cyberlegs also have +2 Speed).

Cybernetic Weaponry

Cyber Claws (2 pts)

A set of three razor sharp, high-density alloy metallic claws that can extend or retract from the back of the hand, much

like that well-known Canadian mutant. Under normal use, these claws never need sharpening, although too much cutting through brick walls or car doors will create the need for regular maintenance. Their damage is D6×Str Slashing.

Gun Arm (3 pts)

Require a Cybernetic Arm. The gun is inside the cybernetic arm, and fires through a port in the hand. The gun is reloaded with special magazine under the arm. Two Gun Arm versions are available: 9mm Submachine Gun Range 3/15/30/100/200; Damage D6×4; Ammo cap: 12 Shotgun Range and Damage: As ammo; Ammo cap: 3

Body Plating (4 pts)

Body plating covers the torso, giving it the same AV as a Class II armor (D6×2 +14). Limb protection costs one additional point per limb. Extra armor can be worn in the form of special cyborg armor that clamp over the Body Plating (Class III or IV, 150% of the price normal price). Body Plating isn't very esthetic.

Miscellaneous

Datajack (1 pt for the first, any extra ones only cost money)

Datajacks are either one of three types: Headjacks (located somewhere on the head), LimbJack (on a limb), and Eyejack (in a cybereye socket; requires cybernetic eye replacement). It can be used to plug into computers, TV sets, weapons, it act as earphones, etc . . .

Cranial Computer (3 pts)

An up-to-date, powerful computer located inside the user's head. A (free) Datajack is included as an I/O port. Memory use the brain's memory centers, as it can be much more powerful than any machine. The process is similar to the one used in the Johnny Mnemonics movie: The first 10 years of the user's life is erased (or downloaded and saved on about a hundred high-capacity datadisks) and configured to be used by the brain. Huge amounts of information can be stored that way.

Bio-Scan computer (2 pts) and Chem Regularization Unit (+2 pts)

Required either Cybereyes (for the Retinal Screen) or Cranial Computer. The Chem regularization Unit require the Bio-Scan Computer. A very small computer located in the abdomen analyze the user vital signs and inform the user via his Retinal Screen or Cranial Computer. A wide variety of information is collected, from general fatigue, to combat damage, body temperature, nutrients levels, pulse and so on.

With the help of a Chem Regularization Unit, the Bio-Scan computer can automatically dispense pain killers, amphetamines, antibiotics, anticoagulants, Buzz-be-GoneT anti-alcohol drug, and other various chemicals to keep the body in peak condition. The system will even automatically try to revive the user in case of a cardiac arrest. The chemicals are reloaded by injection into sub-dermal receptacles located in the lower back. The chemicals can also be dispensed manually by applying pressure to particular points in the lower back, or even by simple mental command if the user also possesses a Cranial Computer. In game terms, the character will regain D6 Endurance points for every 5 points loss. He can sleep soundly a minute after going to bed and he will be fully awake and functional a mere 3 seconds after being woken up. If he so chooses, he can also stay fully awake for 62 hours. Alcohol and sedatives can be dissipated on command.

However the system isn't perfect. If the character pushes himself too hard, the system will try to compensate (by injecting mild sedative during stressful situation like combat, or putting him to sleep if he sit down for five minutes). A greater problem arises if the Unit is used a lot for a prolonged time: a dangerous chemical "cocktail" will circulate in the character's body. Even more chemical will be pumped in just to offset the effects of the chemical cocktail,

aggravating the situation. Also, a dependency to the chemical often develops in the user in less than a month.

Reflex Enhancer (3 pts)

The Reflex Enhancer is a combination of nerve boosters and adrenaline injectors that can be activated by a sub-dermal button usually located on the wrist (or by mental command if the user also has a Cranial Computer). The user's Initiative is greatly increased enabling him to act before anyone without Reflex Enhancer (including those with Qualities that enable them to act first).

* * *

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The End Of The World

by Chris Anthony

In the most remote corner of the world stands the tallest mountain in the world. It is not a place many encounter; although it is tall, it is also well-hidden, for the philosophers say that it is the place where the ideas of previous ages, weakened to the point of implausibility, go to die. As each idea arrives, the place itself becomes more and more improbable, until time, space, mathematics and philosophy bend around the peak, creating a point of land past which there is nothing: the End of the World.

The End itself is both a wonder and an extreme oddity to behold; it is as if the mountain simply falls off before the viewer, leaving nothing but vast expanses of air. There is no land far below, and if an observer took it into his head to leap from the very tip -- which, in this area of strange physics and philosophy, is not necessarily a bad idea -- he would, at least according to the philosophers, fall forever, never encountering the ground again. This is at least one reason why one man has made his home here at the End, in a simple wooden hut mere yards from the precipice. He calls himself nothing more than the Man at the End of the World; philosophers, ancient and modern, have called him the Sage.

The Sage is wizened, to be sure; his beard hangs to his knees, and his head is hairless, but his back is yet unbent and his mind is as agile as it can be given the uncertain and highly-improbable circumstances in which he lives. The wary traveler should not, however, be fooled by his apparent youth. If what the philosophers say is true, the Sage is many, many thousands of years old, and forms the archetype from which all sages-atop-mountains are forged. He lives simply, on the meat of the dodos which inhabit the End and the grain of the wheat that grows straight from the rock. He also keeps a cow, which he calls the Cow at the End of the World and to which philosophers refer as Bessie; she provides the Sage with milk, cheese, and -- very, very occasionally -- meat.

However large the group who approaches him, the Sage always has enough food ready for them; he calls it a knack. (The philosophers attribute it to his Sage-nature.) In addition, there will always be just enough room in the hut for the travelers to sleep, and just enough grass outside for their steeds to graze. "Just a coincidence," says the Sage, winking; there are many coincidences, it seems, at the End. If questioned, the old man knows quite a bit -- not everything, of course, or even everything about the End of the World, but still quite a bit -- and will be more than happy to give answers to any questions the group might have, although he does consider "I don't know" to be a perfectly valid answer. The temperament of the group won't change this; years of experience have given the Sage a supernatural calm. In exchange for each question answered, however, the Sage will expect an answer to one of his own questions. These are usually about the state of the world; the Sage doesn't get out much.

Unfortunately, if a traveler's emotions do swing into anger, he'll soon find out that attacking the Man at the End of the World isn't a pleasant task for those bellicose enough to try. Implausibility is on the Sage's side in this realm, so much so that each strike against him will fail utterly to hit its target. (The Sage himself will never attack guests of the End of the World; neither will Bessie or, if the group is really bucking for a fight, the dodos.) In addition, there's a certain chance with every blow that the End of the World will intervene and try to stop the fight itself. This usually takes the form of changing the shape of the attacker's weapon into something harmless. (Plowshares are typical, which seems to back up the philosophers' claim that ineffability has a sense of humor, although the claim of one belligerent traveler that his axe was turned into a small wooden sheep is not exactly unusual among those who have tried to assault the Man at the End of the World.)

The Tour

When day breaks -- which, strangely, happens on a fairly regular schedule -- the Sage takes any guests who have stayed the night on a tour of the End of the World. This includes a walk through the Barn at the End of the World (wherein lives Bessie), among the fields of wheat and bluegrass, past the dodo nests, along the edge of the cliff that

marks the End of the World, and finally to a small graveyard that isn't noticeable until the Sage points it out. Here the Sage tells of the true nature of the End -- that there is, in fact, land below; it's just that, in most cases, it happens to be the End itself. Anyone jumping off of the End of the World will encircle the world itself on their travels, seeing all there is to see and then landing once again at the very spot from which they leapt. The trouble is that the circuit takes about a year -- by which point the traveler has long since died of starvation and dehydration. It is therefore the Sage's sad duty to bury those bones he finds -- and he finds about two sets a year. (The cemetery is larger than it looks.) Sometimes, of course, those who have chosen to throw themselves from the cliff have certain spectacular abilities; those who need no food or drink typically arrive back at the End of the World after a year of orbiting, safe, sound, and very well-rested.

Those who can fly on their own, on the other hand, have found that they can, in fact, return to the ground they begin to see below them after several days, and that it universally takes about an hour to do so regardless of their speed -- at which point, they can no longer return to their former orbital path or find the End of the World from the air again. (Likewise, those who can fly and who turn around during the orbital circuit have not been able to re-locate the End of the World, regardless of how long or far they flew. Eventually, most of them gave up and headed back along the circuit, although rumors abound that at least one flying individual is still looking for the End.)

There is, however, a way for a traveler to descend from the End of the World -- aside from going back the way he came -- and that is to climb down the cliff face. There is about a mile of travel between the top and bottom of the cliff marking the End of the World, much of which is both nearly horizontal and very treacherous; if travelers are lucky enough to make it to the bottom, they will find themselves where they most want to be, the cliff having vanished behind them. (It is entirely possible to find oneself back at the End of the World by this method!) If more than one traveler is descending at once, connected by ropes, the bottom climber decides, consciously or unconsciously, where the party is going; at the moment his feet touch ground, the cliff face above the topmost climber vanishes, and the face between them becomes a hill of a height such that the topmost climber can stand easily on it from his former position. Falling off at any point during this journey means that the traveler begins the orbit of the world as described above. (He returns to the point where he originally left the edge of the End after the year-long circuit.)

The trouble with this approach is threefold. First, as mentioned, the slope is extraordinarily difficult; even experienced climbers will have trouble with it, as for the first quarter-mile of the trip the climber must cling to the underside of the outcropping at an angle that is nearly parallel to the ground, and even afterward the cliff is rough and unforgiving. Second, the implausibility of the area itself leads to some interesting results: footholds and handholds may simply disappear, the rock face may become improbably hard and impenetrable, or the climber may find a hidden cave full of treasure; none can be sure until they actually descend. Third, the End of the World is full of native life, which in this case involves two species: rockhammers and runner-snakes.

The Perils of Improbable Life

Rockhammers are large birds, with an adult wingspan of about a yard, coarse white feathers, and enormous, diamond-hard and superbly-sharp beaks which they use to chip nesting-holes from out of the cliff face itself. If a rockhammer nest is disturbed, the parents will attack whatever disturbed it -- regardless of size! They are thus not only deadly in their own right but can easily knock even an experienced climber off of his perch.

Runner-snakes, by contrast, are quite small; the largest adults are only 12 inches long, and all have scales banded in patterns of red, orange, and green speckles and bands that are unique to each individual. They use specially-adapted, nearly-microscopic suction scales on their undersides to climb sheer surfaces -- specifically, the side of the End of the World's cliff. Their small size should not fool cautious travelers, though; many years of evolution -- or perhaps the End of the World itself -- have given the runner-snakes extraordinary swiftness and slow-acting, debilitating venom. Although it does not take effect immediately, a runner-snake victim can succumb to the venom within hours, becoming drowsy (and eventually comatose) and losing fine motor control. Fortunately for climbers, runner-snakes only attack when threatened; the wary can ensure their safety by keeping a good distance from any sighted runner-snake.

Finally, there is always the option of descending the mountain in the direction from which the traveler came -- down the forbidding slope of the tallest mountain in the world. Although it is a steep and dangerous descent, many find it

easier to bear than the other two options -- and should they want to try one of the two later in life, it is always possible for a traveler to retrace his steps; the End of the World will be right where he left it.

Should the group choose to remain at the End of the World for a while, there are a number of features of the location which travelers often find quite useful. For instance, every two or three days, the Sage begins speaking prophetically for a few minutes; these prophecies will always have to do with the listeners -- usually advice on their next journey -- and will never be remembered by the Sage himself, who usually denies that they ever happen. In addition, the milk produced by Bessie has been occasionally known to have various spectacular properties. Those drinking from it might find that they have had years added onto their lifespan, injuries healed, or dire poison introduced into their system; or, it might just be normal cow's milk. The only way to be sure is to drink.

This is not, of course, the limit of what can happen at the End of the World; in fact, nearly *anything* might occur, as long as the odds are very firmly against it. (Philosophers say that the End of the World has not only a sense of humor but a spiteful streak.) Visitors have reported friends (and enemies) returning from the dead, the overnight appearance of a dense forest stretching out from where the End of the World once was which lasted only one day before vanishing again, and a cloud of small pink butterflies entering the Sage's hut, landing to spell out the word "Forsooth," and scattering again, among other strange tales.

Getting There is Half the Fun

As stated before, the End of the World is not easy to find, but it isn't an impossible task, either. Anyone who has been before might be persuaded to lead a band of adventurous souls back up the mountainside to the End; likewise, maps have been drawn showing its location, and the locals at the base of the mountain upon which the End is perched will be more than happy to point the way -- for a price, of course -- although they will almost never go up the slope themselves. (The philosophers, whom the wise listener will note have probably never met the natives in question, say that this is because they have ancestrally looked over the abyss and desperately disliked -- or feared -- what they saw; the natives, if asked, gladly tell that it's nice and warm in their valley and very, very cold on the way up the mountain. The End, by direct contrast, is pleasingly temperate, if above the tree line.) Groups of adventurers have also happened upon the End of the World entirely by accident, or have been guided there by oracles or priests.

But why would someone seek out the End of the World? The philosophers describing the End of the World advocate going in order to achieve enlightenment. Perhaps an adventurer might go the End of the World for religious reasons: a sect might decree that a pilgrimage to the End of the World is required of all true devotees of the faith, or a cult might spring up based around the Sage as a prophet or an oracle -- or a god. A group might also go looking for the Sage to acquire information; perhaps another party -- or some of their own comrades -- were last seen ascending toward the End of the World, and the group has now decided to go up themselves to find information on their whereabouts, and possibly to collect remains. (Or perhaps they have an ulterior motive -- was the previous party carrying a powerful item that the current group wants to get their hands on?) Or, it may just be for the sake of exploration -- climbing the mountain because it's there, so to speak. As the philosophers might say, the possibilities are endless.

Pyramid Review

Creatures of Freeport (for the d20 System)

Published by [Green Ronin Publishing](#)

Written by Graeme Davis & Keith Baker

Illustrated by Toren "Macbin" Atkinson, Kent Burles, Mario Fiorito, Chris Keefe, Jonathon Kirtz, & Britt Martin

96-page black & white perfect bound book; \$19.95

Monster tomes for the *d20 System* fall into three types. The first is the generic, containing a wide selection of beasts, creatures, and monsters suitable for use in any *Dungeons & Dragons* game. The second concentrates upon a particular type of creature carrying its theme across all its entries. The third again provides a range of creatures, but just for one world or setting. The [Monster Manual](#) is an example of the first, [Legions of Hell](#) is an example of the second, and [Monsternomicon - Volume I: Denizens of the Iron Kingdoms](#) an example of the third. As is *Creatures of Freeport*, a collection detailing a variety of species native to [Freeport: City of Adventure](#), Green Ronin's setting that combines fantasy, piracy, and adventure flavored with a dash of Lovecraftian horror.

Within its pages, *Creatures of Freeport* details just 16 species, plus another seven animals and 11 types, all of various sizes. In truth this does not seem like an awful lot, but what *Freeport* sourcebooks generally in quantity they make up for in quality. Plus these limited numbers make sense; the *Freeport: City of Adventure* setting is an area limited in size, consisting of just the city itself, and jungles spread across the island chain that the city is located in.

Indeed, what *Creatures of Freeport* makes for in its lack of entries is depth and usefulness. Each creature write-up runs between three and seven pages long, with an average of five pages. Besides the actual stats for the creature and its description, the information on each is greatly expanded. This expanded information comes in the form of skill checks for various Knowledge skills and Bardic Knowledge. These act as an easy method of handling how much is known by a character, and can add elements of roleplaying, research, and investigation to a game. In most cases, these checks and the parcels of information and hearsay they dole out relate to on particular tome. This is *Beastes of Farre Landes*, a book that can be found with a little effort in Freeport and beyond. Each entry also lists the uses that a creature's parts can be put to by alchemists, necromancers, spell casters, and others. Finally, every entry is rounded out with several detailed adventure hooks that showcase how a creature could be used.

The pages of *Creatures of Freeport* are graced by some excellent illustrations, particularly those by Toren Atkinson and Kent Burles. Since all of the artists on *Creatures of Freeport* have contributed to previous titles in the line, this supplement keeps in line with the other books. The book's writing is likewise good, with just one typographical error. That said, the color text taken from the *Beastes of Farre Landes* does grow a little wearing on the eye, as it follows the rule "If a word lacks an 'e,' find somewhere to put one -- preferably at the end."

The monsters themselves range in Challenge Rating from the lowly one-sixth of the humble Parrot, up to the 20 for the Colossal Flying Lizard. Both ends of this scale are examples of the themes that run through the designs in *Creatures of Freeport*. For the Parrot, the theme is the animal companion or familiar. From the Scalewing or Tiny Flying Lizard and the monkey-like undead hating Ghosteater to the magical cat-like outsider, the Malkin and the miniature couatl-like Picacouatl, there are plenty of creatures here that can serve as familiars to spellcasters and companions to others. For the Colossal Flying Lizard, the other theme is reptilian, with various lizards also described. This ties into Freeport's background, the city located in an island chain that is the only remnant of a continental empire ruled by the

Serpentmen. Most curious of all is the Spirit Lizard, the only type of fey creature native to the islands. They remain protective of the jungles and have a sad history. When the original summoning of the Unspeakable One shattered the continent, some Spirit Lizards were caught in their home trees, which were warped by the Unspeakable One's influence. These are known as Deadwood Trees, while those Spirit Lizards left outside at the time of this calamity became the bitter, twisted Devil Lizards. Both of these creatures are detailed in *Creatures of Freeport*. Included also is an antithesis of the Serpentmen, the Tavi, an intelligent race of Mongoose Folk bred to fight large snakes and others of their kind.

Not surprisingly, a third theme in this supplement is that of the ocean. The aquatic entries include the Dead Man's Brain, a coral that feeds on the lingering mental energies of the dead; the Nereid, the marine equivalent of the Dryad; the Wereshark, a vicious lycanthrope; and the Thanatos, a whale-sized, undead fish. Other creatures in the book include the Vulpine, another take on the humanoid fox trickster; several types of creature that are not necessarily dangerous in themselves, but certainly are when they swarm; plus a few ordinary, but no less interesting animals; and finally, some species of vermin that could prove very dangerous. Also contained in the appendix of animals are guidelines for teaching animal companions various tricks such as "Carry Message," "Howl," and "Steal." Several of the intelligent creatures in this book, such as the Vulpine and the Nereid, are supported with fully written up NPCs for use with one of their adventure hooks.

The strength of *Creatures of Freeport* is its depth and high utility factor, with every entry adding a little more to the setting's background in addition to giving a creature to be encountered, fought, or interacted with. Despite the details being particular to Freeport, there is nothing to stop a DM from stripping any of the creatures of their setting information and using them for a different campaign. But of course, this supplement works best with *Freeport: City of Adventure*. In that, *Creatures of Freeport* serves to show that a book of monsters with fewer entries is infinitely more interesting and useful than a catalogue of creatures to butcher.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Meddling Kids

Published by [PandaHead Games](#)

Written by Allyson Brooks

Edited by Brett Brooks

Art by Brian Laframboise, Peter Delgado, & Marcio Fiorito

96-page b&w digest-sized softcover; \$9.95

The title really says it all: *Meddling Kids* is a tribute to Saturday morning cartoons with good-guy youngsters accompanied by a quirky sidekick trying to solve mysteries (usually involving weird creatures). PandaHead Games is aiming for the junior set with this roleplaying primer from its Meddling Kids imprint.

Although the title is a pretty obvious reference, the game applies to many such shows. The players play the teenagers in the Clique, and the GM takes the part of the eccentric Wild Card character.

Meddling Kids calls its game engine The Starter System, and this book is "Stage One" (the advanced *Meddling Spies* and *Meddling Heroes* are next). PCs are a simple selection of Strength, Moves, Smarts, and Health, rated from one to 10 -- players buy them with a pool of points. Everyone falls under archetypes, like the Jock or the Brain. This gives everyone an idea of your role in the group, and gives the character a related free ability. The rest you have to pay points for.

Abilities are a catchall, bought with their own point pool. Price varies depending on how utile they'll be in the game. They include skills (such as Singer, or Xtreme Sporty for skateboarding), areas of knowledge (such as Math Whiz), and talents (including Luck, Popular) that round out your persona and make you different from other archetypes. Some knacks build on previous abilities (you can only become Really Rich if you already have Rich). If a roll is required, the ability lists the associated stat and its bonus. Steel Memory gives a +3 to Smarts, while Webworm adds 1d6.

Wild Cards also get abilities, but they have access to a variety of additional special ones -- after all, if you're an electric eel in a fishbowl, you'll need all the bonuses you can get. Some make the Wild Card more colorful, like the ability to fly, while others make it more playable (can the cat talk to anyone, or only to the members of the Clique?).

To use abilities, players roll three six-sided dice and add their stat and ability. Compare this to a Target Number, and if they beat it they succeed. Borrowing the Mojo Pool concept from PandaHead's *Xcrawl* game, players may also be offered Kid Points, a cooperative pool that, with teamwork, will add to a friend's total. Since it's geared toward kids, all the violence is muted. Heroes don't get hurt often, and even then it's something cartoonish like being pelted with fruit. Running out of Health leaves you Bonked, rendering you incapacitated however many minutes your Health was exceeded by.

As for the monsters (or whatever villains the Clique is investigating), no one engages them in combat. Kids have the option of tricking them, confusing them, or otherwise sneaking past them (there are some optional rules for chases). But the big confrontation comes when they've got a trap ready. Traps are set by having the kids brainstorm some Rube Goldbergian setup -- the more steps in their plan, the more effective the teens will be when the dice are rolled. If it's elaborate enough, they bag eccentric old Mr. Galoot and the police make him pay for his misdeeds.

The book is covered in appropriate cartoon art, and figures are almost immediately recognizable according to their archetype. Mr. Bingo, the sample Wild Card, is a pirate-possessed lab monkey who looks like he just stepped off your television screen.

The rules play right into the company's objectives, striving to tap the juvenile market by providing a gentle intro to the fine art of roleplaying. They're quick, and few subjects take more than a paragraph to explain. You'll find the same selection of GM advice here as in any other book, but it's tailored to its audience. The included adventure, in part the inauguration of Mr. Bingo and his crew, falls a little flat. It bends over to be as simple as everything else, but there's not much detecting to do. Players get to roll some dice, but aside from creating the trap, they don't so much sniff out clues as get them handed to them. Even then, the tips don't alter the action much -- the gang can't innovate, intercept trouble, or alter the linear plot (by design, no doubt), and some rolls produce the same effects with or without a success. On the other hand, it's very Scooby-esque.

Kids may also balk that they don't get to play the oh-so-tempting Wild Card (all those wonderful toys), but it's a good way to persuade everyone to try the GM's seat at least once. Whether you were raised on Scooby and Shaggy or Captain Caveman, *Meddling Kids* captures the genre well, and is a good initiation for little kids -- or big kids with their own.

--*Andy Vetromile*

Spaced Academy

A *Toon* Short Subject

by **Bob Portnell**

Cast of Characters

The Animator and two to five players. The players are free to play whatever characters they like; they may work together or in opposition. The only common thread is that all characters must express an interest in being astronauts.

The Animator plays Admiral Ham Sammich (chimp), commandant of the Spaced Academy and one of the first animals in space; Captain G. Armstrong Shepherd (dog), the senior Academy instructor; and Lieutenant Catherine Byrd (duck), the junior instructor. The Animator may add additional non-player peers for the player characters as he sees fit.

Location

The characters begin at the Spaced Academy, nestled just Outside of Town in the mountains near Colorado Springs. The adventure concludes with a real mission into (near) Outer Space.

Situation

The cartoon world needs brave astronauts like commandant Sammich, and our heroes have answered the call. Will they have what it takes to master the skills of space flight? Will they be able to meet Captain Shepherd's ever-increasing, impossibly high standards? Do they have . . . The Right Schtick?

Object Of The Adventure

The players must successfully complete the evaluation and training phases of the Academy program, followed by a genuine test mission into space. Those who do will earn the right to serve as astronauts.

Plot

The characters have responded to advertisements promising Great Adventure, Amazing Sightseeing, and Astounding Salaries to those able to become Astronauts. (Not to mention Babes. Or Hunks. Whatever.) They have been bussed from the recruiting office to the Spaced Academy complex and led into an auditorium. The stage has a single podium, three folding chairs, and a deep blue backdrop curtain featuring the academy symbol: a finned dunce cap tilted at an angle, with rocket exhaust pouring from the open end.

First Assembly

The auditorium lights are dimmed, and three figures come onto the stage from the wings. An aged chimpanzee in an old fashioned naval greatcoat leads; gold braid spills off the epaulets and halfway down his sleeves. He is followed by a young, efficient-looking duck. She wears the Spaced Service uniform, glasses and carries a clipboard. Last is a police dog with an annoyed expression and a uniform so heavily starched it squeaks.

The police dog stands at the podium. He doesn't bother turning the microphone on, since he speaks in a continuous

shout. "On behalf of Admiral Sammich and the Academy staff . . ." -- his muzzle twists into a snarl -- ". . . *welcome*. I am Captain Shepherd and I will be supervising your testing and training. Do not expect to succeed! Only the best, the brightest, and the bravest can become astronauts, and I can see from here that none of *you* have what it takes! So let's get this over with. The sooner you flunk, the sooner I can go back to writing my autobiography."

"Admiral Sammich is pleased to patrol the Academy grounds at any and all times observing training procedures. You *will* stop whatever you are doing and salute should the Admiral come near. Failure to salute will result in Unpleasant Consequences! Lieutenant Byrd will be on hand to keep records of every activity. Only the best of the candidates will move on to become cadet-trainees. First test begins in two minutes. You have that long to take your belongings to the dormitories, unpack, change clothes, eat lunch, and return here. *Dismissed!*"

Testing

Animator's Secret: These scenes can be run in any order; just be sure you're done with testing before you move on to training. If you have a large cast, you may wish to show only one or two characters for each test -- choose "volunteers" or look for the player who thinks he has a good gag to try. Throughout all the tests, Lieutenant Byrd (the duck seen at the assembly) stands in the background, making notes on her clipboard. She now wears a neat and spotlessly clean lab coat over her Service uniform and will appear in this way for the rest of the adventure.

The Centrifuge: Everyone's favorite training device. Captain Shepherd explains in his usual bellow that space launches require great stamina and tolerance for physical stress. The candidate will be placed in a small capsule at the end of a long rotating arm. The arm will spin the candidate around the circular chamber at increasing speeds, simulating the forces of a space launch.

Captain Shepherd monitors the operation from an adjacent control booth; candidates waiting for (or recovering from) their centrifuge runs wait here also. The booth has many interesting dials and buttons, along with a master control dial that ranges from "1 Gee!" (about the same as the "normal" force of gravity) through "10 Gees!" (more than most any space mission would experience) and on up to "**OH THE HUMANITY!**" at the highest setting.

Tolerating the Centrifuge is a Pick Up Heavy Thing Skill check, with a -1 penalty for every 2 Gees! of force. Characters in The Centrifuge are likely to experience the usual effects of excess Gee! force: sunken eyes, cheeks and lips pulled away from teeth, and so on. In extreme cases, a candidate might actually be *flattened* into the capsule seat. (We've seen this done, but we don't really understand how two-dimensional cartoons can be made more flat. But there it is.) Failure on the Skill check results in being Boggled.

If Captain Shepherd really has it in for the would-be astronaut, he'll vary the speed of The Centrifuge, speeding it up and slowing it down at random. This technique is known by the astronaut shorthand EIEO ("Eyeballs In, Eyeballs Out").

Pressure and Vacuum Tests: "It is important," Captain Shepherd shouts, "for the astronaut to be able to withstand rapid changes in air pressure. As you might have heard, there is no air in space and in the event of an accidental loss of cabin pressure . . ." A oxygen mask on a hose drops from somewhere above Captain Shepherd; he ignores it. "You will be expected to do your job appropriately. Expect this to be a long and boring test; the Lieutenant will give you some activities to pass the time."

The candidates are all ushered into a large pressure chamber which resembles a Thermos (TM) bottle, right down to the cap which is screwed into place to establish the seal. Inside is some modeling clay and dowel rods, with which candidates are supposed to recreate models illustrated in a book. (Models illustrated range from a simple dumbbell to a working steam locomotive.) A portable ice chest carries cans of Fizzy-Cola; a bowl on top is full of wrapped pieces of chewing gum. Lieutenant Byrd is behind the operator's console with her clipboard; Captain Shepherd watches with malicious enthusiasm through a thick porthole in the side of the chamber.

Unlike real pressure chambers, the Spaced Academy chamber can change pressures *instantly*. This can have interesting effects on cans of soda or on drinkers of soda. Likewise a bubble gum bubble can instantly take on dramatic

proportions if the air pressure is dropped.

Use a See/Hear/Smell roll to determine how well a character withstands a given change in pressure. (Yes, See/Hear/Smell. It's all about body sense.) Animators can feel free to add modifiers to the roll for the speed of change, with an instant transition from high-vacuum to ocean trench pressures getting the biggest modifier. Visual effects of lowering pressure might include bugging eyes, eardrums popping out, and all-body swelling (potentially leading up to a traditional "explosive" decompression.) Another possible consequence of low pressure is a painful condition called "the bends" -- the comedy potential should be evident in the name alone. Pressure increases might be signaled by all-body shrinkage (akin to the classic "steam box" gag), flattening, or folding. Failure on a skill roll results in one die damage.

The Medical Exam: Since "astronauts must be in perfect, flawless, ideal health" (or so Captain Shepherd insists at high volume) the candidates are thoroughly examined by a top-flight surgeon, Doctor Markus Illby (an owl), and his ace team of nurses (all identical quail in nurse's caps.) The usual routine of medical exams follows: measuring height, weight, and other physical dimensions; blood tests (love those needles); electrocardiograms (reading heartbeat patterns); electroencephalograms (reading brain patterns, if such exist -- brains, not patterns); and the ever popular "turn your head and cough" test. No doubt the players and Animator can devise more painful and intrusive tests if desired. Candidates should make a basic Smarts roll to avoid doing a "take" of pain with each indignity; failure on the roll results in Lieutenant Byrd shaking her head sadly and making marks on her clipboard . . .

Training

Much to Captain Shepherd's disgust, you've all managed to pass the testing phases. (It helps that Lieutenant Byrd keeps all the records.) "All right. You've made it this far. You're fit enough to be astronauts, but are you smart enough?"

Animator's Secret: Actually, it's just the same secret as last time. These scenes can be run in any order; just be sure you're done with training before you move on to the real mission. As always, Lieutenant Byrd takes very efficient notes.

The Tank: "Trainees get their first experience of weightlessness in this large swimming pool! You will be outfitted with real spacesuits and lead weights will be added so that you float exactly in the middle of the tank, neither rising nor falling. You will then be expected to perform your duties. Good luck." Aside from the inconvenience of the bulky space suits, the awkward controls for same (which at the slightest mishap will overinflate the suit so that the character looks like a giant marshmallow with hands, feet and a helmet head), and the ever-present risk of drowning . . . Captain Shepherd has handed out individual assignments that are difficult if you're lucky (build a house of cards underwater) to simply impossible (make a pretty vase using the provided pottery wheel and water-soluble clay.) Trainees will need to find creative ways to cooperate (or not) to solve their problems.

Whoopsie-Doodles: "Having acquired free fall skills in The Tank, you will now proceed to mastery in the Training Aircraft!" (*Okay, we know we said these could be run in any order. We meant it. Just rewrite Shepherd's dialogue appropriately.*) The next phase of training involves practicing zero-gravity skills in a large empty cargo plane. The interior of the cargo compartment is heavily padded; a layer of airsickness bags covers every inch of the padding. This plane is known as the Whoopsie-Doodles, both for the usual flight path (involving repeated climbs followed by free fall dives) and for the effects of free fall on the trainees. High Smarts or Chutzpah will help one resist the siren song of Space Sickness. This is also a fine time to practice advanced space flight mayhem skills, like floating an anvil over your favorite instructor or Natural Enemy. After all, when Whoopsie-Doodles pulls out of the dive, everything inside suddenly experiences 2 Gee! . . .

The Flight Simulator: A mockup of the space shuttle flight deck sits in one large room, mounted on hydraulic actuators able to shift it in most any direction. (The words "Star Tours" are imperfectly painted out on one side.) It is expected that trainees will fight among themselves to get to be commander or pilot. Inside, the cockpit is a gallery of unlabeled controls and indecipherable displays -- a Drive Vehicle roll is required any time a cadet actually tries to do something useful. Failure of the roll could generate a consequence as simple as a display light coming on ("NOT THAT ONE, YOU DOPE!") or as involved as an unexpected cream pie deployment.

Trainees can experience (be subjected to) (be tortured with) any simulated mission or mishap Captain Shepherd can devise; a favorite is a satellite retrieval mission (except the satellite is sulky and refuses to hold still for capture.) It is also likely that the "simulated" asteroids seen on the screens will *actually* crash through the windows to bean the unfortunate.

The Big Finish: The Mission

The graduation exercise is a real mission using the Academy's space shuttle Minnow. Shepherd and the cadets will fly to orbit to repair the Dribble Space Telescope (an unsightly collection of patches, boded repairs and bubble gum as it is, loosely resembling an oversize drinking glass with solar panel wings and a hole near the rim). Pick Up Heavy Thing rolls at -2 are called for to endure the 4 Gee! launch; failure results in being Boggled and missing the chance to "ooh!" and "ahh!" out the windows once in orbit.

The current repair involves the placement of an oversize bifocal pince-nez on the telescope. If the adventure is tied to the SAPS program from *Toon*, our heroes will be issued the standard full-body hot-pink-with-bubble-helmet SAPSuits.

Captain Shepherd will do everything in his power to make life difficult for the cadets, including wiggling the shuttle at inopportune times or making inappropriate use of the robotic arm in the cargo bay. It should be clear at this point that the only way to successfully complete the mission is to mutiny! (Lt. Byrd does not join the space mission, as she is in Mission Control at the Academy.)

Several Drive Vehicle rolls will probably be required to make the rendezvous, put the robotic arm in position, and make the pince-nez installation. If the astronauts manage to confine (or get rid of) Shepherd, they will be able to complete the mission with a minimum of (external) mishaps. If not, they will return in shame and disgrace . . . but it's Captain Shepherd who will get a triple-strength chimpanzee screaming from the Admiral. No one remains sane after a triple-strength screaming . . .

Plot Points

Give one Plot Point to the character who makes the best showing in each testing or training exercise. Give one Plot Point to each character who survives the mission without falling down once; give an extra point to each character if they actually managed to get the Dribble working again. Don't forget the usual migration of Plot Points during play! (*Toon* pg. 55)

Afterwards

The cadets return home and are received as heroes (or scapegoats, if something awful happened to the satellite observatory). Shepherd is hauled away on a hand-truck, straight-jacketed and muzzled, but his rage for revenge is plain enough to hear as he's taken to the Spaceman's Retirement Home, Insane Asylum, and Car Wash. Either way, Our Heroes will be offered prestigious positions in the space service. This could be an ideal segue into the SAPS-based adventures "Spaced Out Saps" or "Mars Needs Creampuffs" in *Toon*. This plot could serve equally well as an introduction to the *Tooniversal Tour Guide* series "Star Toon." Just update the technology and cliches appropriately.

Inspiration

Your Author found the following resources essential in developing this adventure:

We Seven by the Mercury astronauts. Vivid inside account of the selection and training of the original American astronauts. The testing and training described in this adventure are mild compared to the heroic reality.

The Mercury 13 by Martha Ackmann. More details of the 1960s astronaut evaluation process and the semi-secret history of another corps of Mercury astronauts.

"Conrad the Sailor" (1942). Stowaway Daffy Duck makes naval duty complicated for Conrad the cat. Admiral Sammich is a direct blend of real space apes and the flag officer from this Chuck Jones cartoon.

Man in Space (1955), *Man and the Moon* (1957), and *Mars and Beyond* (1957). These episodes of the *Disneyland* series still give a good sense for the basics of space flight despite their age. "Joe Everyman as Astronaut" is amusing both for the cartoon and for the dated 1950s culture. Available on limited edition DVD.

And, of course, The Compleat **Toon** Library. Special thanks to veteran Toonster David Morgan-Mar for remarkably helpful suggestions and comments.

Characters

The main Academy characters are created with 16 points of Attributes and 35 points of Skills and Shticks, just to give them a nominal edge over the player characters.

Ham Sammich, Admiral

Description: Chimp-sized chimpanzee, dressed in naval cap and long-coat bedecked with gold braid. In the habit of strolling around the Academy compound with his hands behind his back, observing the goings on. He could appear anywhere! Even in The Tank! Other characters are required to snap to attention when he passes; failure to do so will earn the slacker a chimpanzee-screaming (one die of damage).

Beliefs and Goals: Be distinguished. Know what's going on at all times. Never speak, unless it's to scream at a deserving subordinate. In his youth, Sammich's Natural Enemies were space program scientists; however, he's outlived them all and so has no Natural Enemies remaining.

Hit Points: 11

Muscle: 5

Break Down Door: 5
Climb: 9
Fight: 5
Pick Up Heavy Thing: 5
Throw: 5

Zip: 3

Dodge: 5
Drive Vehicle: 3
Fire Gun: 3
Jump: 7
Ride: 3
Run: 3
Swim: 3

Smarts: 4

Hide/Spot Hidden: 9
Identify Dangerous Thing: 4
Read: 6
Resist Fast-Talk: 6
See/Hear/Smell: 4
Set/Disarm Trap: 4

Track/Cover Tracks: 6

Chutzpah: 4

Fast-Talk: 4

Pass/Detect Shoddy Goods: 4

Sleight of Hand: 4

Sneak: 10

Shtick(s):

Chimpanzee Scream: 9. The object of the Admiral's wrath is subjected to a chimpanzee-style tongue-lashing consisting of high-pitched shrieks and screams. This does 1 die damage. There is no way to avoid or counter this attack. Cost 4. (The Animator is encouraged to leap around the room, hooting and shrieking ape-style at the offending player.)

Captain G. Armstrong Shepherd, Senior Instructor

Description: Human-size dog, dressed in impeccably pressed uniform jumpsuit. He seldom speaks below a shout, thanks to hearing loss from repeated exposure to chimpanzee screams. Spittle drips from his muzzle when he's really worked up. His obsessive need to be "the best" led to his demotion from active space service into this menial position at the Academy; he wants to prove himself a team player again but has problems with this.

Beliefs and Goals: I'm the best! No one can outmatch me, especially stupid candidates and trainees. Therefore no candidate must be accepted and no trainee graduated. Natural Enemies are (what else?) astronaut candidates and trainees.

Hit Points: 10

Muscle: 3

Break Down Door: 3

Climb: 3

Fight: 5

Pick Up Heavy Thing: 3

Throw: 5

Zip: 5

Dodge: 5

Drive Vehicle: 7

Fire Gun: 7

Jump: 5

Ride: 7

Run: 5

Swim: 5

Smarts: 3

Hide/Spot Hidden: 8

Identify Dangerous Thing: 3

Read: 3

Resist Fast-Talk: 3

See/Hear/Smell: 3

Set/Disarm Trap: 3

Track/Cover Tracks: 3

Chutzpah: 5

Fast-Talk: 10

Pass/Detect Shoddy Goods: 10
Sleight of Hand: 10
Sneak: 5

Shtick(s): Incredible Strength: 5 (Cost 5.)

Lieutenant Catherine Byrd, Junior Instructor

Description: Human-size black duck in space service jumpsuit. Wears glasses to look more efficient but doesn't really need them to see. Carries a clipboard with her at all times. Often seen with lab coat over uniform.

Beliefs and Goals: Be fair. Stay out of the Captain's way but always be on-hand in case the Captain wigs out. Candidates and Trainees are cute and need all the help they can get.

Hit Points: 12

Muscle: 3

Break Down Door: 3
Climb: 3
Fight: 3
Pick Up Heavy Thing: 3
Throw: 5

Zip: 3

Dodge: 3
Drive Vehicle: 3
Fire Gun: 3
Jump: 3
Ride: 3
Run: 3
Swim: 9

Smarts: 6

Hide/Spot Hidden: 9
Identify Dangerous Thing: 9
Read: 8
Resist Fast-Talk: 6
See/Hear/Smell: 6
Set/Disarm Trap: 9
Track/Cover Tracks: 8

Chutzpah: 4

Fast-Talk: 4
Pass/Detect Shoddy Goods: 7
Sleight of Hand: 7
Sneak: 4

Shtick(s):

Bag of Many Things: 8. Actually a jumpsuit of many things, Lt. Byrd can produce almost anything from her pockets to assist the player characters on the sly. Cost 5.

Heard On High: The Angels of Mons

"And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."

-- 2 Kings 6:17

When angels come, they bring two things: [words](#) and [death](#). So it was in ancient Judah and Israel, and so it was in the Belgian battlefields of the Great War. Although no less a source than A.J.P. Taylor refers to the Angels of Mons as an unequivocal "supernatural intervention . . . observed, more or less reliably, on the British side," the truth is that all we have are the words -- and the death -- that someone, or something, angelic or otherwise, brought to Mons.

"His heart grew hot as a burning coal, it grew cold as ice within him, as it seemed to him that a tumult of voices answered to his summons. He heard, or seemed to hear, thousands shouting: 'St. George! St. George!' . . . And as the soldier heard these voices he saw before him, beyond the trench, a long line of shapes, with a shining about them. They were like men who drew the bow, and with another shout their cloud of arrows flew singing and tingling through the air towards the German hosts."

-- Arthur Machen, "The Bowmen," in the *London Evening News* (Sep. 29, 1914)

On August 22, 1914, the world came apart for the British Expeditionary Force in Belgium. The onrushing German hordes had splintered the Allied front, and were pivoting on their axis for the drive to the Marne. The BEF was strung out, isolated, and outnumbered by more than three to one, and the 6th and 9th Brigades of II Corps were pinned along the Mons-Conde Canal by the German advance. The next day was spent tearing holes in the German ranks with aimed rifle fire, but that afternoon the Canal was flanked and II Corps had to pull back. On the retreat from Mons, British soldiers claimed to see "shining figures" such as St. George, angels, armored horsemen, and medieval longbowmen intercept the German forces, holding off the attack long enough for British units to evacuate. In some stories, the apparitions actually attacked the Germans, smiting them with heavenly might; in most cases, the visions simply panicked German horses, or somehow rendered the Germans unable (or unwilling) to advance. Some soldiers wrote of seeing "black clouds," "flashes of light," "winged shapes," and various other supernatural entities and shapes on the long, confused retreat. On August 26, the surviving British regrouped and dealt the Germans another blow at La Cateau, delaying the inevitable long enough for the survivors to pull back and fight again. Bloodied, the Germans held their positions for ten days before resuming the offensive. 8,000 Tommies were dead or dying; perhaps 20,000 Germans along with them -- but the Angels of Mons had saved the BEF, and by extension, France.

"Now it is possible that some persons, judging by the tone of these remarks of mine, may gather the impression that I am a profound disbeliever in the possibility of any intervention of the super-physical order in the affairs of the physical order. They will be mistaken if they make this inference . . . But I confess, very frankly, that I credit none of the 'Angels of Mons' legends, partly because I see, or think I see, their derivation from my own idle fiction, but chiefly because I have, so far, not received one jot or tittle of evidence that should dispose me to belief."

-- Arthur Machen, *The Bowmen and Other Legends of the War*, "Introduction" (1915)

Or was it just trained rifle fire and the entrenching tool, which British soldiers used to throw up earthen battlements at every stop along the retreat, prefiguring the defensive advantages that trenches would convey later in the war? It is interesting to note that not a single one of the hundreds of reports of the Angels (or Archers, or Glowing Clouds) of Mons predates the publication, in late September (about a month after the retreat), of a short story by Arthur Machen called "The Bowmen." Set during an unnamed "Retreat of the Eighty Thousand" (obviously Mons, at the time), it tells of a soldier beset by impossible odds who recalls the inscription on the plates in a vegetarian restaurant he patronized: *Adsit Anglis Sanctus Georgius*, "May St. George be a present help to the English." Speaking the motto out loud, the soldier is astonished to hear it echoed by thousands of throats, calling out medieval war cries -- and then the Bowmen appear and slaughter the Germans with magical arrows that leave no mark upon the bodies. Machen spent much of 1915 and 1916 answering eager letters from occultists, and outraged letters from nurses and propagandists (and sometimes, as with the redoubtable Phyllis Campbell, all three in one), swearing that they knew someone (whose name and unit they somehow never included) who had seen the Angels at Mons. The few times that identifiable soldiers

swore to the sight, their stories broke down -- they had enlisted after Mons, or their unit was nowhere near the Retreat. Machen's story, dashed off after a frenzied vision during a church service as the news from Mons came in, had struck a chord in the peculiar spirituality and matriolatry of Edwardian Britain. When it struck, however, the echoes changed his bluff (if supernaturally powerful) archers and warrior saint into shimmering female angels of protection and security.

"[T]hen there is the story of the Angel of Mons going strong through the 2nd Corps of how the angel of the Lord on the traditional white horse, and clad all in white with flaming sword, faced the advancing Germans at Mons and forbade their further progress. Men's nerves and imagination play weird pranks in these strenuous times. All the same the angel at Mons interests me. I cannot find out how the legend arose."

-- Brig.-Gen. John Charteris, letter to his wife, dated Sep. 5, 1914

The only shred of contemporary, certifiably pre-Machen evidence for the sightings of Angels at Mons comes from the diaries and letters of Brigadier-General John Charteris, quoted above. Two weaknesses in Charteris as witness remain, however -- the first being that the letter above exists only in an edited version published by his wife in 1931, well after the Machen story saw print. The more serious weakness is that Charteris worked at GHQ in military intelligence, with direct personal responsibility for other propaganda and atrocity stories, including those spread by "Angels of Mons" enthusiasts such as Phyllis Campbell in their publications. When this resume item gets tossed into the equation -- along with the interesting fact that interest in Machen's story was revived nine months later when the occult magazine *The Light* "received a visit from a military officer" who quite obviously planted the story with the credulous spiritualists -- it begins to look like the Angels of Mons came not from Arthur Machen, or even from a vegetarian restaurant, but from Whitehall.

The other best-known legend of supernatural intervention in World War I, the "white cavalry" story, shows similar fingerprints. Allegedly, a German advance on Bethune on April 16, 1918 halted for no reason and raked a completely empty stretch of ground with heavy artillery and machine-gun fire. Then, again for no reason, the Germans threw down their arms and fled the scene. Captured German prisoners said that a brigade of cavalry, in white uniforms riding white horses, had charged them across that space, immune to gunfire, until a "great fear fell on" them and they fled. Curiously, this story appears nowhere until 1942, when it is printed in *Household Brigade* magazine, a time and place not un-conducive to propaganda attempts. The genuine "urban legends" of the First World War seem to center on "the Comrade in White," a figure who, seemingly immune to shot and shell, saved wounded men from no-man's land or otherwise desperate situations. (I give nothing away by noting that the Comrade often shows "old wounds" on His hands and feet.) There is one interesting story of a mysterious Frenchman who passed out a miraculous elixir right before the first terrible German gas attack at Ypres in 1915; the notion of Nicholas Flamel or the [Comte de Saint-Germain](#) in the trenches appeals somehow in a way that the clumsy "white cavalry" does not.

"The great neglect of these explainers is in not accounting for an astonishing preference for, or specialization in, marching soldiers, by mirages. But if often there be, in the sky, things or beings that move in parallel lines, and, if their betrayals be not mirages, but their shadows cast down upon the haze of this earth, or Brocken spectres, such frequency, or seeming specialization, might be accounted for."

-- Charles Fort, *New Lands* (1923)

Which is not to laugh to scorn the notion of white cavalry or other phantom armies per se; Charles Fort is right to note that "shadows cast down upon the haze of this earth" quite often take the form of soldiers. 800 soldier-martyrs appeared during the Turkish sieges of Otranto in 1480, 1537, and 1644. Spectral armies marched across the skies of Scotland in 1686 and 1744, and appeared during the battles of Edgehill and Marston Moor during the English Civil War, to murky but vaguely Royalist effect. St. George himself appeared to English soldiers on crusade at Antioch in 1098 and Jerusalem the next year. He also, as Machen knew well, appeared at Agincourt in 1415, whence his miraculous Archers came to the relief of Mons. (The Russian troops in 1914 apparently had their own miraculous horseman, one General Skobelev, who despite having died in 1877, wore a white uniform and rode a white charger against the Hun, for proper spectral impact.) Serbian troops saw their own national hero, Marko Kraljevic, during the Balkan Wars; a spectral army with flaming swords marched across the skies of Varasdin, Croatia, in August of 1888. Throughout 1881, spectral armies maneuvered over Delaware, Virginia, and Maryland; such tales, along with the "great fear" reported by the alleged German prisoners of Bethune, begin to elide into the infamous [Wild Hunt](#) and still

murkier clouds of witness.

"[T]he threatening sky, the restless symmetrical movements . . . the whole scene reminded me in some strange way of Milton's description of the legions of dark angels practising for giant warfare with St Michael on the plains of Hell . . ."

-- Capt. Arthur Osborn, 4th Dragoon Guards, BEF, quoted in *1914*, by Lynn MacDonald

Could the confused and interrupted chains of testimony and evidence thus be proof of the Angels' reality? Witnesses to the Wild Hunt can be driven mad, after all; the first thing any angel says in the Bible, of course, is "Be not afraid." Intriguingly, the Russellite sect in Britain (later to merge with, or become, the Jehovah's Witnesses there) taught in 1917 that the Biblical "war in heaven" broke out in 1914, and that the Dragon (Ho! for Saint George!) and his angels were cast down to earth that year. Perhaps the Masonic leadership of Britain called in some old markers from the summer of 1888 (when angels marched over Croatia, and a different flaming [blade](#) scorched the heart of London) and diverted their path through Mons, a cloud of wings and hands in the forests of Belgium, itself a locus of [death energies](#) on a scale dwarfed only by the war just beginning. Phyllis Campbell claimed to Machen that she had no proof of the Angels' appearance because the government had clamped down on the story -- an interesting theory, since what motive other than Satanic involvement could persuade the British government to suppress a propaganda triumph? And, just as though there was such a conspiracy, no soldier ever came forward with a verifiable tale of the Angels, almost as if their involvement came at some unknown, but horrible, cost. The Germans' inexplicable halts (which did occur, both at Mons/La Cateau, and at Bethune) carry a similar whiff of the horrible and inexplicable. The reports of deaths without a mark on the bodies (well before the debut of gas in the war) sound simultaneously like genuine angelic effects (as with the unfortunate Assyrians in 2 Kings 19:35) and a sort of steampunk [subsonic weapon](#) that might spread both fear and death. Bisociate the tale: perhaps the two are the same; perhaps the Mons Effect is a vibratory cannon that tears open reality, developed in secret by British ontogeneers.

". . . Machen meets the Three Impostors, is engaged in conversation with his own creations, gets his ear bent by young men in spectacles. An entire process is implicit here . . .

The written page becomes too frail a barrier. Things start to tear their way through from the other side . . .

The dreams start answering back. Miss Lally waves to Machen from a tea shop window."

-- Alan Moore, *Snakes and Ladders*, "Baghdad" (1999)

A mysterious German source calling himself "Colonel Friedrich Herzenwirth" claimed in 1930 that the Angels had been just such a steampunk effort, a cinema projection on the clouds over Mons to dishearten the British defenders. Although the Germans denied the story (and "Herzenwirth's" existence to boot), there *was* a zeppelin over Mons that day -- a fact with many possible interpretations. Could Brigadier Charteris have deployed [Pepper's Ghost](#) -- or even made a pact with the [Things Between the Frames](#) -- to reverse "Herzenwirth's" semiotic warfare in the clouds over Mons? Could the psychic leakage of that battle have struck Machen, inspiring "The Bowmen"? One Harold Begbie, who wrote *On the Side of the Angels* to rebut Machen's claim, believed that Machen "may have received from the brain of a wounded or a dying British soldier in France some powerful impression of the battlefield at Mons."

Or does it, bisociatively, go the other way? In 1899, Machen spent about a year encountering figures from his own fiction, noting that his personal fabric of reality was slipping him from London into "Baghdad," a kind of super-sense world above and inside London itself. Shortly thereafter, he joined the ritual magical society known as the Golden Dawn; in 1901, he became a traveling actor, performing Shakespeare all across England until 1909. Had Machen discovered that he (born in the mystical seat of Caerleon in Wales) had opened a door or pierced a veil with his writing and his dreams? Did he use the Golden Dawn's magics to begin to bind these [tulpas](#), and orchestrate [Shakespearean dramaturgy](#) to reknit his own sanity and perhaps recharge the mystical batteries of England for the coming crisis? Did the "vision" he had, of "our men with a shining about them," in the furnace of battle and terror "seven times heated" call -- or create -- the Angels of Mons? Did *Arthur* -- Arthur Machen -- save England, in her hour of greatest need?

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Sora

Character Concept by Kenneth Hite *GURPS Fourth Edition* Stats by Brian Hogue and Sean Punch

Manila exists in many worlds. In some worlds, its masters speak Japanese; in others Russian; in others Spanish or English. But in every Manila, the real bosses hide in the stark tropical shadows. They are the Triads, interlocking networks of criminal gangs with a finger in everything from traditional thuggery and kidnapping to high-tech organlegging and holopiracy.

In one Manila, the local Triads needed a powerful computer system to use as an illegal data haven -- and a relatively innocuous place to store it. They chose a local circus, setting their comp up, seemingly, for holographic set projections. Anyone who asked too many questions . . . well, they just disappeared into those tropical shadows.

Two of those who disappeared were the circus' headlining acrobats, the husband-and-wife team who anchored the Esclamado Family troupe. Their bodies turned up in the city dump, dinner for rats and gulls. Sora, their daughter, and a rising star of the show, vanished as well . . . hiding in Manila's urban maze, avoiding every eye, living by petty theft and trickery. Somehow -- she doesn't speak of it -- she came to the attention of the legendary Guro Dan Inosanto, master of the deadly Filipino martial arts of escrima and kali. He recognized her potential, and took her in as pupil and ward. He kept her from the sight of the Triads, and taught her to combine her rage, her alertness, and her acrobatics into a fluid system of death and life.

Sora could not stay under his wing forever, though. She had to hunt down and kill the Triad bosses who had murdered her parents. She worked in the meantime for other gangs, zaibatsu, the underground, or whoever else could pay her increasing fees. Though she was no computer whiz, she also managed a surprising number of successful hacks through "social engineering," dumpster diving, and good old-fashioned breaking and entering. As a Triad-hunting vigilante, she slowly earned the trust of Manila's small shopkeepers and churches; as a corporate agent, she gained contacts among the wealthy and powerful.

One trail led to a suspiciously lucrative warehouse operation in the Quiapo district. Sora set up a surveillance pattern, rigorously tracking who entered and who left -- and discovered that some people entered the warehouse and did not

Sora



A full-color PDF is [also available!](#)

leave for days, or even weeks! But some of those who entered and left were Triad kingpins.

Clearly, though, this was the front for a very secret smuggling operation. It was time for direct action. She broke in, slew more than a dozen mooks and three Very Important Crooks, and was taken from behind by a dart. Still conscious, she was bundled into a machine that looked on the inside like a bus . . . and then out again, without going anywhere. She was thrown into a crude cell. It would have held most people, but not the daughter of the Esclamados, not a student of Inosanto. She fled the warehouse . . . but found herself in another Manila, where everything was the same yet different . . . in this one, America had won the Pacific War! But here, too, the Triads were the bosses.

Sora made a place for herself in this strange Manila's underworld and resumed her watching. Soon she realized that the Triads of her world and this one were cooperating, and that the warehouse was the gateway. Well, fine . . . if that was their scheme, she'd destroy it. And them.

A mid-level Triad was strangled from behind in a gambling den. Sora now had a warehouse key. Soon she knew the place better than its masters. Sora learned that the "bus" she had ridden in was a "conveyor," a shuttle between the worlds, and the only one the Triads had. One night she broke a guard's neck, walked into the conveyor, ripped the improvised cover off the red Panic button, and hit it.

Ten seconds later, on yet another world, she was telling her story in broken English. A month after that, she was in the first wave of the ICops team that visited her original world to take out "her" Triads for good.

And when the operation was over, Infinity had a choice: either send her to Coventry or offer her a job. And Sora was too good to waste.

Sora

335 points

5'2", 130 lbs. (SM 0).

ST 12 [20]; **DX** 16 [120]; **IQ** 13 [60]; **HT** 11 [10].

Dmg 1d-1; *BL* 29 lbs.

HP 12 [0]; *Will* 13 [0]; *Per* 12 [-5]; *FP* 11 [0].

Basic Speed 7.00 [5]; *Basic Move* 8 [5]

Dodge 11*; *Parry* 12* (Judo or Karate).

Social Background

TL 8 [0].

CF East Asian [0]; Homeline [1].

Languages: Chinese (Broken) [2]; English (Broken) [2]; Japanese (Accented) [4]; Tagalog (Native) [0].

Advantages

Catfall [10]

Combat Reflexes [15]

Fit [5]

Legal Enforcement Powers [15]

Perfect Balance [15]

Trained by a Master [30]

Disadvantages

Code of Honor (Professional) [-5]
Delusion ("My mother is an angel in Heaven watching over me") [-5]
Duty (To ISWAT; 15 or less; Extremely Hazardous) [-20]
Enemy (Large group: Manila Triads; Hunter; 6 or less) [-15]
Light Sleeper [-5]
Pacifism (Cannot Harm Innocents) [-10]

Quirks

Careful [-1]
Devout Roman Catholic (reacts at +1 to Catholic clergy, tithes, attends church regularly) [-1]
Dislikes wide-open spaces [-1]
Uncongenial [-1]
Vow ("Never reject a challenge to single combat") [-1]

Skills

Acrobatics 17† DX+1 [4]
Area Knowledge (Manila) 14 IQ+1 [2]
Broadsword 15 DX-1 [1]
Climbing 17† DX+1 [2]
Computer Hacking/TL8 11 IQ-2 [2]
Computer Programming/TL8 11 IQ-2 [1]
Fast-Draw (Knife) 17* DX+1 [1]
Fast-Draw (Small Thrown Weapon) 17* DX+1 [1]
Fast-Draw (Tonfa) 17* DX+1 [1]
Fast-Talk 13 IQ+0 [2]
Filch 15 DX-1 [1]
Garrote 16 DX+0 [1]
Holdout 12 IQ-1 [1]
Judo 16 DX+0 [4]
Jumping 16 DX+0 [1]
Karate 16 DX+0 [4]
Knife 16 DX+0 [1]
Lockpicking/TL8 15 IQ+2 [8]
Makeup/TL8 13 IQ+0 [1]
Main-Gauche 16 DX+0 [2]
Observation 11 Per-1 [1]
Performance 12 IQ-1 [1]
Photography/TL8 12 IQ-1 [1]
Pickpocket 14 DX-2 [1]
Search 11 Per-1 [1]
Shadowing 13 IQ+0 [2]
Smallsword 17 DX+1 [4]
Stealth 15 DX-1 [1]
Streetwise 13 IQ+0 [2]
Throwing Art 15 DX-1 [2]
Tonfa 15 DX-1 [1]
Traps/TL8 12 IQ-1 [1]
Urban Survival 11 Per-1 [1]

Techniques

Arm Lock 17 [1]
Back Kick 13 [2]
Choke Hold 15 [2]
Disarming (Smallsword) 18 [2]
Dual-Weapon Attack (Smallsword) 15 [3]
Elbow Strike 15 [1]
Jump Kick 14 [3]
Knee Strike 16 [1]
Off-Hand Weapon Training (Smallsword) 16 [4]
Rope Up 17† [2]
Scaling 15† [2]
Sweeping Kick 15 [3]
* Includes +1 for Combat Reflexes.
† Includes +1 for Perfect Balance.

Filing Cabinet Filler Column

I am moving from the city that has been my home for the past 13 years.

In the tearful series finale -- or at least the cliché-ridden flashback episode -- moving entails the discovery of various knickknacks and mementos that make one reflect on various aspects of the character and his life. In dramas, moving can unearth secrets and clues to buried mysteries of the past. ("My goodness -- this certificate . . . my father had a *previous* marriage? To Lady Macbeth?!?")

For the most part, my own moving adventure has unearthed few such nostalgia bombs in my own closets. Probably the most interesting thing -- for a gaming magazine -- is what I do believe was my first handout ever. It was the pre-history of my long-running *GURPS Supers* campaign, given out before the first game. I considered typing it in for everyone, but my present-self -- who has a Creative Writing degree and has been writing professionally for a long while -- won't allow this to happen.

I also found my second handout -- the lyrics to a fictitious song entitled "Metagirl," attributed to whatever pop flavor of the day was popular at the time. Again, my creative respectability forbids me from publishing this, and actually demands it be buried in a deep grave in an unexplored forest.

Anyway, here are a few random thoughts about some of the goodies I've found in my old folders.

Save everything. I'm assuming it's obvious, especially for the packrat culture of most gamers, but you never know when you'll want to recycle something you've done before. For example, when I ran a *Star Trek* miniseries (back in the netherworld between FASA and Last Unicorn), I wrote pre-adventure scripts for each adventure. I discovered, to my surprise, that I still had them all. And -- unlike my Supers handouts -- they were pretty good. So now I'm excited about perhaps rerunning that series.

All gamers hit cold spells, and browsing through old adventures, notes, characters, or handouts can be a good way to rekindle that creative spark. Or, at the very least, it can give you an excuse to avoid packing for a while.

Whither printing? I'm concerned that I don't have any printouts from the past five years or so. I suspect it's partly because I lack the colossal store of free time I laughingly called "college," so I just haven't had the time to make the elaborate handouts I normally do. But it's also because I haven't been saving them. I suspect *that's* because I believe, on some level, I can just print them out again. (After all, I have pretty much every document ever on my hard drive . . . or in the *Pyramid* archives.) But I should know better; these ancient documents I have were part of my long-gone Apple IIs system. They're so antiquated, they were printed out on a dot matrix printer in Times Old Roman.

Put in holes. Beware of holes. The original Supers handout revolved around a hidden metahuman community that needed to band together and overthrow an oppressive insanely powerful being. Now, at one point in this back story I had this being disappear for two minutes, then reappear for the final confrontation (which he lost).

When I put it that bit, I had no clue what the evil bad guy (called "The Mentor") was actually *doing* in those two minutes . . . but I figured that it would be useful to have an unexplained gap for the ultra-powerful plot device character who got whacked.

Now, the interesting thing is, when it came time for character creation, over half of the players wanted to make use of that two minutes for their origin. The Mentor was popping up, giving instructions to one PC, issuing a challenge to another, and dropping off the dry cleaning of a couple other players, for all I knew. I also ended up using that gap once or twice in my own adventures. In short, this dude did more in two minutes than most folks do in their 20s.

So, if I was trying to extrapolate a random piece of advice out of this, I'd note that inserting these kind of open-ended wild-card plot elements can be a great idea . . . but if you make those elements commonly known, it's very likely the players will want to make use of it for their own purposes.

I've been gaming a long time. The Supers handouts were from my first semester of college, which puts them at 1991. This was last millennium -- before I was an adult . . . heck, even before the existence of *Pyramid*. This won't be a full wallowing down memory lane, although I think it's amazing to consider that I'm working for the company who published the RPG I ran my first game for. And rummaging through all my old papers is a great way to avoid packing. After all, I've got a good five days before I need to load a truck with all my belongings. What could possibly go wrong?

* * *

Did I hear someone ask about what *Pyramid* chats are coming up? No? Hmm. Oh, well; too bad!

Tonight -- July 23rd -- we've got Phil Reed stopping by to chat about various interesting things, including his 24-hour RPG (and what that entails), and where Ronin Arts is headed. It starts at 7 P.M. Central Time; be there or be square!

Next week -- Friday, July 30th -- we're having another **GURPS Fourth Edition** chat -- this one covering the combat system. Andrew Hackard, Sean Punch, and David Pulver will be on hand to answer your questions. And it, too, starts at 7 P.M. Central Time.

Be sure to stop by the [chat page](#) to see how to become a part of the fun!

--*Steven Marsh*

The Goblin Market

by Matt Riggsby

Dangerous but irresistible, the Goblin Market is a place to get anything you need, but it may cost more than you think. In a typical fantasy game, the market is a traveling entity, a veritable town of colorful tents and booths that springs up overnight and vanishes just as quickly some time thereafter. In a more modern setting, it might be an obscure floating market in [Bangkok](#), a warren of booths in [Kowloon Walled City](#), or a group of interstellar peddlers stopping off at [the galaxy's backwaters](#). In any case, it's a source of endless wonders and an infinite array of magical goods. But don't bring your money; the charge may be anything from a fresh flower to your soul.

The Market and The Merchants

Whatever form it takes, the Goblin Market doesn't stay in one place very long. It may stay for a week, a season, or even a year, but eventually it moves on to a new location, perhaps vanishing altogether for a while like a commercial Brigadoon. Nevertheless, its location is predictable. It may not be completely common knowledge, but those who pay attention to the Goblin Market will be able to tell you when and where you can find it next.

The market carries many hangers-on with it: fortune tellers, alchemists, and mystics of conventional races. Indeed, better than half of the people setting up shop at the market are simply followers, distinguished by their much plainer wares. The market also attracts itinerant jugglers and entertainers, sellers of wine and ale, and others catering to the often wealthy travelers who come to buy.

However, at its core are a number of members of no known species (the number changes, but it's typically between 30 and 60), a peculiar range of creatures ranging from hideous goblin to radiant faerie, each apparently completely unique. They are rarely seen away from their booths at the market, and some have suggested (on, admittedly, paltry evidence) that the market is itself a kind of magical entity, of which the merchants are really just appendages, like fingers on a hand.

Whatever their nature, they do have individual personalities but share a decidedly unique sense of value and a cruel sense of humor. They are pleasant enough, or at least never overtly insulting, but usually have an air of knowing more than the buyers they deal with. They do keep their promises to the letter, although they sometimes enjoy perverting the intent, particularly if they believe someone is trying to cheat them. Some have suggested that the market is made up of capricious spirits playing an obscure practical joke on mortals, or perhaps attempting to teach them a painful lesson about greed and desire. Then again, they may be creatures who are vaguely similar to mortal races in shape but very alien in thought, trading (to them) flashy geegaws for riches that their buyers are too foolish to recognize.

Security at the market appears lax, at least on the surface. When the market comes to a new location, a few people are often hired from the vicinity to help out in that regard. These temporary constables are charged with carrying off anyone who becomes excessively intoxicated on wine or faerie-dust, breaking up any fist-fights that may arise, and so on, but they're unequipped to head off devious thieves. The merchants themselves are quite sharp-eyed and will usually spot anyone trying to shoplift. It is said that some thieves are successful in the short term, but that stolen objects carry terrible curses with them. The visible security is also in no position to resist a concerted armed assault. There is no record of such a thing happening; the rumors of curses may have something to do with that.

What You Can Buy

Everything sold at the Goblin Market is, in some way, otherworldly and at least faintly magical. The Goblin Market doesn't traffic in common goods, or even conventional riches such as gold, silk, and spices. Only the unique and, often, the impossible are on sale here.

Some of the items on sale at the market are relatively mundane (that is, without inherent exceptional powers) but made out of improbable materials. Most of the booths sell items like crystallized dreams, stone swords, bottled whispers, and cloaks made of mist. Such items will be roughly comparable in performance to their normal counterparts or somewhat superior, but may display some special properties (an ice sword will be cold to the touch but not melt in the sunlight or break any more than a metal one would; a cravat made of woven sunlight would choke and burn a vampire).

In addition to the exotic, the Goblin Fair sells the truly potent. Charms, talismans, potions, and all manner of other magical items are on sale here. Some will be interesting but of minimal practical value: rugs with moving figurative patterns woven into them acting out a story, a "sundial" that indicates time by changing color rather than casting a shadow, a cooking pot that hums quietly to itself when warm. Others, though, will have immediate application: magical weapons and armor, fireball-hurling devices, charms of protection, and anything else one might find in a listing of magical items for a fantasy game.

All, though, will have an unusual form. Some will have a certain appropriateness. For example, an invisibility charm might come in the form of a candle, which casts a "light of invisibility" on its carrier as long as it is lit. Others will just be peculiar. Instead of a flying broom or carpet, one might buy a spoon that will grow large enough that its user can sit in the bowl and fly away, or a Cyclops's skull might have an impossibly large internal capacity, giving it the same uses as an enchanted bag of holding. If the GM is using a list of magical items (as in the D&D *Dungeon Master's Guide* or the *GURPS Magic Items* volumes), select items as desired and keep the magical effect, but give them a different form. The article "[Pretty Things](#)" may be used to randomly select items, but use the revised table here for material (roll two dice):

Roll Material

- 1,1 Ivory
- 1,2 Bone
- 1,3 Wood
- 1,4 Stone
- 1,5 Glass
- 1,6 Crystal
- 2,1 [Precious stones](#)
- 2,2 Ceramic
- 2,3 Metal (roll two dice)
 - 2 Gold
 - 3 Lead
 - 4-5 Iron/steel
 - 6 Copper
 - 7 Bronze/copper alloy
 - 8 Billon
 - 9-10 Silver
 - 11 Electrum
 - 12 Unidentifiable/otherworldly
- 2,4 Fabric (roll a die)
 - 1 Cotton/linen
 - 2 Wool
 - 3 Silk
 - 4 Leather
 - 5 Fur
 - 6 Bark
- 2,5 Paper/papyrus/parchment
- 2,6 Fire
- 3,1 Light (roll a die)

- 1-2 Sun
- 3-4 Moon
- 5 Stars
- 6 Otherworldly

3,2 Lightning

3,3 Comets/stardust

3,4 Smoke/fog

3,5 Water (roll a die)

- 1-2 Seawater
- 3 Fresh water
- 4 Rain
- 5 Dew
- 6 Tears

3,6 Ice

4,1 Teeth

4,2 Blood

4,3 Divine substance (godly or demi-godly hair, blood, or other parts)

4,4 Common shell/carapace (as opposed to decorative shell such as abalone or mother-of-pearl; roll a die)

- 1 Eggshell
- 2 Nutshell
- 3 Seashell
- 4 Snail shell
- 5 Large animal (turtle, giant insect)
- 6 Otherworldly

4,5 Thorns

4,6 Flower petals

5,1 Milkweed/dandelion fluff

5,2 Spiderwebs

5,3 Butterfly/moth wings

5,4 Bee/wasp stingers

5,5 Scales (roll a die)

- 1-3 Fish
- 4-5 Common reptile (snake, lizard, etc.)
- 6 Dragon, basilisk, or other unusual reptile

5,6 Live plant (for example, a rope made from a vine that will slowly grow longer if properly cared for or a pot made of living wood that will occasionally grow new branches and leaves)

6,1 Live creatures (for example, a cloak made of ladybugs or a helmet made of a coiled snake)

6,2 Salt

6,3 Sea foam

6,4 Wind

6,5 Sound (roars, crying, speeches, etc.)

6,6 Emotion, knowledge, or state of mind (love, anger, boredom, etc.)

You may, of course, substitute your own materials. It's probably a good idea to come up with a list of weird items before PCs reach the market so that you can rapidly impress them with their strangeness.

What It Costs

The merchants of the Goblin Market do not covet gold and silver, or whatever is usually used for money in the setting, and they will sneer at anyone who offers them. They have some fondness for gemstones, though, and are willing to

trade lesser items for them.

More often than not, though, the price of an item is an unusual object in trade. These objects may be of a quite common type (a daffodil, a copper coin, a lock of hair). However, there will almost invariably be conditions on the object's location, ownership, attributes, and the method of obtaining it which will make getting it unexpectedly difficult, or at least make the buyer suspect he's getting more than he bargained for. Some examples:

- **Location:** A flower from Farmer Brown's field, a stone from the top of a distant mountain, a pound of dust from the Moon.
- **Ownership:** A lock of hair from the first stranger you meet; the finger-bones of a saint; the crown stolen from a dragon's hoard.
- **Attributes:** A lock of hair from the tallest man at the market; a blue rose; a flaming pie.
- **Method:** A lock of hair cut with a pair of golden shears; a flower picked at midnight; a child taken from its mother by an honest man.

Often, the object will have multiple conditions: for example, the tallest tree in the forest, cut down with a herring; or a lock of hair from the Great Cham's beard, cut with a silver razor at midnight by a singing woman. Not surprisingly, even the simplest conditions often result in difficult challenges. For example, if a buyer is told to get a lock of hair from the first stranger he meets, that stranger is likely to be a member of a hostile family or country (and will therefore be unlikely to do anything to help the buyer) or perhaps just a member of an intelligent species of amphibians or reptiles, and therefore completely hairless. On the other hand, some things which seem impossible (hen's teeth or a stone which floats to the top of the sea) may eventually become available to particularly clever and observant buyers.

But the most powerful items (or at least the items that PCs want most) require the buyer making a significant sacrifice of himself, for example:

- Everything you own
- Everything you have on you
- A period of service (a year and a day, until the next full moon, etc., during which the PC must follow all of the merchant's orders; watch out for leap years!)
- An appendage (finger, foot, eye, etc.)
- Everything you know about a particular subject (may or may not be trivial: being ten years old, boating, swordplay; depending on the game rules in use, this may result in the loss of skills, attribute points, or experience levels)

The peddlers of the Goblin Market do not haggle. They may entertain *one* counter-offer for lesser items, but in general, their price is fixed. However, it won't change over time if the exchange can't take place on the spot. If a PC strikes a deal for a singing harp in exchange for that hair from the Great Cham's beard, he could spend decades (or longer, if he's immortal) obtaining the hair and be able to count on getting his harp. It's not clear how, but the merchants will know on sight if an object offered in exchange is counterfeit.

In The Campaign

In a low-magic campaign, the market may be the only place where magical items can be readily purchased. In a high-magic campaign, the market will be a place to buy particularly notable or specialized magical items, or perhaps a place to attempt to buy powerful magical items at a better price; a cash-strapped adventurer in dire need of a Mace of Sharpness might decide that a purple daisy cut at dawn on the solstice, no matter how far he has to go to get it, is easier to get than a million gold pieces.

Because of the peculiar nature of its wares and their prices, the Goblin Market generally works better as something that appears occasionally in adventures rather than being the magic shop down on the corner. It could easily be the object of quests, both in order to reach it and in order to pay its unusual prices. Even if the PCs don't intend to buy anything, it makes a good backdrop for other events. Magicians and would-be miracle workers flock to the market, hold secret councils on its outskirts, issue public challenges, settle duels and other affairs, and so on.

The market could, though, be the focus of a campaign. It presents many mysteries to be solved: who are the merchants, really? Are they in charge of their own destiny, or are they compelled by another power? Where do they get their wares? Why are they trading for the peculiar things they do, and what do they do with them? Anyone who can shed light on any of these questions is likely to be able to profit from their knowledge.

An interesting variation is to use the market as the center of a campaign, with PCs as faerie merchant princes or hangers-on. The market may be the result of a curse the PCs will want to release themselves from, the very tip of an otherworldly commercial venture or magical rivalry (perhaps competing with gods, demons, and lone merchants trading livestock for magic beans), putting the PCs in conflict with other great powers, or a sophisticated tool to monitor and control the world, making the PCs spies and political manipulators.

Further Reading

- Bradbury, Ray: *Something Wicked This Way Comes*; the carnival resembles a Goblin Market gone very, very bad.
- Gaiman, Neil: *Stardust*; the action begins and ends with events around a traveling faerie marketplace. The marketplace in *Neverwhere* bears some resemblance to the Goblin Market as well.
- Rosetti, Christina: [The Goblin Market](#), an allegorical poem written in 1862 about the delights and dangers of otherworldly commerce.
- Underkoffler, Chad: *Dead Inside*; the Exroads Market resembles a relatively benign Goblin Market.
- Vance, Jack: The *Lyonesse* trilogy; features a stationary marketplace where wonders are sold.

The Exchange of Wonder

by Don Webb

Fantasy roleplaying games, like many forms of fantastic literature, are based on a feedback of wonder -- the same feedback that must have driven the original tale-tellers of what became the *Book of 1,001 Nights*. How, then, is the sense of wonder and magic retained within a game setting?

First we will visit the origin of the impulse for magic and science. If you doubt that they have a common root, the more intellectual among you might seek out Lynn Thorndike's *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*. It is eight long volumes, and will dazzle you on many a rainy afternoon -- as well as provide many intriguing game scenarios. Let's visit cavemen Ug and Bug. Ug, a fundamentalist caveman, has come upon a grassy knoll. That's knoll, not gnoll. Ug -- like all of humanity -- wonders what's on the other side of the knoll. Bug suddenly wonders what's *inside* the knoll. Now if he marshals the forces of logic, he will develop the scientific method. If he marshals the forces of imagination, he will develop the art of magic. He will seek dreams, conjure elemental, and otherwise force the supernatural world to tell him about this mystery. In fact during the process he may even ask, "What's inside of Bug?" thus inventing philosophy and psychology as well. Eventually all of these things may evolve into religion.

Now despite the glorious example of our forebear, Bug, we have lost our sense of wonder. Instead of marshaling our forces of imagination, we have game after game of "I'll cast my four-dice energy blast with armor-piercing since I know his shield is low." That's as far from the romance of magic as it's possible to get. The games become dull, colorless; and die as imagination is replaced with reading descriptions from the rulebooks. Let's look at six methods to put magic back in your magic. Although magic is commonplace in many settings, it is never common. After examining how to return glamour to magic, we'll look at some interesting game possibilities that mystery makes accessible.

1. **Insist that magic is a personal art.** For game reasons every spell produces a fixed result, but -- since magic is an art -- be sure and tell how each character's spell and spell-casting look. Does Ethelbert create great green fireballs after calling out his incantations in a loud, grandiose style? Does Susanna keep her magic secretive and short, sticking with surgical precision? If you enter into the mood and mode of a character's spell casting, you'll begin to learn how they think and what they are. In short, they'll take on a living presence -- much like characters in a novel, who wind up telling their authors what to do. If you're a GM, insist that spell casters describe their style and effects. If you're a player, discuss this notion with your GM.
2. **Magic is not just at the center of focus; it is also at the corner of the characters' eyes.** It is important to keep magic as a source of atmosphere and mood. For example, a party sneaks through the night seeking adventure. On the way to their location one of them sees an eerie green light flare behind a shuttered window. Now, this has nothing to do with them; it's really Almore the coppersmith casting his Clean Copper spell. But the allure's there. The world is made mysterious and uncertain. The spaces between buildings, the garrets and gables, all the involved darkness of the night has suddenly become alive.
3. **Magic leaves traces, which will be mythologized in time.** Again working from the principle that "Magic may be commonplace, but it is not common." we expect a world with magic to remember and build upon magical happenings. For example, 200 years ago the Magus Loois enchanted a silver platter to fly to and from his favorite bakery (to pick up his favorite orange brandy brownies). Loois and the bakery are long gone, but the dented sulphur-toned platter still flies through the streets of its city. The good people of the town have told and retold the story so that now it is, "The executioner's plate which caught the severed head of the witch Belinda, which sails silently to remind us of the nearness of Cosmic Evil."
4. **Magic will always attract the curious.** No matter how dangerous the magical firefight may be, there will almost always be someone so possessed by the sense of wonder to risk his neck to witness it. If someone mentions a magical wonder that he has glimpsed in the dire dungeon dreadful, there will be someone else who will go just to see it, *hear* it, touch it. This principle should guide the behavior of new spell casters and provide groupies and apprentices to the more advanced. Ultimately principles #3 and #4 will blend, giving rise to "fans" who will proclaim that "their" wizard can beat "your" wizard. Lore travels in all directions -- this can lead to transtemporal or transdimensional showdowns.

5. **As with any art form, magic will have politics and criticism.** Some of this may take the form of academic debate -- the older paradigms of magic versus the new. Younger, less established, practitioners will pick up new spells while the older/wealthier crowd disdains them (at least publicly). There will also be elements in society motivated by their lack of magical talent (and consequent jealousy) to seek to legislate against it. Certain types of magic may come under criticism. For example, suppose there is a small movement in the game world against illusionist magic, because it "takes the mind away from what is real and opens the psyche to dangerous phantasy." Those stalwart types will shutdown any illusion, and have begun to be a tiresome pain against those poor souls who earn their bread by creating fantastic shows in the streets. The important notion behind this principle is that attitudes toward magic will be widely varied among social, religious, political, and cultural lines. Remember that the reality of magic will mean a great deal of debate and discussion of how (or even if) it should be used. If characters enter into these discussions, whole new avenues of imagination, thought, and behavior will be opened up. If paradigm debate interests you, you may wish to read Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolution*.
6. **Just because magic is real doesn't mean that superstition has gone away.** In any society there will always be people who blame their woes or attribute their success to forces outside of themselves. In a society where magic is a known force, this tendency increases. After all, people see the laws of Nature suspended everyday; no doubt this explains their toothache or why their windowsill garden isn't doing well. Even magicians who aren't used to truly examining their own lives may succumb to this "magical thinking." You may rest assured that there will be a class of individuals who prey upon their fears. Take Mubbard the Drunkard. One day in the Yodeling Zombie Tavern, while he sang the drunken songs of his homeland, one gambler began winning big at knucklebone. Mubbard convinced the gambler that he was the source of her luck. Since then he's never short of ale or silver. If someone else starts to do well at the table, the winner buys Mubbard a few drinks so his luck will continue. But on a darker note, take Edith the Scold. She keeps her neighborhood clean of magicians by telling people whatever misfortunes they may have are due to the new magus who just moved in down the street. More than one apprentice sorcerer has had to beat an exit by night. And it's funny how all the things they leave behind somehow become Edith's property . . .

Now you can take these six principles and apply them singly or in groups to any magical roleplaying situation. For example, at character creation the GM wants something unusual, so he rolls a d6 and gets a 5 -- Politics and criticism. He asks himself about politics of magic and society, and two characters come to mind. The first is Ptahotep, a magical populist, who believes in power to the people -- so he teaches magic to as many people for as little money as possible. His long-term goal is a democratization of society by magical empowerment. Certain nobles have placed a price on his head. The second is Nepthys-en-mer, an aged quiet feminist; she believes in teaching combat magic to women so they can walk at night without fear. Her classes draw from all walks of life -- streetwalkers, women shopkeepers who rise early, wealthy women who want to be something other than ornaments. Nepthys-en-mer only asks that the women show loyalty to one another. Other characters could be fascists, magic haters, or even a fellow writing a critical history of the aesthetics of construction magic (in this instance, using principles #1 and #5).

These principles could be used for scenario construction. For example, to use principle #3, Magical traces, the GM will want something from the past, which -- because of its present dramatic form -- inspires a lot of folklore and will inspire a party to action. The GM creates a historical object, then hides as many facts as he wishes. If he creates an interesting enough object, all character motivation will follow. And thus he fabricates a thick golden platter bearing the inscription "Cypriot Raydoomire Fifty Years as High Wizard." Created three hundred years ago by the High Wizard Cypriot Raydoomire, he had intended to place the platter in the air above his city as a permanent tribute to his powers. He overdid the spell, and the platter went into orbit. Fortunately, he hadn't announced the event, instead merely recording it in his diary. During a very posh wedding dinner at the Gay Minstrel Inn, the platter crashed to earth, killing a minority official. A few letters were discernible: "riot doom Wizard." This sets in motion a variety of events. Thieves plot to steal the gold. Some see the fall as a divine mandate to kill city officials. Others suspect all foreigners. And, of course, there are tons of rumors. Not only are players drawn into the scenario, but, as they're drawn to the hidden truth, they interact with all levels of society as well as all levels of their imagination. They will be truly dazzled with the depth and breadth of the world (not realizing that they are creating it with every step).

These principles can create long-term goals. For example, an individual player may choose principle #1 -- Personal Artistry. For the individual player this can become a goal. Someday, somewhere, he will be known as one of the great magicians. He may be heralded as the creator of this or that spell, the enchanter of a world-changing spear, or even the

founder of a magical college. This breathes a special life into the characters as they start early on, trying to shape the myth of their existence. This (fortunately) minimizes the focus on statistics and can bring forth such usually unseen character traits as generosity.

The GM can create the deep logical structure of his world through these principles as well. For example, keeping with principle #1, somewhere and at some time witches, sorcerers, and magicians have to gather to show off their artistry. How are the rules of such tourneys prepared? What kind of spectacles could be seen?

The use of these principles will empower your gamers to focus on imagination. Artistry and entertainment are the goals -- not numerical efficiency. In time the formal aspects of game playing tend to pale -- in fact, they may someday be better handled by computers -- but the truly human aspect, the use of imagination, can drive this pastime for lifetimes. Start with the sense of wonder, the sense that there is something marvelous hidden deep within your imagination, and you'll be amazed and delighted by what you create. After all, you owe it to Bug.

Designer's Notes: GURPS Fourth Edition

by David L. Pulver

Sean Punch and I started with copies of *Basic Set* and the two *Compendiums*. We assembled an enormous outline and an overall line plan, and sent it to Steve Jackson and Andrew Hackard. After they approved it, we went to work. The theoretical division of labor in *GURPS Fourth Edition* was that Sean worked on Book 1 and I handled Book 2. In practice, that broke down almost immediately, and we both ended up working on a large chunk of each book.

The actual process of writing and revision began around September 2002. For several months, I lived, ate, and breathed "Basic Set." I remember being so focused on it that a few times when I was riding the bus or out at a supermarket filling the cart with canned tuna, I might be hit by an idea and use my cell to phone Sean to discuss it (carefully avoiding those giveaway words "Fourth Edition" in case any gamers might be lurking by the Pocky in the next aisle).

To this end, the chapters I spent most time on in Book 1 were parts of the Advantages and the Disadvantages chapter (focusing mostly on Innate Attack and various exotic abilities), and the Equipment, Psi, and Templates chapters. In Book 2, I worked on Combat, Tactical Combat, Special Combat Situations, Injuries, and the Charts and Tables, and the Infinity setting, along with parts of Animals and Monsters and Technology.

Anyway, several hundred dollars in phone bills later, our labors culminated at the end of March in a frenzied 36-hour no-sleep session to meet our deadline. I remember emailing Sean the last section I was working on -- the Infinity Unlimited background -- just ahead of the clock. We handed in a first draft for April 1, 2003, which was duly announced in the Daily Illuminator by SJ Games (with some minor disinformation about content). Then we got some sleep.

The *GURPS Fourth Edition* playtest began in early summer of 2003, and involved a select group of many dozens of active and not-so-active *GURPS* contributors. It was almost as wild as most *Pyramid* playtests, and numerous ideas were suggested and thrashed out -- in particular, I remember some very productive discussions on how tech levels should be handled, a huge threaded discussion on how Allies and Patrons should work, and some heated debate on the nature of Strength and Hit Points, and strong lobby in favor of keeping the parachronic secret from Reich 5, all of which led to significant revision. During this period, I worked with Sean on revising some of the chapters, and this progress continued through the fall of 2003. Then Sean, and later Andrew and Steve, worked on perfecting the final draft for months after that.

In addition to the goals established by Sean and Steve in the outline and the many individual fixes (we had hundreds compiled from years of Q&A), there were three things I especially wanted the revision to accomplish.

The first was to make combat play faster without losing its tactical feel. For me, the two most important ways to do that were to simplify ranged combat and make changes to the way Active Defense worked.

The second was to make it easier to play both high-powered games to slay the old "*GURPS* doesn't do Supers well" canard. However, this meant not just supers, but also robots, vehicles, big guns, and even bigger explosions. Near the top of the list was fixing rules like the unbalanced cost relationship between Hit Points and DR, and ensuring the system properly handled various high-powered abilities, including -- but not limited to -- attacks.

The third was to ensure that we connected the dots between the various "subsystems" in *GURPS*. This meant that, for example, super powers, missile spells, and high tech weapons all used the same rules for handling things like explosions, or that the incomes for jobs interfaced with starting wealth and status-based cost of living at various TLs. In other words, system unification, or functional simplicity.

Combat

Combat was divided into three parts, rather than the old Basic/Advanced split. In *GURPS Fourth Edition*, the "Combat" chapter covers most situations, including things glossed over in Basic Combat in the last edition, such as automatic fire, close combat, and movement. We now make the assumption that GMs can visualize spatial relationships (or scribble a few notes down on a map). Thus, ranges and movement are integrated into them. "Tactical Combat" is the rules for hex grid action and only that. As a result, it's much more focused. "Special Combat Situations" is what it says: a grab bag of situation specific or optional rules covering a range from hit location and cinematic combat to explosions.

The removal of Passive Defense (except, effectively, for shields) and replacing it with a flat +3 increase in defense rolls was probably the most obvious change made in the combat game mechanics. There were many realistic reasons for removing it, as the various "special case" PD rules that crept into places like *High-Tech* attest to. But the biggest one was flavor. When an armored knight and a lithe barbarian, both with Broadsword-16, are engaged in a fight, the knight already has a big advantage from his DR 4 chainmail. Giving him Parry-11 and the barbarian Parry-8 on top of that was overkill. So now both have Parry-11. The result is a fight in which every parry really *is* a parry. The fact that some armor does have a degree of slope or curvature that make it better at deflecting blows is part of its DR.

A question that is often asked is why we did not go with a Quick Contest of Skills for combat. This had some appeal, but it gives too much of an advantage to a higher skilled fighter, and simply doesn't reflect the way fights in fiction or fact between equal foes are usually described. With both Third Edition and Fourth Edition rules, a battle between two master swordsmen will go on longer than a fight between novices . . . which is definitely intentional. Of course, two warriors can still run at each other to make All Out or Move and Attack maneuvers (as is the case in, say, the classic samurai movie duel).

Now, one problem with the existing rules as applied in Third Edition was that a fight between two highly skilled foes with lots of PD could drag on, being resolved only by feints or who scored a critical hit first . . . especially if using advanced combat with the rules for retreating, which gave a +3 bonus (a rule that was originally intended to allow unarmored swordsmen to have a chance at survival). In *GURPS Fourth Edition* this bonus is reduced to +1 . . . unless using a skill in which fast footwork and mobility are emphasized, such as Boxing, Rapier, or Karate, where the +3 bonus replaces the old 2/3rds skill parry those combatants had, ensuring that people with these skills can continue to defend well despite lack of armor . . . if they have room to maneuver. Back them up in a corner, and the fellow with the big heavy weapon may make mincemeat of them. In addition to this, Fourth Edition also presents other tactics beyond the Feint maneuver that let skilled fighters make the best use of their high skills rules for deceptive attacks and rapid strikes, for example.

A Unified System

A significant goal for *GURPS Fourth Edition* was to establish a useful "grammar" that further books could expand on. That meant not just including "basic" statistics (like some examples of vehicles or animals or weapons) but establishing a way of describing some things, so that a future *GURPS* supplement or adventure could simply say "this is a missile launcher with these stats" or "this is a poison with these stats" rather than having to reprint a whole mess of specialized rules from a supplement about how to use these things. So, for example, the injuries section has a unified system for describing poisons/diseases/drugs -- and one that ties in with the character creation system, if you want your character to be capable of delivering them. Similarly, while there are a few dozen vehicle statistics in Fourth Edition, what is far more important is that the book presents and explains the standard *GURPS Fourth Edition* statistics format for describing vehicles.

For example, vehicles now have a standard statistic line just like weapons. And unlike previous one-line vehicle entries, this line now packs in all the vital combat, capacity, and travel information, from hit points and acceleration to cargo capacity and hit locations. *GURPS Vehicles* will include the rules for super-detailed vehicle descriptions for situations when it is vital to know exactly what equipment is built into that M1 Abrams or a Free Trader starship.

High-Powered Games

I started out working on Book 1 in the Characters and Psionics chapter. While Sean covered the mass of character creation, my role was often to explore the end points. *GURPS* evolved from a system that handled medieval combat to one that has let you play angels, dolphins, ogres, Ogres Mark IIIs, ghosts, demi-gods, and disembodied computers, and people who can download software into their brains. In so doing, many rules had to be tacked on top of other things, and many square pegs forced into round holes. One of the great things about working on a new edition of *Basic Set* was that we both had the benefit of hindsight. We knew what areas had given problems to world book authors in the past, and where possible, designed around it. This let us to use elegant solutions. For example, we figured out that the rules for gods needing worshippers and trucks needing gasoline were basically the same Disadvantage, and wrote it as such.

The aforementioned goal of system unification was followed in the psionics system, which emerged as a prototype for the way a wide range of special abilities are handled in the upcoming *GURPS Powers*. Another issue was the vexed question of paying character points for devices, vehicles, and so on. I don't like doing this in many games, but I do feel the option should exist where appropriate, such as a supers or anime-themed game, where one hero might be a chi-powered martial artist, another can turn into a living fire elemental, and a third rides a giant robot, and the fourth is a gun-packing vigilante with an armored van full of weapons. In the past there was no way to easily calculate this. My goal was to ensure that most technologies had an equivalent advantage -- both to ensure that you could easily build robots and cyborgs and super-inventors, and to make it possible to succinctly describe both with the same set of rules.

My own experience with books like *Transhuman Space* and *Bio-Tech* (and on Sean's part, *Undead*) showed us some things Third Edition had trouble with. For example, robot, spirit, or animal characters often had the same unwieldy laundry lists of advantages and disadvantages. This led to the metatrait system: pre-designed "packages" of advantages and disadvantages that set down canonical (but easily customizable) values for things like animal intelligence or machine bodies or being a ghost.

Into Infinity

Another reason why both high powered settings system unification were important to me was the decision to include the Infinity setting within the game as a ready-to-use example of a multi-genre campaign setting . . .

This was the last part of the Basic Set that I worked on. I liked it when it was introduced in *Time Travel* and had used it myself as the setting for my "Soulburner" adventure in *Time Travel Adventures* which introduced the world of *Technomancer*. In Fourth Edition, I wanted to "blow open" the basic Centrum-Infinity struggle by adding multiple factions and multiple means of dimensional travel, new groups such as the ISWAT black ops team, the Reality Liberation Front, and new features such as the parachronozoids, nexus portals, shiftrealms, the infinity-spanning chronobahn, and pocket multiverses. It's a short chapter, but I was quite pleased with it, and hope it will encourage people to give the Infinity setting a try; it's not just Centrum versus Infinity any more, although that framework certainly still exists.

Working on *GURPS Fourth Edition* was a culmination of several years of writing for Steve Jackson Games. I'd like to thank Steve for having created such a fascinating and versatile system, Andrew and Sean for having given me the opportunity to play with it, the other *GURPS* authors for the numerous books and articles we were able to draw upon, and everyone on *Pyramid* whose comments have been helpful, critical or supportive, and whose enthusiasm has helped keep me going over these years.

Icosahedron Adventures: Make a Saving Throw

by Owen K.C. Stephens

One of the major changes between the *d20 System* and the Fantasy RPG it was designed to replace is the way saving throws work. In the old days, saving throw categories were defined by the source of an attack -- spell, breath weapon, paralyzation or poison, or even rod, staff, or wand. This worked well enough in a fantasy setting, but didn't make a great deal of intuitive sense. Why would spells from magic items need a different save than those cast by a wizard? And what if you wanted to introduce a new form of attack to your game? Should a hand grenade use a saving throw of items (rod/staff/wand) or common area attacks (breath weapon)? Further, the categories were very fantasy specific. Even if you could map modern or futuristic attacks onto the categories, they sounded odd in different genres.

When the game engine was blueprinted and re-worked for a new edition, saving throws underwent an important change. Instead of being categorized by source of attack, they were organized conceptually by what the character had to do to avoid an effect. All saves were now considered Fortitude, Reflex, or Will. Any time an attack required a saving throw, it was clear the character was toughing it out, ducking, or resisting through force of will.

Saving throws are a critical mechanic to the *d20 System*, influencing many aspects of game play. Very little has been written about how saving throws work, and why they're set up as they are. This article takes a glance at the mechanics behind the rules, and ways to change them for different results.

Saving Throw Progression

Most *d20 System* games have just two progression rates -- "good" (a base save bonus equal to half class level +2, rounding down), and "poor" (a base save bonus equal to one-third class level, rounding down). A few games add a "fair" progression which is between these two, though exactly what this progression is varies somewhat. A logical progression is exactly between the two, with a base save bonus equal to 5/12 the class level +1, rounding down. That's not a very elegant progression, but it's usually written up on a chart anyway. Such a fair progression is detailed below. When compared to the standard good and poor progressions, this fair progression is exactly between them at both first and 20th level.

Level Base Bonus

1	+1
2	+1
3	+2
4	+2
5	+3
6	+3
7	+3
8	+4
9	+4
10	+5
11	+5
12	+6
13	+6
14	+6
15	+7
16	+7
17	+8
18	+8
19	+9

A fair progression can be useful when developing new classes (core, advanced, or prestige) that should be better at some save rate than "poor," but not as good as a class specializing in it. For example, a military scout might be seen as tougher than a wizard but not up to a barbarian's standard, faster than a fighter but not up to a rogue's standard, and more strong-willed than a fighter but not up to a cleric's standard. Giving the class three fair save progressions prevents it from having any real weaknesses, but also no true strengths.

Similarly, some classes that seem slightly overbalanced or underbalanced may be fine-tuned with a fair save progression or two. If a GM considers clerics too tough, he can replace their good Fort save with a fair one. Similarly, if sorcerers seem underpowered, their poor Reflex save can be brought up to a fair save progression.

This system works fine, as long as characters stay in one class, or time their class changes carefully. However, certain combinations of classes and level miss the break-points in save progression, and can suffer for it. For example, a triple class ranger/rogue/fighter can be 6th level (2/2/2) and still have a base Will save of +0, even though a single class 6th level fighter has a +2. This can be considered the cost of multiclassing, or it can be overcome with the use of fractional save bonuses. This means granting a +1/3 bonus at each level on a poor save progression. While the total is still rounded down (a character with a +2/3 base save is treated as having a 0), it means a character with 2 levels in three classes, as out example above, still have a total of a +2 base bonus. This idea is covered in a little more detail in a sidebar in Wizard of the Coast's *Unearthed Arcana* book.

The other odd result that multiclassing can produce is extremely high saves. For example, a 3rd-level character that has one level each of bard, ranger, and rogue has a base Reflex save of +6, even though the good progression on a single character doesn't get that high until 8th level. With two levels in each class the save reached +9, equivalent to a 14th-level good save. This can be eliminated by restricting the +2 bonus built into a good save (and +1 bonus built into a fair save) to the first class that grants that save progression. In essence, a character who takes additional classes that have good save progressions, subtracts 2 from the base save bonus of that class. Using this rule, the 6th level bard/ranger/rogue has a base Reflex save of +5, same as a 6th level rogue.

Setting Save DCs

A saving throw is made against a DC, which determines how difficult an effect is to resist. Most save DCs are determined by taking 10 and adding half the attacker's hit dice or levels and his appropriate ability modifier. This is only approximate, because spells don't quite work that way (a 5th-level caster doesn't add half his level to spell DCs, but the spell's level, which might be 3, 2, 1, or 0).

In general, an attacker's ability score is going to be pretty close to the defender's score for a good save progressions, and better than the defender's ability for poor save progressions. This is a wild approximation, but is good enough to explore trends. This means a character's good save is, generally speaking, going to succeed on average against an attack of a creature of the same power level, but his poor saves won't. Put another way, a GM can expect a wizard will often succeed at a typical Will save, but fail at a typical Reflex save.

Because of this, creatures with more hit dice than their CR often have disproportionately high DCs for their CR. A typical 11th-level NPC wizard likely has a spell DC of about 21 (10 +6th level spell +5 Int modifier), with his DCs decreasing as he uses lower-level spells. A colossal monstrous spider, also CR 11, has a poison with a DC of 28, which he can use every round.

Additionally, the margins between success and failure are pretty thin. Even a character's good saves are often only slightly better than the attacks they apply against, and a poor roll can easily lead to a failed save even in the character's strongest category. Thus, a GM who wants to produce a failed save can simply require numerous saves, rather than try to bring the save DC extremely high. A dozen 1st-level wizards (CR 8) are actually more likely to charm an 8th-level cleric than a single 8th-level wizard, simply because they force so many saves. (Of course, they may also be killed by a single *fireball*, so a GM must balance enemy forces with more in mind than their offensive ability). Similarly, a set of six DC 14 traps are likely to be more deadly than a single DC 18 trap.

When designing an encounter, a GM should avoid combining high hit dice, high ability scores, and frequent saves required in the same creature. For example, a monstrous scorpion with multiple poison tail stings should have its CR boosted by more than the additional attacks might suggest, since every attack includes a high-DC poison.

Saving Throws as Target Numbers

Though they are used defensively, in fact generally passively, saving throws are rolled like attacks and skills instead of being set numbers like armor class (or defense value). While this is mechanically valid, my observations suggest it adds to player frustration unnecessarily. This frustration comes in two forms -- a sense of powerlessness when trying to affect targets with spells that allow saves, and a sense of failure when trying to resist such efforts made on the player's character.

In essence, the entire saving throw mechanic places the action, and thus the blame or accolades, on the defender. Since the defender rolls a die to resist an effect, a bad roll is seen as a failure of the defense, not a victory of the attack. Compare this to combat, where it is the attacker who makes the die roll. People rarely complain that their armor class "failed" -- they instead bemoan the efficiency of their attackers. Similarly a wizard casting a *charm person* spell is completely removed from the action -- he has no die roll to make. Instead the GM secretly rolls a die, and declares the spell a success or failure. Unlike combat, where a fighter gets to make an attack roll, the wizard's involvement is largely passive.

One way to change this is to make saving throws instead resistances -- Fortitude Resistance, Reflex Resistance, and Will Resistance. These are target numbers, equal to the previous saving throw bonus +10. Thus a character who would have had saves of Fort +11, Ref +5, Will +4 instead has Resistances of Fort 21, Ref 15, Will 14.

Then, any attack that would normally call for a saving throw instead makes an effectiveness roll. This is essentially an attack roll with the target's resistance acting as the AC or Defense. The effectiveness roll gets a bonus equal to the original attacks save DC -10. Thus a wizard with a 20 Int casting *fireball* makes a roll with a bonus of (3 for spell level +5 for Int modifier) +9. If his d20+9 roll meets or beats the Reflex Resistance of a target it takes full damage. If not, it takes half. This places the die rolling in the hands of the player initiating an action, making saving throws work more like attack rolls and skill checks.

Saves as Ability checks, and Str-, Int-, and Cha-based Saving Throws

One curiosity of the saving-throw system is that it lends additional weight to a character's Dexterity, Constitution, and Wisdom. These ability scores are already extremely important (governing such features as AC and hit points, and being key to numerous important skills), but because they have associated saves, characters seem to get better at tasks involving them, while not enjoying a similar increase in Str, Int, and Cha challenges. In many campaigns the GM rarely asks for a Dex check when something important is on the line, instead calling for a Ref save. Thus a fighter whose physical ability scores remain the same becomes more and more likely to duck most of a *fireball* as he gains levels, but is no better at lifting a heavy rock off a pinned friend at 14th level than at 4th.

In theory, this shouldn't be the case. The *d20 System* rules assume that you make a saving throw for something you're avoiding, but you make an ability check for something you want to accomplish. Falling past a friend and you want to grab onto them? That's a Reflex Save. Trying to grab a friend who's falling past your position? That's a Dex check (or possibly an attack roll -- the logic gets fuzzy sometimes). Dex, Con, and Wis checks should be as common as Str, Int, and Cha checks, but this doesn't seem to be the case in actual play. Because the saving throw rules exist, they get called for more than simple Dex-, Con-, and Wis-based ability checks.

One reason for this is that it's not much fun for a GM to watch players get frustrated by a character's inability to do something in an area that's supposed to be a strength. A high-level rogue expects to be able to do things requiring agility, but if forced to rely on a Dex check is not likely to succeed. Rather than fight this trend, a GM looking for a heroic style of game can embrace it, calling for saving throws any time a simple ability check would normally be

called on.

Of course to match the disparity between the abilities with saves and those without, a series of Str-, Int-, and Cha-based saves should be created. Though these might not be called on often to avoid consequences, they can add an element to the gaming environment, as well as helping high level barbarians smash down doors. Possible additional save categories are described below.

Brawn Save: A Brawn save is called for in circumstances where raw power can save a character -- when caught between two crushing walls, or trying to hold a comrade by fingertips after a disastrous jump. In essence it's a Strength check for circumstances that lead to damage or negative modifiers with failure. Breaking down a door is just a Str check, but holding a rope from which friends dangle, or keeping a grip on a sword after being knocked unconscious are Brawn saves.

Any class with two or more class skills based on Str should have a good brawn save progression. If using saves for ability checks, any Str check becomes a Brawn save.

Cognition Save: A cognition save is made any time a character is about to do something that flies in the face of the facts he has access to, but has forgotten or failed to put together. It is also used when a character needs to remember something, such as the exact wording of a prophecy or the technicalities of a common law. It does not replace Knowledge checks, which are matters of education, but is used if a character needs access to specific facts he has definitely had access to.

Any class with all Knowledge skills as class skills, or with a research skill, should have a good Cognition save progression. If using saves for ability checks, any Int check becomes a cognition save.

Reputation Save: A reputation save represents the common perception about a character, and his resistance to public opinion. It's used whenever someone tries to start a nasty rumor, or when the character is found doing something that could be taken negatively. A fighter found proclaiming his innocence while standing over a dead body holding a knife might make a Rep save to see how many people believe him.

New bardic abilities could be developed that required a Rep save to resist, or a GM could use them periodically to determine a character's overall reputation. If using a Fame system, character might gain or lose fame based on a Rep save made at each new level gained.

Any class that grants Bluff or Diplomacy as a class skill should have a good Rep save. If using saves for ability checks, any Cha check becomes a Rep save.

The Omniscient Eye

What Color Are Plants on Other Worlds?

Earth has a yellow sun, and our plants are (by and large) green, in order to take maximum advantage of that sunlight. But what color would be likely for plants evolving naturally on a planet circling a star more orange, or even red? Or, moving the other direction, to bluer stars with higher-energy output? Basically, what "chrome" about lighting and flora can I give my descriptions in sci-fi games when the PCs step out onto an alien landscape?

--Joseph Lockett

The Omniscient Eye, and this author, regret that even our immense wisdom cannot answer this question completely -- no, not even if we had a whole book to fill instead of just one article! You see, answering what-if questions about evolution is a dangerous thing. No one can be sure how life would turn out if we rewound Earth's history and played it over again. Trying to figure out how life would have evolved circling another star is an even more challenging question; we don't have our basic knowledge of Earth conditions to rely on.

To have some hope of figuring out plausible evolutionary paths for alien flora, therefore, we'd better begin by making the assumption that these plants have some qualities in common with their Earthly cousins. At the end of this essay, we'll consider some truly wacky possibilities, but the easiest (and most probable) place to start is to look at what goes on in our own backyard. Earth plants convert carbon dioxide, water, and sunlight into sugar and oxygen. This process is called photosynthesis, for those who slept through high-school biology. Chlorophyll, along with several chemical variations and some related helper molecules, is the key to this process. So we'll assume, for the moment, that alien plants also convert carbon dioxide, water, and sunlight into sugar and oxygen, and that they use chlorophyll as an integral part of this process.

This, by the way, implies one important corollary. If the plants in question are Earth-like, we can assume our alien planet has a somewhat Earth-like atmosphere. Photosynthesis was pretty much directly responsible for the atmosphere changing from mostly carbon dioxide to a relatively high-oxygen mixture. Plant life under methane or other exotic atmospheres is outside the scope of this essay; we'll see another reason why the atmospheric composition is important later.

So, since we're talking about vaguely Earth-like plants under an Earth-like atmosphere, we can extrapolate about our alien planet from how Earth plants work and why they look the way they do. By applying those same rules in a different environment, we can get some general guidelines of how alien plant life might look.

Speaking of looks, let's start with color. Why are Earth plants green? Well, from a nitpicky technical standpoint, they actually aren't. They only *look* green because chlorophyll is green. (The natural colors of leaves, for example, are only visible in the fall. Most of the time, the chlorophyll in the leaves makes them look green, but in the autumn the chlorophyll disappears and the leaves' natural color can be seen.) But that only changes the question slightly: so why is chlorophyll green?

For this, we need to consult basic color theory: all opaque objects have a color because of the light they reflect back to our eye. Red objects tend to absorb orange, yellow, green, blue, and violet light, and reflect red light. Green objects tend to reflect green light¹. Chlorophyll absorbs red and blue light incredibly strongly, and reflects green more than all the rest; thus it appears green. What this means is that when chlorophyll uses sunlight to turn carbon dioxide and water into sugar and oxygen, it's only changing the red and blue light. The green light escapes to hit our eyes and make us see the plant in question as green.

But does this really answer our question? So what if chlorophyll absorbs red and blue light and reflects green light?

That isn't exactly a "why," nor does it help us in thinking about our alien plants. Fortunately, we know that chlorophyll actually depends on sunlight to work. That means there's a concrete evolutionary reason behind the colors of sunlight that chlorophyll absorbs and reflects. Chlorophyll evolved to make the most of the sunlight of its environment. (Plants that used less thrifty kinds of chlorophyll would be at a disadvantage against their competitors.²)

If we can learn some things about the environment that the chlorophyll evolved in, we can figure out what kinds of light it would likely absorb. Once we know that, we can figure out what other colors it would reflect, determining the color it might be. Alien chlorophyll can only evolve to use colors of sunlight that would reach it. For our alien planet, then, we need to understand the environment before we can figure out what color the chlorophyll in its plants would be.

There are three main factors affecting the colors of sunlight that get through to the chlorophyll. The first factor is what kind of light the planet's sun gives off. This gives us a baseline of what kinds of light are out there. As the initial question suggests, every star has a dominant color, from blue (the hottest) to red (the coolest). Our sun falls in the cool side of the middle, yellow. No star gives off just one type of light, of course! With these colors, we are just describing the dominant type of light the star emits. Blue stars tend to be proportionately hotter than our sun, and give off less red light. Red stars are the opposite, cooler and with little blue light. What this means is that the type of star will affect what kinds of light the chlorophyll might possibly be able to use.

The second factor is what kinds of light are intercepted by the atmosphere before reaching the planet's surface. Every atmosphere filters out some of the available light, reducing what's available to our proto-plants. Remember when we mentioned that the Earth-like atmosphere was important? This is why: Because in an Earth-like atmosphere, visible light is the main light that gets through, while high-energy ultra-violet light and almost all infrared light is blocked. This means we know that our plants will be absorbing light in the visible spectrum. (Incidentally, the oxygen atmosphere not only allows your player characters to breathe, it also prevents them from dying of skin cancer. UV-blocking ozone is a good thing.)

Finally, we need to know about the immediate environment of the chlorophyll. Chlorophyll will almost certainly evolve in water, because all single-celled forms of life need a moist environment. For example, on our world the first photosynthetic organisms were ocean-living bacteria that evolved three and a half billion years ago. Water tends to block red light while letting blue light pass, which is probably why they evolved to have chlorophyll that absorbs so strongly in the blue end of the spectrum. Blue light was the best light to penetrate the water. Similarly, on our alien world, the light that the chlorophyll transforms must be able to penetrate water.

(A tangent, for those interested in evolutionary theory: you may have noticed that chlorophyll absorbs red light as well, even though that's a completely useless ability underwater. No one quite has an answer for this, but it's a useful illustration of the principle that evolution can be pretty darn random. Chlorophyll didn't have to be perfect at absorbing sunlight, it just had to be better at it than any competitors were. Next time your players catch you in a biological inconsistency, this is a useful principle to pull out of your hat.)

Putting together these three factors, we can make some good guesses about how alien chlorophyll looks. It probably uses the bluest light available to it, because of water's tendency to block red light. We know that it doesn't use light outside the visible spectrum, because that kind of light doesn't easily penetrate Earth-like atmospheres. Finally, we know that plants will respond to the special spectrum of their sun. Plants near blue stars will receive a lot of blue light. This means that they will tend to produce chlorophyll that absorbs more blue light than red, so they will be colored red or yellow. Plants near red stars receive red light instead, so they will tend to produce chlorophyll that absorbs more red light than blue and be colored blue. (For the curious, because of the higher energy content of yellow light, plants around orange stars will prefer it to red. That means these plants will probably reflect both red and blue, which combine to purple.)

We've even got a real-world example that indicates our hypothesis is a sound one. Brown and red algae are Earth organisms adapted to live deep underwater. Water, as we've seen, absorbs red light, so a plant under a few dozen meters of water is probably experiencing conditions similar to being in orbit around a blue star. These plants have adapted by evolving chemical helpers to broaden the range of light that chlorophyll absorbs in the blue range, while

reducing the light it can absorb from the red range. Just as we predicted, they absorb blue and reflect red -- and it's this reflection of red light that gives red algae their color, and their name.

Unfortunately, there's one more wrinkle to consider. Because we see reflected light, there needs to be light of a particular color in the environment in order for us to see in that color! For example, our red algae is colored intensely red once it has washed up on the beach. Deep underwater, though, there's no red light to be reflected. The only light around is blue light, which is absorbed by the algae. Since no light is being reflected back to our eye, the algae will look black. So under strongly blue light, all the plant life may look black, though it would seem red under a flashlight or other ordinary light. Under strongly red light, the plant life will also seem black (though with a blue rather than a red tint), because the blue light necessary for the blue color to show up simply isn't being emitted by the light present. The closer a star's light is to our sun, the more non-black color our eyes will perceive.

So we've pretty exhaustively examined color: Congratulations! But color is hardly the only visible difference between plants. A sequoia tree and a stalk of kelp are both green, but they look quite distinct. For this reason, it's important to consider (and describe!) a variety of different plant types. Trees, bushes, and grass will be the most visible things the characters see, but half of the Earth's photosynthesis is performed by microscopic plankton in the oceans. These microscopic plants may be too small to see with the naked eye, but that doesn't mean they won't affect the visual environment. For example, high concentrations of algae might actually color the oceans, like Earth's "red tides" during an algal bloom.

In fact, there might not even be trees at all. It took trees a good three billion years to evolve, even after photosynthesis was working just fine! If we take earth's history as a guide, 90% of planets where photosynthesis is occurring should be devoid of trees. If you want an environment with large plants, but one that still feels alien, borrow from other periods of earth's history. The moss-dominated flora of the late Silurian, the thin or pine-needle like leaves of early trees in the Carboniferous, or the forest dominated flora of the early Eocene (before grass evolved) all provide interesting ideas.

Of course, there are many factors in the environment might change how all these flora look, trees, and algae alike. Important things to consider are gravity, temperature, solar intensity (how much light there is available), the length of the day, access to water, and the larger ecosystem of the world, especially predators. For example, a low-gravity world would allow plants to grow taller. Dry conditions will force plants to adopt strategies to conserve water, either swelling up to store water or having tiny leaves to prevent evaporation. Plants on a world without herbivores will not evolve poisons, spines, and other biological defenses, and plants on a world with a very long day lasting a week or more might go into periods of hibernation.

Unfortunately, examining all of these factors in detail is outside the scope of this essay. One important thing to consider when inventing the effects of these factors, though, is how they combine. For example, consider a plant on a low gravity world with a weak sun and generally cool temperatures. The height of a tree is ultimately limited by the ability of the plant to pull water up from the ground. Root pressure and capillary action play roles in this, but the most important factor by an order of magnitude is the pull exerted by water molecules evaporating from the plant's leaves. If that pull is weak, as we might expect on a world with cool temperatures and little sunlight, plants will be prevented from reaching great heights despite the low gravity. Instead, enormously long vine-like branches with giant leaves might spread across large areas of ground.

So what happens when we put all these factors together? The type of star, the light it gives off, the general atmosphere, the absorption rates of water, the other environmental factors -- what might some plausible alien flora look like?

At one end of the spectrum, we've got blue stars. These stars, as we've seen, are the hottest type. Because they consume fuel so quickly they tend to be very short-lived. Many are too short lived for life to have evolved! Consider a blue star of about four stellar masses. This mass is small enough that plant life will have time to evolve before the star becomes a supergiant. The oceans of our hypothetical world could be teeming with single-celled plankton and very simple multi-celled algae. Algae and bacterial slimes might be visible near the seashore and in very wet areas. These would be colored yellow under the light of the blue sun. Since the plants have evolved to absorb blue light, they would be reflecting yellow light, since yellow is the most plentiful light around which they don't absorb. Under a white-light

flashlight, of course, they would appear red, just like red algae on earth. The local sun's blue light would also penetrate ocean water well, and relatively complex algae might thrive even one hundred meters underwater.

A nearly opposite situation could exist around a red star. Red stars are so cool that a planet will have to orbit very close to the star to have liquid water, which is a requirement for plants, and life, as we understand it. The planet must orbit so close that it becomes tidally locked. That means that one side of it always faces the local sun and the other side always faces away, just like one side of the moon always faces the earth. It would be very difficult for photosynthesis to develop on such a world since there is relatively little blue light. Red light is preferentially filtered out by water, so the oceans of such a world would be quite dark. On the bright side, the coolness of red stars means that they exist for many billions of years before becoming supergiants. This gives plenty of time for photosynthesis to evolve in a less favorable environment, such as shallow pools on land. Even well after photosynthesis evolved it would remain uncommon in the ocean, and hence life would be uncommon in the ocean. Plants on the land, on the other hand, would be highly evolved and very plentiful. One possibility is dark forests of tall trees that are completely devoid of underbrush. Since sunlight constantly comes from a single direction there is no variation that might allow light to trickle down to the forest floor.

These worlds, exotic as they may seem, aren't the strangest kinds of plant life that might be out there. We originally assumed that alien plants would be similar to Earth plants, but it's possible that they could be different in some very basic ways. For example, the plants might use a method other than photosynthesis to create their food. One way to do this is through chemosynthesis, a method that uses chemicals such as sulfur or iron compounds to create sugars. Plants that use chemosynthesis rather than photosynthesis don't need sunlight; they can thrive under thick cloud cover that blots out the sun, near volcanic vents deep in the ocean (just like they do on Earth), or in caves and tunnels that never receive sunlight. Alternately, the plants could use photosynthesis, but they could create proteins with the process rather than sugars. By using ammonia, carbon dioxide, and sunlight, plants could be largely protein based. Without the raw materials (sugar) to manufacture cellulose, the major component of wood, they might be very limp and ground hugging. Alternately, they might have a chitinous shell for support, like a crab.

With all these possibilities, the Omniscient Eye knows that it must seem hard to actually create a world that is scientifically plausible. Just remember, as we previously mentioned, evolution is an unpredictable and often undirected process. This essay serves as a guide to the underlying science, not as the only truth. Life on an alien world is completely outside of our knowledge, so, while we can make intelligent guesses as to what it would be like, we can't say for sure. With this article, a liberal dose of common sense, and some imagination, though, you can have a shot at creating a believable alien world.

¹ Actually an object can be colored by the combination of different colors it reflects. Yellow and blue make green, so a green-colored book might look that way because of a combination of yellow and blue light reflecting off its cover, even if it reflects almost no green light. This is not the case with chlorophyll, but it's worth mentioning.

² Its worth noting that this disadvantage need not be a critical one. Evolution rewards passing on one's genes, not perfection. The study of evolution is full of imperfections, the human appendix being perhaps the most famous. It's safe to assume that the evolution of chlorophyll on an alien world would not be any different, and that there would be plenty of imperfections that make things different from the idealized version that is described in this essay.

--Chris Hall

Paleontologist Turned Computer Programmer

Sages theorize that the Omniscient Eye might actually be composed of a panel of Experts chosen through mysterious and arcane means. Regardless, the Omniscient Eye is benevolent, and every other week it is willing to share its lore with all. Or, at least, with all with valid *Pyramid* subscriptions.

The Omniscient Eye seeks to answer questions that are tied to knowledge of the real world, providing information with a perspective that is of use to gamers. The

Omniscient Eye does not concern itself with specific game systems or statistics.

Do you have a question for the Omniscient Eye? Feel free to send it to pyramidquestions@yahogroups.com, and the Omniscient Eye might answer it!

Pyramid Pick

Spellslinger (for d20 System)

Published by [Fantasy Flight Games](#)

Writing, Art Direction, & Layout by Kevin Wilson

Developed by Kevin Wilson & Greg Benage

Illustrations, Maps, & Graphics by Anders Finer, Scott Reeves, David Griffith, Monte Moore, Michael Philippi, Joseph Querio, Hian Rodriguez, & Brian Schomburg

Edited by Greg Benage & Rob Vaughn

64-page b&w softcover; \$14.95

What do you do when *Deadlands* wraps up the market on bringing magic to the Old West? Bring the Old West to fantasy, that's what. *Spellslinger* is Fantasy Flight's attempt to tie the two genres together, using the *d20 System*.

The old world is getting full. It's a fantasy world, but it's coming into its own technologically -- it's been left deliberately vague, but most hints point to a steam-powered setting. It's pretty crowded, so anyone with a sense of adventure or who just wants a little elbow room is hopping a ship and sailing across the ocean to the Territories. Here, travelers find all the trappings of the Old West: burgeoning frontier towns, racial disharmony, prospectors, and shootouts at high noon.

One of the wildest elements of this virgin land is the indigenous population: the gray runners. These wolf-like humanoids, whose individual tribes are collectively called the Pack, once roamed freely throughout this land, but the pushy newcomers' guns make them a serious threat to the natives. The dwarves, elves, and humans (among others) have run them out of just about every town east of the Gray Hills. The runners live on the west side now, and a treaty prevents the gnomes from building their railroad any deeper into the mountain range. This is to keep the intruders from releasing the unnamed, evil forces locked beneath the peaks. The dwarves are pretty sure this agreement is just a smokescreen to keep them from obtaining the vast riches there, and so the pact's future is in doubt.

The newcomers have problems of their own. Ancient racial rivalries have been preserved among humanoids. The old country hasn't forgotten the "colonists," and the Governor (and his mysterious right-hand man, the Governor's Man) makes sure everyone tithes to the homeland. But the worst, most divisive problem plaguing people are the brands. Symbols of great power, those born with a brand are feared, respected, worshipped, or hunted, depending on which mark they have and which town they enter.

Some brands are welcome, like the Padre, carried as it is by healers and holy men. Others are thought to be more annoying than anything, like the shape-changing Skinwalkers, who may alter their form and whose sense of humor is misunderstood. The worst of the bunch, however, are the Blackhands and Magi.

Someone with the Blackhand is often in direct, functional opposition to other brands because such an individual is resistant to most magic and may even douse the effects of spells just by their presence. This upsets no one more than

the Magi, whose brands mean pure magical power -- bad enough to be marked and feared, but when a magus can't enjoy the fruit that forced his exile, he lashes out. The fighting between these two groups is so fierce, folks call it the Prairie War, and neither side is welcome in most townships.

There are only three classes in *Spellslinger*: the Gunfighter, Maverick, and Trailblazer. Gunfighters are the iconic warriors, constantly besieged by young bucks looking to challenge the best. Mavericks are akin to rogues, using charm and looks to get away with whatever intelligence and sleight of hand won't allow. Trailblazers are the quintessential explorers, leading the way in the Territories. Although these options seem limited, the feat-based spell system opens these roles up in interesting ways.

Each class has a core ability, such as the Maverick's *Jack of All Trades*. Not only does he get eight additional skill points a level, he can choose a skill that gets a +3 bonus, and he can take the better of two die rolls when using it. If you want to use magic, however, you choose the brand that gives you the powers and spells you want. The brand is a feat, and it replaces your core ability. Both options promise great power, but it's an either/or situation.

If you choose the brand, the *Spellslinger* setting arranges its own spell lists. You're only allowed three spells from a level (called "circles") when you take the appropriate feat, though you can freely switch new spells for old at later levels. If you want more first-circle spells, you'll have to take that feat again. The same is true for spells from the second through fifth circles.

Characters of all types are tough hombres, and they gain in power quickly. This is all part of the way they offset sides in combat. There's not much armor -- who needs it, when bullets will pass right through it? And since everyone's got a gun, you have to be a robust opponent (or know a skilled healer). The monsters are stronger, and there are rules for the shootouts on Main Street and the effects of a high reputation.

The book, another from Fantasy Flight Games' self-contained Horizon line, concentrates on a broad sense of story rather than the nuts and bolts of the setting. Just as the world from which the characters came is undefined, so, too, are many chunks of the new world waiting for a GM to give them his stamp. There's a map of the land and a sample town (and some thumbnails of other burgs and what races or brands hold sway there), a few new spells, some tribal names to get the Pack started, and an equipment list that doesn't try to needlessly bulk up the word count.

There's little wasted space here, and the book looks fabulous. With cross-genre artwork that makes dragons and shootists seem like they belong together, and looks gorgeous to boot (Joseph Querio in particular has the decimal in the wrong place on his paycheck), the volume is a visual joy.

Fantasy Flight is getting better at these capsule game worlds, and *Spellslinger* shows they can do it with understated mechanics and intelligent design that sit behind the curtain, out of the GM's way, letting him do his job and making it all look so easy.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Natural Selection: A Thrilling Prequel to Sucking Vacuum!

Published by [Alien Menace](#)

Designed by Marc Davis

Eight 5½ by 8½-inch card sheets, one four page 5½ by 8½-inch rules leaflet, one rocket shaped turn counter, & one six-sided die; \$5.95

Monkeys. Woohoo!

Monkey poop. Eeuw . . . !

Both appear in the latest game from Alien Menace. Well, actually, *neither* appear in *Natural Selection*, the prequel to one of last year's most frantically fun games, [Sucking Vacuum](#), which itself has been given a spiffy full-color upgrade for its recent second edition. Instead, *Natural Selection* is about chimps being trained to serve aboard the International Space Station. You know, the one that is going to hemorrhage oxygen like a very leaky thing in *Sucking Vacuum*. And sometimes yes, this does involve chimp poop, though not the bit about hemorrhaging oxygen . . . Anyway, chimps are cheap to train and easily replaced, so can be shot into space without risk to human life. They also do not ask quite so many awkward questions. So eight nations have put forward their best chimponauts who must complete a series of tasks in the fastest possible time within set time limits. The best overall team of chimps will then be sent into orbit.

Alien Menace put out games in a similar style to those from Cheapass Games, but they come better appointed. That includes everything necessary to play: dice, counters, boards, and tokens, plus the ziplock bags to store it all. (This is a feat that many other publishers of more expensive titles still seem unable to do.) Some preparation is necessary of the components in *Natural Selection*, involving taking a pair of sharp scissors to the eight card sheets. Cutting up these sheets gives the following components:

- Four 4½-inch square map tiles that depict the test areas, marked with lockers, computers, and cages.
- Four 3-inch square Command Modules.
- A plethora of tokens -- eight Initiative Tokens numbered one through eight; eighteen paintball splats; five sets of Team Tokens labeled Alpha, Beta, Charlie, and Delta; and 27 Item Tokens that depict O₂ Cylinders, Paintball Guns, Micrometers, Mission Discs, and Teddy Bears, plus the Monkey Poop
- A Mission Track and a Locker Contents board.
- Eight stand-up figures.
- Eight ID badges that corresponds to the stand-ups and give details of the chimps submitted for testing. Besides a little biographical background, every chimp is rated between 3 and 7 in their Kinesthetic, Logical, and Spatial abilities.

While *Natural Selection* can be played by between two and eight players, it is best played by four players, who each take control of a team comprised of two chimps. (There are rules for as many 10 players, but then they need another, wholly different game). The aim of each chimp is to complete five missions in set order, each within a time limit of three turns. Points are awarded for doing each task first, second, or third, so it is possible to win a game without being the fastest. The game ends after five missions have been completed, which lasts a total of 15 turns, at which time the simian team with the most points is declared the winner.

At the game's beginning, the four map tiles are laid down to form a square, and the four Command Modules are placed on perimeter of the testing area. The chimps are organized into teams of two and given the Team Tokens that they will

place on the Mission Track board as they complete a mission. The lockers on the Locker Contents board are filled with three random objects ready for a chimp to open and search to find what he needs to complete a mission. All chimps begin play locked in their cages.

On each turn, order of play is determined by drawing the initiative Tokens. When it is his turn to act, a chimp's actions are limited only by his Kinesthetic score. The higher it is, the more actions he can attempt. This includes moving; picking up, throwing, and smashing objects; wrestling with other chimps; using skills; and, of course, throwing Monkey Poop. To use a skill, a chimp rolls the die and adds the appropriate ability, hoping to get a result of 10 or more to succeed. This is necessary to open lockers, throw things, wrestle with rival chimps, and complete many of the tasks necessary for the game's missions. Some objects, of which a chimp can hold two, can enhance a chimp's skill, and will often prove necessary if a chimp is to use his skills. When thrown, objects inflict damage by reducing the number of actions a chimp can do. In particular, Monkey Poop is very effective in doing this, as despite all that training, it cannot overcome a chimp's instinct to self-groom!

The game's five missions are Launch, Repair, Navigate, Insurgency, and Egress, which must be played in that order. In Launch, the chimp teams must prepare their Command Module by stocking it with an O₂ Cylinder and getting into their seats. During the Repair Mission the chimps must repair one of the many malfunctioning computers. For the Navigate Mission, a navigation program must be located and uploaded into the team's Command Module computer. It is time to get out the Paintball Guns for the Insurgency Missions and to see how many hits they can land on the members of rival teams. Finally, the Egress Mission allows the chimps to get out of the test area via the airlock.

So what you have in *Natural Selection* is a set of five very mini-races. Each is a race against the clock and the other teams; with players needing to match the strengths of their chimps against the tasks they need to perform. One problem is that players may find that the three-turn limit for each mission is too short; to counteract this, we rolled for mission length (specifically 1d4+2) to add an extra random element. Also the rules feel a muddled upon first appearance, but a thorough read through and the play of *Natural Selection* is easily grasped. The components are themselves solid, although the rulebook is a little rough looking.

As a prequel to *Sucking Vacuum*, *Natural Selection* shares not-too-dissimilar mechanics and, in some cases, the icons on their components. It also shares the same aspect for team play. That said, *Natural Selection* is not as fun as *Sucking Vacuum*, if only that it lacks the roleplaying element that made *Sucking Vacuum* so engaging to play. Of course, how much verbal roleplaying potential is there in playing over trained simians with a propensity to throw their own poop? Yet, putting aside what are really just minor quibbles, *Natural Selection* is a solidly designed game that bears some repeat play. And although not as fun or as frantic as its sequel, *Natural Selection* possesses a certain chutzpah. After all, how many other games let you play with Monkey Poop?

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

BESM Space Fantasy

Published by [Guardians of Order](#)

Written by James Maliszewski, with additional writing by Christopher Haynes

Art by Christina Crontiris, Olga Bosserdt, Derrick Chin, Svetlana Chmakova, & Tara Lustik

96-page b&w digest-size softcover; \$16.95

Guardians of Order extends the *Big Eyes, Small Mouth* universal anime roleplaying game franchise with this solid treatise on the characteristics and conventions of anime space fantasy (or "space opera" in older usage). While some of this terrain has already been walked (in *Centauri Knights* or the out-of-print-but-available-by-download *Big Robots, Cool Starships* and even touched on peripherally by the *Tenchi Muyo!* game book series), this is *Big Eyes, Small Mouth's* first comprehensive look at the space fantasy genre separated from the settings.

The first chapter gives a brief definition of space fantasy, as well as an overview of the history of space opera anime from "Astro Boy" forward; this is fairly standard introductory stuff. The book gets down to business in chapter two, with nearly a quarter of the book dedicated to discussion and investigation of campaign styles. This begins with a look at the broad elements (action, comedy, melodrama, romance) and then examines common applications, ranging from a *Star Trek*-like exploration campaign to the military themes of *Star Blazers*, even to the mixed romance-magical girl tendencies of *Tenchi*. More familiar space gaming premises, like space merchants or pirates, are also treated. The middle portion of this chapter addresses the distinctive elements of visual style which makes space anime what it is. The chapter closes with several brief but very usable campaign premises demonstrating the concepts of the chapter. Many of these make deliberate nods to familiar space opera or action-adventure concepts from other media, but this, too, is characteristic of anime and perfectly valid and enjoyable.

Chapter three discusses character creation. As might be expected, this is the chapter which relies the most heavily on the Tri-Stat rules foundation. However, the chapter works just as successfully as a general discussion of character types and conventions. The only purely "crunchy" elements are the sample race and occupation templates, which give players and game masters a welcome leg up on designing such elements for their own games.

Chapters four and five get to the nuts and bolts of any science fiction setting: technology and starships, respectively. These chapters are almost purely discussion of the questions which must be asked as a setting is made, and what sort of answers (and repercussions of those answers) might ensue. This is a remarkable and refreshing change from many space-based games where the hardware has center stage in the rules. The non-technical focus continues in the final chapter on exotic worlds. There's no star system design rules here, just a very anime-like discussion of the assorted elements which need to be considered as one develops strange new worlds and new life forms. The book concludes rather abruptly after this chapter; I would have welcomed a few example worlds or creatures, possibly followed by a fully-fleshed campaign setting drawing on all the elements from prior chapters.

Author James Maliszewski might be familiar to science fiction gaming fans from his columns in the early incarnations of RPG.net, contributions to the *Fading Suns* and *Stargate SG-1* games, and extensive credits for *GURPS Traveller*. Here he's able to apply his broad experience of space gaming while blending in the conventions of anime-style

storytelling. The result is both a welcome guide to space fantasy in general and to anime space fantasy in particular. This mixing of cultures, the combining of Western and Eastern styles, is sure to continue and, if done well, should bring much entertainment to gamers and readers in the years to come.

The interior art is in line with the usual standards we've come to expect from Guardians of Order. The cover art by Christina Crontiris left me a bit confused; the interrelation of the major figures, the minor figure with the major gun, and the spacescape never gelled for me. The graphics layout is clear enough, but I would have been happier with better distinctions between sections -- the typeface sizes chosen don't jump out as much as they might. As might be expected for such a brief book, the table of contents is quite short. The index takes up two full pages, but much of this is padded by repetition from assorted section and subsection headers; this is not necessarily material that is expected in an index. Occasional spelling errors and the two separate entries for "bounty hunter" make this an index which may be usable but doesn't generate respect. Perhaps a condensed index would have left room for another page of recommended anime source material.

What I found most surprising about this book is how truly generic it is. The focus on the themes of space fantasy anime, from settings to characters to technology, is a welcome change of pace from many space gaming books which tend to enforce themes with rules edicts. Here you get "just the facts" about what's needed to run high adventure in the high frontier. If you prefer a more technical approach you will probably be happier with Hero Games's *Star Hero*, Steve Jackson Games' *GURPS Space*, or any of the many incarnations of Marc Miller's *Traveller*. But if you're like me these days and more interested in telling a ripping yarn in deep space, you'll find *BESM Space Fantasy* a welcome addition to your library.

--*Bob Portnell*

Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



The Black Hawk in GURPS

A Modern Helicopter and its Use(r)s

By Hans-Christian Vortisch

This article describes the widely used Sikorsky H-60 series of helicopters, with [GURPS Vehicles Lite](#) stats. It is especially useful for [Special Ops](#) or other military campaigns, but may also feature in many other modern action campaigns set between the 1980s and the 2030s -- including [Hellboy](#) or low-tech [Cyberpunk](#).

Much of the information can also be used in other games, such as *Cthulhu Now*, *Delta Green*, *d20 Modern*, *Merc: 2000*, *Twilight: 2000*, etc.

Sikorsky UH-60 Black Hawk

In the early 1970s, the U.S. Army issued a requirement for a new multi-purpose helicopter to replace its fleet of Bell UH-1 "Huey" choppers (pp. SO123, VE141). The new aircraft was to be larger, faster, more powerful, and less vulnerable. One of the main goals was for it to provide higher survivability for crew and passengers.

The design developed by Sikorsky Aircraft Corp. of Stratford, Connecticut, entered service as the UH-60A Black Hawk in 1979. It soon spawned numerous variants for special uses and various branches of the U.S. military, as well as civilian users and export customers in more than 25 countries.

The UH-60L is the improved general-purpose variant, adopted in 1989. It differs from the original UH-60A mainly in upgraded engines and electronics. Some 540 have been acquired by the U.S. Army by 2003, and 60 more are on order. It cost around \$8.6 million in 1997.

The Black Hawk is a twin-engined assault and transport helicopter with a four-bladed main rotor and a smaller tail rotor. Some vital components are ballistically tolerant and can take a couple hits before ceasing service completely. The whole craft has an IR-suppressant paint finish.

The cockpit seats the pilot on the right, the co-pilot on the left. Both have crash-resistant, armored seats, which provide small caliber and fragment protection from the rear, underside, and part of the sides (DR 25). If properly buckled in, the seats reduce collision and whiplash damage (pp. VE160, VL47) with an effective DR of 5. In addition, the pilots' seats are provided with cockpit airbag systems from 1999. There is a door on either side of the flight deck. The 410-cf main cabin is located behind the cockpit. Directly behind the pilots' seats, adjacent to the cabin's side windows, are the stations of the crew chief and the gunner. In addition, the cabin can accommodate 11 fully equipped troops on crash-resistant seats (an alternative seat arrangement seats the crew chief and 14 troops; this usually lacks armament). In the field, the passenger seats are often removed, allowing up to 22 troops to be carried. This is more dangerous in the event of a crash, but allows quicker dismounting. Two large doors are located on either side, sliding to the rear to open. There is an internal 600-lb. winch (ST 30) with 66-yard cable at the right door. This can be deployed to recover cargo or personnel while the helicopter is hovering. Alternatively, the passengers can fast-rope or rappel down (p. SO59).

The crew has dual flight controls and instrument panels fully compatible with AN/AVS-6 ANVIS image-intensifying night vision goggles (p. SO110), allowing flight at night. SINCGARS-compatible radios with encryption (pp. SO106, VL13) as well as satellite communication (SATCOM) equipment are installed.

Defensive equipment includes the AN/APR-39 radar warning receiver, AN/ALQ-144 IR-missile jammer, and twin M130 flare/chaff dispensers. The dispensers can be loaded with M206 flares and RR-170 chaff bundles.

The engine compartment behind the cabin contains the twin 1,342-kW General Electric T700-GE-701C turboshafts. The engines are fitted with IR-suppressors. The self-sealing, explosion-proof fuel cells are designed to seal off a 7.62mm hole. A 67-kW Solar T62-T-40-1 auxiliary power unit (APU) is provided for the electrical systems and emergency use. The 4-bladed main rotor features ballistic blades of composite construction (which are able to tolerate a hit from a 23mm [autocannon](#)). The main rotor blades are foldable for stowage on cargo aircraft -- four Black Hawks can be carried in the McDonnell Douglas C-17A or six in the Lockheed C-5B (p. SO125). One hour is required to prepare it for loading and one hour for rebuilding on arrival.

The UH-60L can mount up to four machine guns -- two in the forward windows on either side and two in the doorways of the cabin. The forward mounts were originally fitted with 7.62×51mm Saco M60D machine guns (pp. HT119, SO121) with a 200-round belt of ready ammo each. These have been replaced in U.S. service with the 7.62×51mm FN M240D (pp. HT120, SO121, and VL57) from the late 1990s. Some mount 7.62×51mm GE M134 miniguns (selectable RoF 33/66, pp. HT119, SO121, and VL57) with 4,500-round belts each instead. The door mounts are not normally fitted on the UH-60L; if installed, various heavy machine guns can be mounted. The 12.7×99mm General Dynamics [GAU-19/A](#) minigun (pp. MF30, VL57) originally intended for it has been found to develop too much recoil, however.

The UH-60L can use the external stores support system (ESSS), which consists of two removable stubwings from which drop tanks and ordnance can be suspended. The ESSS features four hardpoints and can support up to 5,000 lbs. per side. Loads include 230-gallon or 450-gallons drop tanks (every three gallons increasing endurance by one minute), 7-round M260 or 19-round M261 70mm BEI Hydra rocket pods (pp. SO121, VL59), 4-round M490 HELLFIRE missile racks (pp. SO121, VL59), or the 160-round M56 Volcano FASCAM mine dispenser system -- the weapons are not usually carried (and note that the helicopter lacks the laser designator to guide the HELLFIREs; a designator on the ground or another helo is required). Any external load severely restricts the fields of fire of the machine guns. The stores are jettisoned if the helicopter comes under attack, to permit the gunners to return fire.

An external cargo carrying hook under the belly can support a slung load of up to 4.5 tons, e.g. an [M1025 HMMWV](#) armament carrier or a 105mm M119A1 towed howitzer, with its 5-man crew and 50 shells in the cabin.

The UH-60L burns 161 gallons of jet fuel per hour at cruising speed (normal endurance is about 2 hours 6 minutes). A full load of fuel and ammunition is \$1,212. Visibility is good.

Sikorsky UH-60L Black Hawk

Subassemblies: Body +4; Top-and-Tail Rotor +2; 2×open mounts -1; 3×small wheels +1.

Powertrain: 2,535-kW Improved TTR drivetrain; 2×1,342-kW Improved HP gas turbines; 67-kW Improved HP engine; 1,470-kWs advanced battery.

Fuel: 360 gallons jet fuel (Fire 13).

Occupancy: 4 RCS, 11 NS

Armor	F	RL	B	T	U
<i>Body:</i>	3/5	3/5	3/5	3/5	3/5
<i>Wheels:</i>	3/5	3/5	3/5	3/5	3/5
<i>Rotors:</i>	4/20	4/20	4/20	4/20	4/20
<i>Pilots:</i>	0/+0	0/+25	0/+25	0/+0	0/+25

Weaponry

7.62×51mm Machine Gun/M240D [Body:L] (600 rounds).

7.62×51mm Machine Gun/M240D [Body:R] (600 rounds).

Equipment

Body: 2×door mounts; 2×medium range radios w/ scrambler; long range radio w/ scrambler; long range radio w/ tight-beam option (p. VE47); autopilot; military GPS; 2×navigation instruments; IFF; inertial navigation system; radar detector; IR missile jammer (-2); compact fire suppression system; 600-lb. winch; duplicate controls; 2×airbags, 15×crash-resistant seats; 17-man environmental control; basic IR cloaking (-3); 2×6,000-lb. hardpoints [Body:L/R]; 9,000-lb. hardpoint [Body:U]. *Open Mounts:* Aircraft decoy discharger with 29 reloads (p. VXi18).

Statistics

Size: 50'×8'×12' *Payload:* 5.24 tons *Lwt.:* 11 tons

Volume: 792 *Maint.:* 16 hours *Price:* \$1,545,683.88

HT: 12. HPs: 900 Body, 360 Rotor, 75 each Wheel, 16 each Open Mount.

aSpeed: 184 *aAccel:* 4 *aDecel:* 14 *aMR:* 3.5 *aSR:* 2

Stall Speed 0. -2 *aSpeed* per loaded hardpoint (if any).

Design Notes

GURPS Vehicles Lite design. Body is 761.1 cf; rotor is 15.2 cf and 120 sf; open mounts are 1.5 cf each; wheels are 38.1 cf.

Body structure is medium, expensive, with fair streamlining. Armor is expensive composite on body and rotors, expensive metal on wheels. Each pilot station (40 cf) has 100 points expensive composite armor. 2×180-gallon light self-sealing tanks. The crash-resistant seats were bought as airbags. Each M130 dispenser can carry 30 flares or 60 chaff packets, equivalent to 30 flare/chaff loads in *Vehicles*.

Empty weight of the design was 11,960.85 lbs., which has been decreased to the actual empty weight of 11,516 lbs. *Lwt.* is the maximum combat weight. For ferry operations with extra fuel, it can go up to 12.25 tons. *aSpeed* has been decreased from 274 mph as designed to the actual maximum speed.

Variants

Numerous variants and modifications of the basic design exist. These include:

UH-60A Black Hawk

The original version of 1979 has 1,165-kW engines and a 4-ton slung capacity. The U.S. Army originally procured 976 of them, some of which have since been lost to combat or accidents, given away, or converted to other configurations.

UH-60M Black Hawk

Scheduled to enter service in 2006, this version is planned to increase the service life of the series to the year 2025 and beyond. The UH-60M fleet will consist of converted UH-60A and L models as well as newly built aircraft.

Modifications include rebuilt airframes, new rotor blades with better lift, a completely new digital cockpit with multifunction displays and internet access, and upgraded communication systems.

EH-60L

This is an electronic warfare version introduced in 1996, carrying the AN/ALQ-151 Advanced Quick Fix (AQF) battlefield ECM detection and jamming system, which intercepts, locates, and jams radio communications. The EH-60L also mounts extensive radio, datalink, and data storage equipment. An AN/ALQ-156 missile warning detector is also installed. It has a crew of five and is operated by military intelligence personnel.

HH-60G Pave Hawk

This version is used for combat search and rescue (CSAR) by the U.S. Air Force since 1992 (p. SO124). Some 102 are in service. It received extensive equipment upgrades, including terrain-following multi-mode radar, AN/AAQ-16 FLIR, external 600-lb. winch with 83-yard cable, two 185-gallon auxiliary fuel tanks in the rear of the cabin (doubling endurance to more than 4 hours), and an in-flight refueling system.

It is armed with 7.62×51mm GE GAU-2B/A miniguns (a variant of the M134) with 4,500 rounds each in the windows and can mount a 12.7×99mm Ramo-Browning GAU-18/A heavy machine gun (a variant of the M2 with RoF 16*, pp. HT119, SO121, and W130) with 1,300 rounds in the left cabin door.

Its crew consists of two pilots, flight engineer, gunner, and two [pararescue jumpers](#) . It will typically take on two survivors (although up to eight can be carried in a pinch).

HH-60H

The HH-60H (p. SO124) is a Navy version based on the SH-60B Sea Hawk. Operational from 1990, some 42 were made and are flown by HCS-4 ("Redwolves") and HCS-5 ("Blue Hawks") for search and rescue and special warfare combat support for the SEALs. Additional equipment includes AN/APS-124 search radar, AN/AAR-39A advanced radar warning receiver, AN/AVR-2 laser warning detector, AN/AAR-47 missile warning detector, improved AN/ALE-47 flare/chaff dispensers, AN/ARS-6 personnel locator system to locate personnel equipped with the AN/PRC-112 survival radio (p. SO106), and Kevlar floor mats in the cabin (DR 20 for the crew and passengers from below). Aside of its 4-man crew, it can carry eight passengers.

Its standard armament consists of two 7.62×51mm GE GAU-17/A miniguns with 4,500 rounds each in the windows (U.S. Navy version of the M134). A hardpoint either side can mount fuel tanks, rocket pods, or gun pods.

HH-60J Jayhawk

This is a search and rescue (SAR) variant developed for the U.S. Coast Guard. Based on the SH-60B Sea Hawk, it entered service in 1991. Called a Medium-Range Recovery (MRR) helicopter, it mounts a weather/air-to-sea search radar, FLIR sensor, 600-lb. winch with rescue basket, and three 120-gallon fuel tanks in external pods (increasing endurance to some 6 hours). Since late 2003, Jayhawks can be armed with the FN M240G machine gun. It has a crew of four and can carry six passengers. The USCG acquired 42 HH-60J Jayhawks, of which 35 are operational.

HH-60L

The U.S. Army's latest medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) helicopter was introduced in 2001 and is a specially equipped, unarmed ambulance helicopter. It has a crew of four (including two medics) and can carry six stretcher patients.

Its onboard equipment includes AN/AAQ-21 FLIR, a 600-lb. winch, and a complete medical kit (including oxygen and a suction system, +3 First Aid).

MH-60K SOA

The MH-60K Special Operations Aviation (SOA) helicopter (p. SO124) was introduced in 1994 for direct support of U.S. Army special operations forces. Some 50 are in service with the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne). It replaced the MH-60A and features numerous upgrades over the standard UH-60L, including: AN/AAQ-16B FLIR, AN/APQ-174B terrain-following, ground-mapping and air-to-ground ranging radar, AN/AAR-44 advanced radar warning receiver, AN/AVR-3 laser warning detector, AN/AAR-47 missile warning detector, AN/ALQ-162 pulse jammer, AN/ALQ-162 radio jammer, improved AN/ALE-40 flare/chaff dispensers, AN/ARS-6 personnel locator system to locate personnel equipped with the AN/PRC-112 survival radio, Kevlar floor mats in the cabin, FRIES bars on either side of the cabin (each capable of supporting 1,500 lbs., p. SO98), two 172-gallon auxiliary fuel tanks in the rear of the cabin (doubling endurance to some 4 hours), and an in-flight refueling system with nose probe (allowing it to refuel from the Lockheed MH-130H Combat Talon II, p. SO125).

Its standard armament consists of two GE M134 miniguns in the windows and optional guns in the doors. The MH-60K does not mount the ESSS, having its own set of removable, upwards bent stubwings. These have only two instead of four hardpoints, but don't restrict the fields-of-fire of the machine guns. Typically, two 230-gallon tanks are carried, but 70mm AIM-92D Stinger air-to-air missiles (pp. SO118, VL59) can also be mounted.

It has a crew of four and can carry seven passengers.

MH-60L DAP

The MH-60L (also known as the AH-60L) pre-dates the MH-60K, having been introduced in 1990, but has since been upgraded to a similar standard. Its main task today is as Direct Action Penetrator (DAP), i.e. as a fully armed gunship. It is very similar to the MH-60K except for lacking the in-flight refueling equipment and employing the standard ESSS. It features a HUD and the AN/AAQ-16D FLIR with integral laser rangefinder/designator, allowing it to fire laser-designated AGM-114C HELLFIRE antitank missiles or IR-homing AIM-92D Stinger air-to-air missiles without support. However, its typical armament consists of two M134 miniguns in the windows (fixed to fire forward and triggered by the pilot), a 19-round M261 70mm rocket pod on one ESSS stubwing and a 30×113mmB MDHC [M230](#) chain gun (p. VL58) with 1,100-round belt on the other. It can carry up to four 150-gallon auxiliary fuel tanks in the cabin, each increasing endurance by about 50 minutes.

MH-60S Knight Hawk

This U.S. Navy version introduced in 2001 is essentially a navalized UH-60L with features of the SH-60B Sea Hawk. It has the larger cabin, cargo doors, ESSS, and many external features of the Black Hawk, combined with numerous internal Sea Hawk features such as the engines, rotor brake, folding tail pylon, automatic flight control system, rescue winch, and a more durable gearbox.

It replaces the HH-60H, CH-46D Sea Knight, and several older types for the general-purpose, search and rescue, medevac, special warfare support, VIP transport, and assorted other roles. Some 237 are to be acquired by 2010.

SH-60B Sea Hawk

The SH-60B Sea Hawk was the U.S. Navy's first version, introduced in 1984 and mainly intended for antisubmarine warfare and surface search and surveillance. It has numerous differences, including a smaller cabin with only one door on the right side, navalized engines, 590-gallon fuel capacity, rotor brake, folding tail pylon, automatic flight control system, rescue winch, and a more durable gearbox. It has an AN/APS-124 surface radar system underneath the cockpit, AN/ASQ-81 MAD sensor, and a 25-round sonobuoy launcher in the left side, in place of the left cabin door. The cargo hook is rated at 3 tons. Armament consists of an optional Saco M60D machine gun in the cabin door on the right, and two hardpoints for MK46 torpedoes, AGM-119 Penguin antishipping missiles or 120-gallon drop tanks.

SH-60F Ocean Hawk

Similar to the SH-60B, intended for use on aircraft carriers and in service from 1991. Roles include transport, search

and rescue, as well as antisubmarine warfare. It features AN/ASQ-13F dipping sonar, four MFDs, three hardpoints (one left, two front-to-back right) for torpedoes or antishipping missiles. Aside of the 4-man crew, it can carry only three passengers.

This variant can be seen in *Tears of the Sun*.

VH-60N White Hawk

Flown since 1988 by the USMC squadron HMX-1 based in Quantico, Virginia, for exclusive use by the U.S. President and his staff (the aircraft carrying the president having the call sign "Marine One"). The VH-60N (based on the SH-60F Seahawk) is luxuriously fitted and equipped with a weather radar system, extensive avionics and communications suite (with its own radio operator) hardened against EMP, and passive defensive systems. Nine are in service.

How To Use It

Already in WWII, helicopters saw limited use for artillery spotting, reconnaissance, and transport, but it were search and rescue operations that were the early helicopters' most important contribution to modern warfare (and soon, civilian life). By the early 1960s, the full potential of the helicopter as a war machine had been realized. The U.S. Army concept of air cavalry that could deliver infantry, supplies, and fire support almost everywhere (provided air superiority had been achieved) saw widespread acceptance during the Viet Nam War and almost all later conflicts. The fine-tuning of tactical concepts (such as the Fire Force tactics in the Rhodesian War) and the ever improving technology changed this but little. At the same time, helicopters became commonplace over cities, highways, forests, and the sea, for police observation, [SWAT](#) insertion, medical evacuation, firefighting, sea rescue, antisubmarine warfare, or simply quick and comfortable transport.

The H-60 series of helicopters can be used for all of these missions; it is a highly developed machine that addresses many of the shortcomings of earlier designs. While increased survivability was its main *raison d'être*, it is not invulnerable, as the fiasco in Somalia underlined (p. SO101) -- but then, nobody claimed it was.

Military Users

Any campaign involving the U.S. military in modern times should get good use out of this helicopter. The UH-60A was first used in Grenada (1983) -- the UH-60L and many of the special versions have been employed in both U.S. wars in Iraq (1991 and 2003), in Panama (1989), Somalia (1992), Haiti (1994), Bosnia (1996), and Afghanistan (2001).

The UH-60L is the main workhorse of the 101st Air Assault Division (which flies 114 and plus three EH-60L), and heavily used by the 82nd Airborne Division and 10th Mountain Division (which have 38 and three EH-60L each), and other front-line Army units, including the 3rd Armored Cavalry Division (which has 21). Some National Guard units also fly it.

Special ops units such as the U.S. Army Rangers (pp. SO24-25) and Special Forces (pp. SO26-28) would be supported by the MH-60K SOA and MH-60L DAP -- flown by the "Night Stalkers," the highly specialized [pilots](#) of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) (pp. SO28-29) --, U.S. Air Force [Pararescue Jumpers](#) by the HH-60G Pave Hawk, and U.S. Navy SEALs (pp. SO30-31) by the HH-60H or MH-60S.

The UH-60L and its variations may also show up in service of foreign forces, including the [Royal Australian Army](#) (supporting Australian special ops, p. SO34), Austrian army, Brazilian army, Brunei air force, Red Chinese army

Black Black Hawk

Some Americans believe in the existence of [Black Helicopters](#), ferrying shades-wearing Men in Black across the country to alternatively engage in cattle mutilations, abductions, or actions aimed at depriving citizens of their Right To Bear Arms. In any *Black Ops*, *Conspiracy X*, *Illuminati*, or *Delta Green* campaign worth its salt, these rumors would of course be true.

They could certainly also engage in more benevolent activities, such as the protection of citizens against alien invasions (as the *Delta Green* organization or the Blue Boys in *Dreamcatcher*).

(designated Hei Ying, mainly for high-altitude operations in the Himalaya), Colombian air force, Israeli air force (designated Yanshuf 2, supporting Israeli special ops, pp. SO38-39), [Mexican army](#), Saudi Arabian army (seating 15 passengers; some have a 20×102mm MAT M621 door gun -- use stats of the GE [M61A1 Vulcan](#) with Wt 99, RoF 5/12*, Shots 240, pp. SO122, VL57), Taiwanese air force, Thai army, and Turkish army (supporting Turkish special ops, p. SO46).

Naval versions are in use with the Royal Australian Navy, Greek navy, Spanish navy (designated H.23), Taiwanese navy, and Thai navy.

License-made versions include the Mitsubishi UH-60JA and SH-60J used by the Japanese army and navy, and the Korean Air UH-60P of the South Korean army.

Civilian Users

Commercial success of the H-60-series has been limited so far, mainly due to its cost and complexity; many of its features are unnecessary for the requirements of civilian operators. Most non-military users employ it for VIP or law enforcement missions.

A number of federal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. use the UH-60A (some on permanent loan from the Army), making it useful for certain [Cops](#) campaigns. These include the [Bureau of Customs and Border Patrol \(CBP\)](#), the Drug Enforcement Agency (dubbed the "Pot Hawk" in its service), and the [Federal Bureau of Investigation \(FBI\)](#). The U.S. Coast Guard flies the HH-60J Jayhawk. A few fire departments, including that of Los Angeles County, fly the Firehawk, a variant with a removable 1,000-gallon water tank and water pump under the belly (Firehawks are also in service with the Florida and Oregon National Guards).

The Hong Kong SDU team (p. SWAT17) is supported by two such helicopters; Moroccan and Turkish police agencies likewise use it.

Many countries employ VIP versions for government executive transport, e.g. Argentina, Egypt, Hong Kong, Jordan, Malaysia, Philippines, South Korea, Thailand, and Turkey.

Selected References

- [Sikorsky UH-60L](#). From the manufacturer.
- [Sikorsky UH-60L](#). Analysis at Global Security.org.
- Jackson, Paul (ed.). *Jane's All the World's Aircraft 2003-2004* (Jane's, 2003).
- [FM 1-100 Army Aviation Operations](#) (Department of the Army, 1997).
- [Black Hawk Down](#) (Ridley Scott, 2001).
- [Tears of the Sun](#) (Antoine Fuqua, 2003).

Back in the real world, the existence of "black" helicopters is fairly easy to explain: under night conditions, all cats are gray, i.e., even plain olive drab military helicopters on routine training flights will appear "black." In addition, pilots of federal agencies are allowed to switch off their position lights if required for an operation, and will thus be nearly invisible in darkness. Finally, DEA "Pot Hawks" *are* actually painted black . . . whether they are engaged in the rumored covert ops is a matter of belief.

In keeping with the rumors, Black Black Hawks should also be fitted with a sound-baffling system to allow for silent flight.

Iron Ref 3: The Legend Begins Anew

Three competitors. Three minds of the roleplaying world, each representing a different gaming genre, have accepted the Iron Ref challenge.

Three secret ingredients. Selected by a special guest, three ingredients -- plot elements, story pieces, or other oddities -- are selected for the challengers to incorporate into their concoctions.

2,500 words. Each competitor has twenty-five hundred words -- and no more -- to devise a generic scenario in their genre incorporating all three secret ingredients.

24 hours. And they have one day to work their magic.

However, unlike previous Iron Ref events, this competition will be even *more* grueling! We will be running Iron Ref competitions for the first week of the month for August, September, and October. One winner will be chosen each week; 50% of the rating will be based on *your* ratings, and 50% will be based on a 1-5 rating of a group of three celebrity judges whose identities have not been revealed yet.

The winner for each of the three events will face off against each other, with the results of that titanic struggle scheduled to run the first week of November.

Who shall emerge, victorious, as the Iron Ref?

* * *

Our challengers, and their respective genres, are:

Jeff Siadek, designer of the [Battlestations Starship Adventure Game](#) and member of over two dozen secret societies, will be representing the **Space Opera** genre.

John Ford, noted coauthor of *GURPS Time Travel* and *GURPS Y2K* who has been secretly spreading encoded messages via his sig files in the message boards for years, will be representing the **Urban Fantasy** genre.

David Morgan-Mar, member of the *Pyramid* family with [Irregular Webcomic](#), will be representing the **Cliffhangers** genre.

* * *

The secret ingredients have again been smuggled out of an cryogenics chamber hidden beneath an active volcano by **Kenneth Hite**, the mastermind behind [Suppressed Transmission](#), and creator of so much roleplaying material he's been given his own Dewey Decimal designation.

Stop reading if you don't want to know the secret ingredients!

This competition's secret ingredients are:

- A truly enormous rabbit
- A Stradivarius violin
- A severed body part

Fiddly Bits

The third Iron Ref competition was held from 2:15 A.M. Wednesday, July 21, Eastern Time until 2:15 AM Thursday, July 22, Eastern Time. We had planned to go midnight to midnight, as we did in our first competition, but e-mail problems conspired against our great competition. Nevertheless, our challengers compensated mightily for this inconvenience, and all was right with the event.

This is the first part of our third Iron Ref competition. Our first one was [February 2, 2001](#), and the second was [August 3, 2001](#).

Without further adieu, then, here are the results of this competition:

Space Opera: [Case of the Unlucky Stradivarius](#), by *Jeff Siadek*

Urban Fantasy: [At The Hop](#), by *John Ford*

Cliffhangers: [The Musical Clue](#), by *David Morgan-Mar*

Iron Ref: Space Opera

Case of the Unlucky Stradivarius

by Jeff Siadek

Read:

The last Stradivarius violin in existence, the "Booth Stradivari" has gone missing. One by one the other Stradivari have gone the way of the dodo. A plasma fire disaster took out three fourths of a quartet on the pleasure liner *Irregardful*. One was given to a Trundlian ambassador who promptly ate it.

This last violin (designated a cultural treasure with commensurate diplomatic priviledges) was in the possession of Emel Fivvdem, an alien musician of stellar rekrown. It passed through customs departing the planet of Dr. Moreau but disappeared sometime before Fivvdem went to claim it on New Europe.

This debacle could be a major embarassment to the Universal Republic as it was in technically our hands when it disappeared. Your mission is to return the violin before the concert on New Europe in one solar week without leaking to the general public that it ever went missing. You begin on New Europe and have the use of a starship to travel the one day journey between worlds as necessary.

Characters can be duty-bound as official agents of the Republic or hired for a substantial reward.

Synopsis

The violin was actually stolen by a dim-witted customs official (Dirk Fitzpatrick) who wanted the case for use to transport an enormous rabbit's foot to the cult of Fortune. Fitzpatrick believed the bogus church of Fortune pamphlets (commissioned by Moreau because she wanted somebody to rid her of the rabbit that was literally eating her out of house and home) and needs a diplomatic pouch to get his package off-world.

Timeline

The following events will happen if the characters don't intervene.

Day 1--

Fitzpatrick steals the Stradivarius and throws it into a refuse heap situated directly between his home and the hardware store where he purchases an energy-blade chainsaw. The Stradivarius begins its 7 day march to the biofusion generator. It is discovered missing when Fivvdem arrives at New Europe.

Day 2--

Fitzpatrick cuts a hole in the wall with his energy blade chainsaw only to find the rabbit is bigger than he thought. He shoots it with the paralyzer and goes back to buy an anti-grav truck. He borrows money from a Zeldfetter.

Heroes begin their investigation on New Europe.

Day 3--

Fitzpatrick pries the diplomatic blackbox off the case and applies it to his truck before returning to find the rabbit still barely alive. He cuts off the rabbit's foot and loads it up. A sudden reflexive jolt by the rabbit kicks Fitzpatrick and the truck with a huge severed rabbits foot inside careening over the city wall and smashing into a building. Fitzpatrick is killed in the fall. **The characters will be notified of this accident even if they are off-world.** Authorities don't know where the truck came from and it doesn't show up on police scanners because it has the diplomatic black box attached. Investigation will show that it has the diplomatic tags from the Stradivarius case. They won't open it to reveal the huge severed rabbit's foot until authorized by the heroes.

Day 5--

Heroes will be invited to dinner at Moreau's mansion if they've not alienated her. If they are still missing the boat, more clues are to be found here.

Day 6--

If the characters haven't located the Stradivari by this time, they won't be able to deliver it to the concert hall on New Europe tomorrow without some fancy piloting.

Day 7--

Concert. If they haven't located the Strad yet, the mission is a failure. If they've got it but are just off-world with it, they may buy some time with a charisma check. If they haven't searched the biorefuse yet, the Booth Stradivari, the last of the Stradivarius violins becomes .0001 kilojoules of power.

New Europe

This is a bustling colony world with most of the benefits of a capitol planet. The climate varies widely but there is ample public transport and shelter and the people are quite friendly. Dealing with the locals could cause a delay in the investigation if the heroes aren't sufficiently diplomatic.

Zoallan Musician - Emel Fivvdem

"I am a frequent guest on Moreau's planet although lately, the good doctor has shown less than her usual generosity. As an artist, I am outraged you would insult my integrity by asking me to submit to a lie detector test."

If surreptitiously followed on New Europe, Fivvdem will lead the heroes to the red light district and into whatever illicit situation is appropriately inappropriate for your game. The heroes will have to face some well armed bouncers who use non-lethal weapons. It should be a tough fight. The heroes could lose and find themselves waking up in hospital a day later fully healed. If they win, they don't lose a day recovering. Either way, they have enough damaging info on Fivvdem that they can blackmail it into taking a lie detector test which will show that Emel is, in fact, innocent of all charges. Emel is annoying and depraved but not a thief.

Standard Printing - Dick Patterson.

"I don't know who or why, the credits came through from a biotech company "Stewart Tech" and we just ran the presses."

Stewart Tech

"We just got this gift anonymously of a formula for increasing carrot yield by 4 tenths of a percent. The donor only asked that the payment if any be made to Standard Printing."

The Planet of Dr. Moreau

A swarm of robotic fighters will attack any vessel that approaches the planet without written consent and 24 hours notice. This should be a minor challenge. Communication with the planet calls them off after a few rounds of a brief fight and a robot pilot will come aboard to land the heroes' ship.

Read:

To land, you need to take a pilot aboard who will play the following video on all viewfinders so the surface of Moreau remains a mystery.

"Welcome to Planet Moreau the ecologically friendly research facility where all of our refuse is turned into biofusion fuel. Here are some tips to help ensure your stay is safe and rewarding. Guests are required to remain within the city walls for their own safety. You will be issued a paralysis gun to be used in the unlikely event you are confronted by a genetically mutated experiment. Don't worry about the paralyzer's safety; it is designed only to work on creatures created by Dr. Moreau and only lethal if the target doesn't receive medical attention."

The Paralyzer - looks like a flashlight. Just point and click. Anything genetically modified by Moreau to be susceptible goes down immediately, wracked in pain with occasional reflexive shudders. Has no effect on offworlders.

Dr. Moreau was granted this planet to further her research into genetic engineering both as a means of funding and keeping the research safely quarantined. Some of Moreau's projects (notably the mammal growth studies) have shown remarkable success but are terribly expensive. Other projects have become dangerous liabilities and all biological material leaving the planet is restricted.

A small population of scientists and support personnel make Moreau their home. There hasn't been a murder on Moreau in the 30 years since it was founded. Some of the support personnel dabble in illegal gaming or drugs.

Moreau guards her secrets well. This applies to the doctor as much as her namesake planet. All view monitors are shut off for landing except those utilized by the official shuttle pilots. Characters who manage to hotwire their viewscreens or somehow fast talk or finagle their way into a view of the planet will see what appears to be hairy mountains and stationary clouds near the ground inside the walled off zone. Do not let the players know that there is a rabbit the size of Milwaukee on the surface.

The cities on Moreau are walled to keep out the free roaming genetic mutants that abound in the countryside.

Outside the walls, the land is a kind of a free range for experiments and agribusiness. They don't export any food but they grow a lot more (mostly carrots) than the people on Moreau could possibly eat (two billion metric tons a year). The refuse (mostly carrot tops) are hauled off to the biofusion generator. It takes seven days for the megadozer to push

a block of bio-refuse the seven kilometers from the dump to the generator. It is first sprayed with catalyzers which along with sunlight turn the mulch into biofusion fuel over those seven days.

Dr. Arden Moreau --

A brilliant genetic engineer responsible for the planet, her lease is valid only as long as she continues research on Government directed programs. Otherwise, she does as she pleases. Her biggest problem is that the government wants her to keep growing this enormous rabbit. She cooked up a scheme to have off-world pamphlets from a phony church of Fortune delivered hoping that some idiot like Fitzpatrick would take out the rabbit.

Customs Official - Brbrb (Zoallan)

"I'm happy to assist with the investigation."

Honest but not the hottest coil in the warp drive. Brbrb will figure things out eventually so he may be a source for information if the heroes get stuck. Security checks reveal that Dirk Fitzpatrick hasn't shown up for work for a few days.

Customs Agent - Dirk Fitzpatrick

"Some day my ship will come in"

He took the violin so he could use the case's diplomatic pouch to transport a huge rabbit's foot off-world. The Booth Stradivari itself is on its way to the biofusion generator. Dirk's not likely to be around by the time the characters get to the customs house or his residence. Searching his residence reveals the bow of the Stradivarius in a closed trash receptacle that is too small for a violin.

His house also contains a pamphlet:

Read:

The church of fortune is seeking unique objects related to charms of luck. We will pay top credit with no questions asked such as: the smallest four leaf clover or a coin that has verified to flip heads 37 times in a row. We paid 1 million credits for each of these items and dozens more. All unique objects rewarded handsomely. The size of your reward is only limited by the unique nature of your lucky charm. This could be your lucky day. Bring your charm to The Church of Fortune on Bomba before somebody else beats you to it.

Analysis of the paper - "this isn't carrot-top fiber" reveals it to be from a Standard Printing on New Europe.

Accessing Fitzpatrick's bank files will tell you that he made a purchase at the general store on days 1 and 2 and had a huge influx of cash into his account on day 2 from Lincoln Zeldfetter.

Walking to the hardware store from Fitzpatrick's apartment you must pass the gate of a huge stinking biorefuse dump. This is where he pitched the violin.

Lincoln Zeldfetter - Fixer

"What's my old pal Fitz gotten himself into now?"

He isn't Fitzpatrick's friend. Lincoln loans him money even though he knows Fitzpatrick is a deadbeat because he occasionally needs a friend in the customs house. He doesn't know Fitzpatrick isn't planning to return. If threatened a little, he'll cooperate. If threatened a lot, he'll drop a grenade and run. Cornered, he fights to kill. He has the empty case Fitzpatrick gave him as collateral. He'll negotiate a pardon for handing it over.

Biorefuse Dump

This is where the biorefuse (and the Stradivarius Fitzpatrick hurled over the fence) is sprayed with a catalyst and pushed towards the biofusion plants 7 kilometers away. The heroes will meet hyena-man Billy Shakespeare here who will tell them all they want to know about how the stuff gets pushed inexorably along 1 km per day until it reaches the plant.

General Store Fitzpatrick purchased an energy-blade chainsaw on day 1 and an antigrav truck on day 2.

The Outlands

The Rabbit

One enormous rabbit weighing in at nearly a million kilos roams the outlands until paralyzed and amputated by Fitzpatrick near a hole in the wall near Fitzpatrick's apartment. Killing Fitzpatrick (day 3 in timeline) was purely accidentally aside from being apropos. The heroes aren't likely to find it until it has been paralyzed. Heroic measures can revive it. A prosthetic foot will be expensive for Dr. Moreau to create but it's the least she can do.

Beastmen

There are all manner of crossbreeds of humans and farm or zoo animals on this world (bears, crocodiles, bulls). Moreau long ago let them free into the ranges. Some come out to work the most menial jobs. Use whatever animal stats from your game system to represent them. Like the rabbit, the beastmen are vulnerable to the paralyzer.

Searching the Biorefuse pile for the Stradivarius

If the heroes begin a search of the refuse pile at its exact location (kilometer 4 on day 4 for example), they'll find it. Otherwise, the beastmen will get wind of the search and go looking themselves. They'll find the Strad and take it home to their village but continue searching because they couldn't imagine people looking for a violin.

After the beastmen find the Stradivarius, they'll play an eerie tune every night that can even be heard faintly from within the city walls (by the character with the best listen check). The heroes must go into the Beastmen village to find it. In the village, they'll find opportunity to talk or fight as they like. The beastmen are pretty formidable and outnumber the characters 2 to 1 but susceptible to the paralyzers. The GM is encouraged to really dial up the roleplaying of the excruciating agony of the paralyzers. This is a hint to the characters to show some mercy. If they don't, they deserve what they get.

Any character giving medical attention to a beastman will cause all beastmen to cease hostilities and become friendly. Pleased that offworlders show them dignity denied them by those who share their planet, they will be happy to give up the Stradivarius when made to understand that it belongs to others but show remorse at losing the music. Any musical instrument will make them happy.

Billy "Shakespeare" - Hyena man.

Billy is a crewman aboard a megadozer and got the nickname because he is one of the few beastmen who can read. Billy is self-conscious about his laugh.

Resolution

If they failed to recover the Stradivarius or it became public knowledge that it was lost, there is no reward but a drayage class passage to their next assignment.

If they saved the Stradivarius they will be handsomely rewarded. In all the excitement the authorities might not notice if the diplomatic seal goes missing. If Moreau's part in this matter remains secret, she'll give each a bite of slime that requires only water to survive and produces enough nutrition and fiber to make those who eat it effectively never have to eat again.

Iron Ref: Urban Fantasy

At The Hop

by John Ford

Introduction

The location is a City, naturally enough, that has a secret fantastic side. The city government is aware of this "Nightworld," but its policy is to ignore it; for their part, Nightworlders are happy to be left alone, and try to avoid anything that might turn the Dayworld actively hostile.

Nightworlders fall into three categories: Dippers visit the Nightside occasionally; Shades move back and forth, and Hallows emerge only under extreme conditions. Many, though not all, Hallows can't pass for human. On the other hand, not all the Dippers and Shades are actually human -- they just look enough like it to pass.

Player Characters

Investigative skills will be most useful for the PCs. Combat will be counterproductive. It will be assumed that they are Nightworlders (Shades, mostly) who look into possible violations of the low-profile rules.

Mr. Bunny, Deceased

The team is summoned to the basement of an apartment building. The building and neighborhood were once classy, but have declined. The janitor, who found the body, shows you to the scene.

The basement is clean, but cluttered. In the center, partly hidden by furniture and crates, is the dead body of a man-sized rabbit, in a pool of drying blood.

The rabbit might be taken for a man in a very well-made costume; he (it's easy to establish the pronoun) faintly resembles Danny DeVito, if he had dingy white fur and two-foot ears.

The body has been disturbed after death; there are handprints on the fur and shoeprints in the blood puddle. And Mr. B's right front paw has been lopped off with one powerful blow.

The footprints lead to a side room, where cleaning supplies are stored; the killer obviously tidied up in here.

Sorting It Out

The question of why Mr. B was in this particular building should arise.

The janitor will be indignant at any suggestion he might have done the shooting, pointing out that any sane man who shot a 5'8" rabbit in the basement would have reported it to the police; he did the Nightworlders a favor by instead telling one of the tenants with Nightworld connections.

There are, in fact, four such tenants:

Fritz Klein lives on the ground floor. He was the one the janitor told about the big dead varmint; if asked why him, he guesses that it's just because he was the closest. He's a Shade, who says that he likes the company in the Nightworld

better than the Day.

Andy and Pilar Moreno live four floors above Fritz. Andy became aware of the Nightworld when he started dating Pilar. He didn't know until later that she was a werejaguar, "but by then it didn't matter, you know." Pilar can transform at will, and retains her human intelligence in animal form; if she doesn't change for a few days every couple of months, she risks an uncontrolled transformation -- "not so good at the supermarket."

Louis d'Antoine has the tenth-floor penthouse. He's decorated the place in what even the least refined character will recognize as horrendous taste -- Fritz calls it "Early Three Stooges." Louis obviously lives only in a couple of rooms at the back; he plays host by serving tea, and the players will get a glimpse of a ghastly kitchen.

If there are any female members of the team, he will switch his act from a bad Clifton Webb to a worse Cary Grant; if Pilar Moreno visits, he'll break into a sweat.

If Pilar is asked, she will change to jaguar form to find clues. She establishes a scent trail from the body, to the furnace/cleaning room, and back out to the alley exit. There she detects something in a trash can. (The team can also find this on their own.)

The can contains a brass-buttoned waistcoat, torn and blood-soaked in front. It also contains Mr. Bunny's missing paw.

Because of the cleaning fumes, Pilar can't identify the killer's scent, but she'll promise to try and match it to any suspect the team finds.

The one thing all the tenants have in common is that they went frequently to the Moonlight Serenade, a night of music and dance held on the nights of the full and new moons. They were all at the last party, at the full moon a week ago, and said hello briefly; no one will attempt to deny this.

Where Next?

The leads available now are:

- Ask around about the late Mr. Bunny.
- Ask about the tenants.
- Look into the Moonlight Serenade.

What's Dead, Doc?

It seems that nobody knows anything about the big rabbit. This is unusual; in the Nightworld, someone always knows something . . . unless, of course, everyone who knows has a reason to lie.

Mr. B's body is moved to a Nightworld clinic, and the crime scene cleaned up; this is necessary for secrecy (and there was no forensic evidence left, though don't tell the players that).

Assuming that they do the forensic wet work:

- Cause of death was three shotgun blasts, from ten to fifteen feet away.
- Mr. B had a humanoid larynx -- that is, he had the power of speech and was almost certainly intelligent.
- He's also not a wererabbit. Wererabbits are usually normal-sized as animals, and never have normal speech.
- His last meal was muffins and tea. (Earl Grey.)

Malicious Gossip

General questioning of Nightworlders will establish that:

- Everyone likes the Morenos. Some will admit they weren't certain about the relationship at first, but Andy has taken very good care of Pilar, and that's a Good Thing.
- Fritz is also well-liked, though he's not a close friend of anybody. Again, there was some early doubt -- was he just gawking at the freaks? -- but now he's almost unnoticed.
- Louis exasperates almost everybody. His art-poseur act gets old fast, and he hits clumsily on almost everyone recognizably female. But a small number of Nightworlders know that he regularly gives a truckload of medical supplies to the Nightworld clinics.

Song And Dance

The Moonlight Serenade is one of the few Nightworld events to be open to any Dayworlder who wishes to attend (and has the connections to know about it) -- most such things limit attendance in some way.

For the last year and a half, the featured musicians have been the Old Dark House Band, which consists of Jamie Wild on violin, Miyu Osato on glass armonica, and Viola Rebec on vocals.

Jamie Wild

Jamie is a tall, gaunt man with a faint Scots accent, preternaturally long fingers, and a raspy voice. If he is called a violinist, he corrects it to "fiddler." He plays the Black Stradivarius, a violin made late in Antonio Stradivari's career, about 1720. It is made of an unusually dark wood, not quite black.

Allegedly the violin has a long and wicked career, having been made for a black magician, who provided a woodstain made from human blood and other unnamable things. The owner played his violin at dark rites, sometimes in concert with the Dark Man Himself (I'll bet you didn't know it, but he's a . . . oh, never mind). It had many subsequent owners; it was said that the Black Strad absorbed more evil with every playing, that it could not play a hymn, that scraping the bow just right could kill.

Jamie Wild won't say where he got it, and everyone agrees that Jamie is an honorable man.

Miyu Osato

Miyu is a plump Japanese woman, who keeps the audience entertained between sets by reciting folktales and telling jokes. She wears traditional kimono to perform, but camp shirts and jeans offstage.

Her instrument is the Glass Armonica (the inventor's spelling), a series of glass bowls that rotate on a spindle, powered by a footpedal and crank. The player holds moistened fingertips against the glass to create musical notes, much like "playing" wineglasses -- which is where the inventor, Benjamin Franklin, got the idea.

Miyu's instrument was made for Dr. Karl Anton Mesmer, who used it to induce hypnotic states in his patients. (Historically amusing, given Dr. Franklin's noted skepticism about Dr. Mesmer.) As Miyu plays it, it has definite hypnotic properties.

Viola Rebec

It may seem odd to call a person an "instrument," but no one who hears TODHB will doubt the label; their sound is not a vocalist-plus-musicians, the band is a unit, and the whole transcends the parts.

It will be difficult, even for the investigators, to talk to the band members. Miyu, by far the most open, says, "I don't think we exist separately anymore," and the first interview will have to be with the three of them together.

Miyu will do almost all of the talking. Jamie will answer direct questions, without apparent evasion but as tersely as possible. And Viola literally won't open her mouth.

The players will undoubtedly want to talk to Viola. There are three ways to go about this.

- They can barge in on Viola in her room. If they do this, they will find her sitting on the floor, holding something which she'll try desperately to hide, including an attempt to swallow it if all else fails.

If the team fails to get the ring (by whatever means), the other members will make sure the detectives never get another chance to see Viola. They can still talk to the others, and the band will perform at the next Serenade in a week, but we'll come to that later.

If they do get it, it's brass, and has an engraved "W." It's much too large for any of Viola's fingers, or even her thumb; indeed, it won't fit any (human) player's finger.

She will still not speak. All inducements, including magical compulsion, will fail. The team can ask Miyu or Jamie to assist; if they don't, one of them will eventually show up to see what the heck's happening.

If it's Jamie, he makes threats (though he'll only turn violent if they start a fight, and then will stop after beating someone silly). If he's shown the ring, he'll try to get hold of it, and if he does, or there's a fight, it'll vanish forever. He'll say nothing about it, though.

If it's Miyu, she scolds you furiously, and asks to see the ring. She's shocked. She asks you to wait until the next concert (in a week) and promises to explain things then. Getting answers now is possible with excellent persuasive skills (or if the GM wishes to speed things up); if this succeeds, go to "Ask Miyu" below.

- Ask Jamie to help. He will firmly, though not rudely, tell them to let her alone. The End.
- Ask Miyu. This will require some persuasion, which the group should roleplay rather than roll for; if they offer a reasonable argument, she will finally agree to arrange a conversation.

This takes place in Miyu's room. Miyu is seated at a koto -- a stringed instrument played with mallets, like a hammered dulcimer. She begins to play, and Viola speaks, her voice coming out in the vibrating notes of the koto.

She has brought the ring. She explains -- in these terms -- that it was a thing someone wanted very much, and she believed it would be good if it were given. Now she isn't sure, about this or anything.

Miyu will now call Jamie in, explain that the game's over, and What Really Happened will now come out. See below.

What If They Don't Get That Far?

If the team runs into a dead end, they will have to wait until the next concert. During that, they will be able to slip into the players' rooms; they'll find the ring prominently placed in Viola's, and Mr. Bunny's watch and chain in Jamie's. It will be particularly effective to confront Viola and Jamie during the break, while Miyu is on stage; Jamie will get angry and Viola will become frightened, and eventually he'll fiddle her voice and the story (up next) will come out.

If they completely run out of leads, Pilar can identify Jamie's scent as the killer's.

What Really Happened

The Old Dark House Band can, when they are in full swing and the audience is (literally) under their spell, grant a wish to someone on the floor. Most of these things have been nudges in the direction things were likely to go anyway; a year ago, Andy Moreno said, "please give Pilar and me a chance," and they got it. In retrospect (Miyu says) that may

have been their mistake; they thought they were a force for good and that was that.

At the last session, Fritz Klein asked "to be led the right way," and who could have argued with that? Except that Fritz's actual dream was to spend the rest of his life in the Nightworld, as part of it, not a Shade visitor, and something in his imagination framed that as "the White Rabbit leading him down the rabbit hole to Wonderland."

When Mr. Bunny arrived at the ballroom and set off in search of his Alice, Jamie realized that this was a Bad Thing -- imaginary creatures running about in the Dayworld broke the first rule -- and tried to stop him. Mr. Bunny picked up the first available weapon, which was the Black Strad. However determined Jamie might have been, he ducked and hit the floor rather than have his fiddle smashed. Then he picked up a shotgun and headed for Fritz's place. Being human and used to the mysteries of public transit, he got there first, met Mr. B in the basement, and shot him.

The fiddle, unfortunately, was stuck in Mr. Bunny's rigid fingers. Jamie was angry and in a hurry, so he found a hatchet in the basement and performed some radical surgery. Then he disposed of Mr. Bunny's clothing, cleaned up, and went back to the ballroom. When he got there, he found he'd stuck the ring in his pocket; Viola held out her hand for it -- she wanted to remember their mistake -- and he couldn't refuse.

Yes, Louis is a Red Herring, as is the tea in Mr. B's belly (presumably he ate before he left for our world). The Morenos are too, in a different way. A mystery with one suspect requires few little gray cells to solve. A

So What's The Verdict?

There isn't anybody to punish. Jamie did some unpleasant things, but he did them to protect the Nightworld; nobody there is going to fault him, and trying to even explain the case to a Dayworld court would be an exercise in absurdity. Fritz didn't actually lie about the White Rabbit -- he saw it without its waistcoat and watch, as just a big dead lump of fur, and only later made the connection, by which time he was scared to admit anything.

Iron Ref: Cliffhangers

The Musical Clue

by David Morgan-Mar

This is a cliffhanging, pulp action adventure set some time in the 1930s. Suitable characters include just about anything that fits the genre.

The Auction

The adventure begins with an invitation to attend a gala function and auction of items from the estate of Sir Winfred Hughes, at his former mansion. His only surviving heir, Jonathon Hughes, is something of a philanthropist and wishes to both rid himself of his embarrassing uncle's stranger acquisitions and raise money for charity. Sir Winfred, although a distinguished biologist and member of the Royal Society, had a growing reputation for eccentricity in his later years.

If the heroes have some social standing, they can be invited directly to this event. Reporters could be covering it for the press. Less polished adventurers can be tipped off by an employer or patron that something interesting may occur at the gala, and be furnished with invitations through this avenue.

A thunderstorm rages outside, but the evening goes pleasantly and the first few auction lots sell for moderate prices. The next item is a battered-looking violin. After a slow start, two partygoers -- a Chinese gentleman and a stunning young woman -- get into a small bidding war, and whispers echo around the room as the price tops \$300. The heroes hear someone nearby saying "Stradivarius", but the auctioneer looks puzzled as one of the bidders indicates \$500, eliciting gasps from the gathering.

At this point, the heroes notice that the Chinese man has a strange symbol tattooed on his left wrist, exposed fleetingly as he raises his hand to bid. Appropriate knowledge skills (or later research) will reveal it is a Tong mark, identifying the man as a member of the Hsui Chen Tong, based in Shanghai. If the heroes have any wealth, or the guts to bluff, they may want to bid on the violin. If they do, the woman will drop out. Whoever the mysterious Tong member is bidding against, he will go as high as \$2,000. (The cost of a luxury car or small house!) The woman will push him this high, but will not top it. If the heroes are bidding, the winning bid will be up to them.

If the heroes win and can afford their bid, they may pay for the violin and take possession of it immediately, to hearty applause from the partygoers. Inspecting it immediately will be difficult, as their actions attract flirtatious attention from several members of any appropriate sex. Amidst this, alert watchers may notice the Chinese bidder slipping out of the gathering (require a skill or attribute roll). He will wait in ambush in the mansion grounds, intending to steal the violin. If the violin winners can find a quiet spot away from tipsy and amorous dilettantes before leaving the party, they can examine it. Stradivari's name is inscribed on it, but music or antiques knowledge is required to recognize that it is indeed genuine. The strings are missing and the body is slightly damaged, though not irreparably. Keen eyes will notice what appear to be tiny hieroglyphics hidden in the decorations along the side of the neck.

If the heroes win but cannot afford immediate payment, scandalous chatter will break out as the auctioneer apologizes and awards the violin to the Chinese man. The defaulters will be "escorted" -- firmly if necessary -- from the mansion. If the Chinese man wins the violin, he will pay for it and leave the party immediately (roll for the heroes to notice unless they are deliberately watching him).

Either by being ambushed or by tailing the Tong member, the heroes could easily get into a fight over the violin. He is unarmed, but fights well with karate, and has a driver waiting to help. From the safety of a Rolls Royce, the driver fires blowgun darts at the heroes -- coated with a toxin that renders them unconscious for several minutes. The fight should be close, but the villains will get away with the violin. If dramatic necessity dictates, the Strad can be used as

an inefficient club, smashing it to splinters -- the villains will retrieve the neck and scroll.

Gathering Clues

Suitable analysis of the darts or the toxin thereon will reveal peculiarities of manufacture that point to an Egyptian origin. If traced, the car belongs to the Egyptian High Commission. Finally, whether or not a fight for the violin occurs, the heroes may question the woman who bid on it. She will be friendly if the heroes suffered for the violin, otherwise she will take some winning over. Her name is Lisette DuBois and she was trying to recover the Strad for the Egyptology department at the University of Paris. It was rumored to contain some sacred texts deciphered in the 1860s by her great grandfather Francois Chartier -- a concert violinist and amateur Egyptologist -- that he considered too horrible to reveal.

The action now moves to Cairo. If the heroes need further convincing or guidance, investigative scenes may uncover the following:

- Chinatown contacts know that an "Arabic" man hired two Tong members for a job on the night of the party. It's possible they could be located and interrogated.
- The poison darts are of a style known to have been used by a cult of the evil ancient Egyptian god Set in the last century.
- The Strad has been sent to Cairo by diplomatic bag.

The Fruits of the Nile

Cairo is very hot and very dry -- a distinct change from the weather back home. DuBois has contacts at Cairo University and will accompany the heroes. Here they can learn about the cult of Set if they haven't already. While in conference with DuBois and Professor Mubarak of the Egyptology department, there is a disturbance in the corridor outside. Investigating reveals a Chinese cleaner, who keeps his eyes low as he apologizes in broken English for the noise of his mop bucket. A perception check will reveal a Hsui Chen Tong tattoo. If the heroes' suspicions are not raised, Mubarak asks what the disturbance was and says that the university has no Chinese cleaners, urging them to catch him if they hesitate.

The cleaner runs into a biology lab next door to the university's antiquities museum. Following him, the heroes are startled by rows of animal cages, containing outsized rats, giant hamsters, and truly enormous rabbits, all four times as large as normal. While absorbing this, a harried professor in a lab coat accosts them, demanding they leave at once, can't they see he's busy? If they protest that they are following a miscreant, the professor says, "Do you see anyone else in here? Now get out before I call the police!" Unless they make an ugly scene, the heroes will have to comply. (If they *do* make an ugly scene, they don't find anything and police haul them away.)

Mubarak says the biologist is Professor Sanderson. He is working on a serum that causes animals to grow larger than normal, hoping to perfect it for use on livestock to improve meat production. If the heroes don't think of it, Mubarak or DuBois may suggest a late night search of Sanderson's lab. Amidst his notes they can find a crumbling papyrus scroll, covered in hieroglyphs. Mubarak says it belongs in the antiquities collection -- he knows the scroll but hadn't missed it. The hieroglyphs on it have so far resisted translation and he suspects it is a cipher of some sort.

As the heroes are examining this, a group of martial artists storm in and attack, led by the cleaner. There should be enough to challenge but not overwhelm, armed with swords if the heroes are armed. The lab will be destroyed in this

Alternative Investigation

If something goes awry with the thread of the plot in this section, such as distrust of DuBois or Mubarak, make suitable arrangements to place suspicion on Prof. Sanderson by other means.

Investigation at diplomatic offices either by fast talking or stealth can uncover that Sanderson has connections with corrupt officials and took delivery of the Stradivarius. If this isn't enough, throw martial artists at the heroes until they get the hint that something odd is happening and let any leads

fight, with cages smashed and enormous rodents and rabbits joining the fray. The attackers will flee when one or more are incapacitated. If at all possible, they should kidnap DuBois at this point, knocked out with a blowdart -- although this is not essential to the plot it will help drive the action later. Examination of a captured attacker's left arm reveals the Tong symbol, and a hieroglyph that Mubarak identifies as the mark of Set. Prof. Sanderson will arrive with police and be furious at the mess, blaming the heroes for breaking into and ruining his lab. The police drag away the martial artists and, depending on roleplaying, possibly some of the heroes. If confronted with the papyrus, Sanderson will feign ignorance well enough to satisfy the police (but perhaps not the heroes) and allow Mubarak to take it.

they follow point to a connection to Sanderson.

The Strad is hidden at Sanderson's home on the outskirts of Cairo. If the heroes search there, they may well find it, along with notes indicating that the hieroglyphs on it are the key to unlocking some mystery hidden on a scroll.

The Hidden Chamber

After dealing with the repercussions of this incident, the heroes discover Sanderson has hired a (Chinese) guard to watch his lab. Mubarak says there is nothing they can do now, but at least he can return the scroll to the university's antiquities collection. He is curious about how Sanderson obtained it, as the museum has an alarm system and is full of students and at least one Egyptology staff member at all times when open. When he returns the scroll to its display case, observers may note its lock appears to have been forced.

Rattling on about how fascinating the undeciphered scroll is and its possible significance to the cult of Set, Mubarak turns around and is dumbstruck as he gapes at an empty corner of the room. "The mummy of Neferamun!" He explains that the mummy was a high priest during the 18th Dynasty, apparently disgraced but secretly embalmed by followers of the Set cult. It was in a wooden sarcophagus that would have taken four men to lift, and clearly wasn't removed via the door. Also missing are large alabaster canopic jars containing Neferamun's internal organs.

Checking the garden outside the window for footprints is a good idea, but there are none. Instead, there are scraping marks along the floor from where the canopic jars were kept to what looks like a blank stone wall surrounded by carvings in the shape of an archway. Once identified as a secret door, finding the mechanism is not difficult as a piece of stone within the carvings gives way under probing fingers. The door opens silently, revealing steps descending into darkness. Mubarak expresses surprise, saying the university is an old building, but he never expected anything like this.

The stairs lead a considerable way down to a chamber underneath the museum, presently dark and unoccupied. The chamber is obviously very old. The sarcophagus lies next to a stone altar at one end, but the mummy is missing. The canopic jars are there also, the wax seals broken and the interiors empty. Another passage leads up to Sanderson's biology lab. A third passage leads to the southwest, straight as far as can be seen -- directly toward the Pyramids, which are five miles away. It is painted with scenes that fascinate Mubarak but disturb anyone else, showing ritual sacrifices under the eye of Set. The dusty floor has been tracked recently by several people and a couple of wheelbarrows.

The Grand Finale

How the adventure plays out now depends on the actions of the heroes. Clearly the secret chamber and passage need exploring. If they do this straight away, skip to the final battle. If they decide to retreat for further investigation, to consolidate before tackling it, or to confront Sanderson about it, step up the urgency by having Mubarak point out that some of the paintings he saw could be interpreted as requiring the sacrifice of a maiden to bring worshippers of Set back from the realm of the dead -- and having DuBois kidnapped if she has not already been taken.

The passage does indeed lead to the Pyramids, and a similar unknown chamber under the paws of the Great Sphinx, although it will be exceedingly difficult to locate from above ground at that end. Assuming the heroes approach it through the tunnel, they have a five mile walk that ends in a torchlit chamber where Sanderson is leading a sacrifice ritual. Wise adventurers will douse their own light sources as they approach, or risk being spotted.

The sacrifice chamber overloads the senses, as a congregation of a dozen men chant in the flickering torchlight, with sweet incense burning around them. If kidnapped, DuBois lies tied to the altar, if not, another innocent victim is there. Sanderson stands over her with a long knife, absorbed in the ceremony. Others are fiddling with the mummy, which lies in one of two wheelbarrows nearby. Obviously, quick action will be needed!

During the battle royale that follows, opponents may attack with martial arts, swords, or guns, to the taste of the GM. Ensure that Sanderson isn't taken out with the opening shot -- have someone get in the way at the last second or something. At a turning point in the fight, when some blood has been shed on the altar, Sanderson utters some ancient Egyptian words and the mummy of Neferamun lurches to life!

As the heroes absorb the horror of this (fright or horror checks as appropriate), something rises from the second wheelbarrow. It is Neferamun's digestive tract and attached organs, moving independently! This requires another round of fright checks at a significant penalty. The mummy is close to indestructible except by fire, and the eviscera will throw intestinal loops around people's necks and strangle with the strength of a whole man.

Aftermath

Once the heroes triumph, they can learn any details they hadn't uncovered during the adventure. Assuming they saved her life, they have won an ally in Lisette DuBois, and Prof. Mubarak may be a valuable contact. Sanderson, an old rival of Sir Winfred Hughes, used the Stradivarius inscription to decode the stolen papyrus and work out the correct ritual to bring life to the mummy. If captured alive he will be hauled away by the police, but may return as an enemy.

Sanderson obviously had Tong contacts. Was he acting alone in these events, or is there someone more shady and sinister sitting in the shadows back in Shanghai, pulling the strings of the heroes' lives?

The Black Chef

for *Feng Shui* and *GURPS*

by Darrin Bright

Out Of The Frying Pan

Kobuto had it all, once. He graduated at the top of his class. He dazzled food critics everywhere. He owned his own restaurant. And if that hadn't been enough, he was chosen to display and defend his skills on the hottest cooking show to hit the airwaves in Japan. But it all disappeared so quickly.

It started out innocently enough. First, accusations about illegal spices . . . nothing he couldn't handle. But they gradually got worse . . . using fake crab meat, then preparing endangered species, then poaching eggs. A bad streak of losses on the TV show at the hands of some inept actresses and idiot athletes as judges didn't help, either. But he probably could have held it all together if that moron hadn't complained about his Gezpacho soup being cold.

If the authorities didn't take kindly to his attempts to whisk his customer's intestines, then they really weren't happy about those pathetic critics he poisoned. His fellow chefs, those jealous weaklings, didn't understand him, and the television producers were no help. Oh, they did their best to be polite about it, but there was no escaping the shame and disgrace. His career was over.

Or so it would seem. Actually, maybe it had been a blessing in disguise. If he hadn't escaped from prison, gone underground, and hidden among the savages in the dark forests of southeastern China, he never would have discovered the savory allure of the Forbidden Arts of Occult Cooking. He would never have learned of the ancient ingredients, secret sauces, and demonic recipes that were now his to do with as he pleased. And he would never have tasted that strange yet wonderfully satisfying flavor of human flesh.

After mastering the arts of occult cooking, Cantonese-Cannibal-style, Kobuto renamed himself the Black Chef. He now burns with desire to return to Japan and exact his revenge on the chefs, critics, and producers he blames for his fall from grace.

The Black Chef, Hidekitomu Kobuto

For *Feng Shui*

Sample Dialogue: "How dare you insult me; you are not even fit to lick the contents of my garbage disposal! But . . . you would make wonderful appetizers; yes, of course, broiled in a nice white wine sauce and served with crab legs . . ."

Body: 10 **Chi:** 4 (Fu 8) **Mind:** 5 **Reflexes:** 6 (Speed 8)

Skills: Martial Arts 15, Sorcery 14, Leadership 14, Info/Cooking 15, Info/Seasonings 15, Info/Garnishes 15, etc.

Fu Schticks: Prodigious Leap, Abundant Leap, Flying Sword, Water Sword, Loyal Steel

Sorcery Schticks: Influence, Summoning

Unique Schticks: Signature Weapon, Wall of Chopsticks, Dice Mince Chop (These are detailed below)

- Whenever Kobuto uses a piece of food, cooking utensil, or other sufficiently food-related item to attack

- someone, it's considered a signature weapon and gets +3 damage. Yes, a turkey baster *can* be a deadly weapon.
- If Kobuto doesn't have a knife or utensil handy, he can always whip one out from under the folds of his apron with no penalty or shot cost.
 - When subjected to Fu attacks or normal martial arts attacks, Kobuto often blocks or parries with his Wall of Chopsticks schtick. This schtick uses a pair of carved ivory chopsticks (Damage 13) as an active parry, and when he does so his Dodge Value is increased by 5 instead of 3. The Chi and Shot Cost is 1. He's also pretty good at that "catching flies with chopsticks" trick, too.
 - Kobuto has developed a specialized version of the Flying Windmill attack, only he does it with a gold-plated meat cleaver (Damage 15) and calls it his Dice Mince Chop attack. Whenever he makes a successful martial arts attack with this meat cleaver he may make another attack, and so on until he misses. The attack is otherwise the same as the Flying Windmill (Chi 7, Shots 0).

Weakness: Other than his short temper, Kobuto has one major weakness, which is an intense hatred of junk food or fast food, and particularly if it is American or Mexican. If he is attacked with this type of food as a weapon, his toughness is halved. If he's force-fed or eats any of it by accident, he suffers 3 points of impairment to his Dodge Value and all his rolls.

Neat things Kobuto can do during a fight:

- Thrown knives, chopsticks, or utensils can be used to pin clothing to something. Kobuto is fond of disabling his opponents so they can "taste" some of his nastier dishes.
- Large pots full of sauce can be spilled, making the floor slippery.
- Kobuto's knives and cleavers can be used with the Flying Sword and Loyal Steel Fu schticks.
- If a knife or cleaver isn't handy, a pot of boiling water hurled into the face hurts quite a bit (Damage 10).
- One of Kobuto's favorite tricks is to throw cayenne pepper or wasabi into an opponent's eyes. This doesn't do any damage, but the victim spends the next 1-6 sequences (roll a die) screaming in pain and suffers an impairment of -5 until he's able to clear out his eyes. Clearing the eyes requires a 3-shot action, which reduces the impairment to -1 for any remaining sequences.
- All his ingredients have to be very fresh, so Kobuto often has exotic or dangerous animals stored in fish tanks or cages nearby. You can't make shark fin soup without sharks, right? Lobster tanks are a must, but tanks full of spiny poisonous fish, sea urchins, alligators, or even an octopus is possible. Cages with tigers, wild boars, or a rhino might be nice, too.
- Two words: gas oven.

For *GURPS*

ST 10 [0] **DX** 15 [60] **IQ** 13 [30] **HT** 15 [60]

Advantages: Acute Taste/Smell +2 [4], Reputation: Chefs +3 [5] Weapon Master [45]

Disadvantages: Bad Temper [-10], Fat [-10], Gluttony [-5], Obsession (become best chef in the world) [-15], Odious Personal Habit (cannibalism) [-10]

Quirks: Enjoys shameless flattery, insists on fresh ingredients [-2]

Martial Arts Styles: Karate Style (cinematic) [11], An Ch'i Style (cinematic) [12]

Primary Skills: Karate 16 [8], Karate Art 16 [8], Savoire-Faire 16 [6], Fast-Draw (knife) 16 [2], Fast-Draw (shuriken) 16 [2], Holdout 16 [2], Throwing 16 [8], Traps 16 [2]

Maneuvers: Back Kick 16 [2], Elbow Strike 16 [1], Feint (throwing) 16 [2], Hit Location (throwing) 16 [4], Hook Kick 16 [1], Jump Kick 16 [2], Kicking 16 [2], Knee Strike 16 [1/2], Spin Kick 16 [1], Stamp Kick 16 [1/2]

Cinematic Skills: Breaking Blow 16 [10], Kiai 16 [8], Mental Strength 16 [10], Power Blow 16 [10], Pressure Points

16 [10], Throwing Art 16 [8]

Skills: Cooking 18 [10], Hand Weapon (knife) 16 [2], Leadership 13 [1]

Total: 280 points.

Plot Seeds

- If the PCs ever get into a fight in an expensive restaurant, Kobuto could be cooking in the back, minding his own business or working on his own plans for culinary revenge. Kitchen crew or helpless customers make nice victims for his brainwashed zombie recipe. Or if he overhears the PCs say something bad about his cooking . . .
- Evil Masterminds have to have quality catering, right? Kobuto can easily be added as a mini-boss for a kitchen or dining room scene.
- Kobuto could also be an independent villain in his own right. He could secretly hire the PCs to track down the exotic ingredients for one of those ancient recipes that grants him superhuman powers or immortality, then double-cross them when they get the ingredients he needs.
- Or the PCs could acquire one of those once-in-a-lifetime ingredients without realizing it, like a dragon's eyeball or demon's petrified liver, and Kobuto will stop at nothing to get it. Or if one of the PCs is supernatural, maybe HE is one of the ingredients!

Pyramid Review

Omlevex (for Mutants & Masterminds, Silver-Age Sentinels, & Champions)

Published by [Z-Man Games](#)

Written by Cynthia Celeste Miller, Shelly Bateman, Trever Harwell, Benjamin Rodgers, Jordan Steelman, Bryan "Mortis" Wylie, Jon Miller, Jon Ogden, George Todorovski, Kirt Dankmyer, & Eddy Webb

Edited by Eddy Webb, Jordan Steelman, Trever Harwell, Jason "Valdier" Orman, & J.P. Meyerson

Art & Graphics by Jeff Stephens, Bong Dazo, Eugene Perez, Jason L. Blair, Jared Brown, Trever Harwell, Stephen Shepherd, Charles Silbernagel, Tim Stiles, Ben Wisosos, Pascal Agunaou, Jeff Austin, Dick Ayers, Robert Thomas Baumer, Rainier Beredo, June Brigman, V. Shane Colclough, Rol Enriquez, Samuel Galentree, Kevin Hill, Joel Klampert, Michael Jason Paz, Eugene Perez, Jr., Tony Perna, Roy Richardson, Josef Rubinstein, Craig Shepard, George Todorovski, Chad Solomon, Herb Trimpe, Blake Wilkie, & Mike Zeck

144-page b&w softcover; \$22.95

Silver Age Sentinels predicated its game world on the idea of heroes reminiscent of the 1960s in the modern day: all the clear-cut, slam-bang action of then with none of the pessimism or angst of now. Z-Man Games adds a new layer of verisimilitude to the effort with their compatible product, *Omlevex*.

In fact, "compatible" is the watchword: The book has stats for *Silver Age Sentinels*, *Champions*, and the *Mutants & Masterminds* Superlink. Characters are written up in the language of this last rules set, and provides appendices for converting to the first two.

Omlevex is the name of the (make-believe) comic-book company on whose works the setting is based. Not coincidentally, this world is riddled with omlevex, a sort of wonder-substance from beyond the stars that crashed to Earth millions of years ago, killing the dinosaurs and creating a small set of islands off the coast of what would become Georgia (the American one, not the Russian one).

The islands are known as Metazon. After several abortive attempts to conquer the (justifiably) superstitious native peoples of this island, white men finally settled here and turned it into a thriving, if somewhat eclectic, community. A territory of the United States, Metazon is still besieged by interests from around the world. American forces are mostly there to keep it out of enemy hands (even if that means blowing chunks of it up), and since just about anyone can become a member of its government, the offices usually fill up with money men. People gravitate toward cities on one

of the bigger islands, anywhere from the Hollywood-like Seaboard, to the techno-fantastic think-tank Valhalla, to the electronic dead zone known only as the Den. Demographics tend to be extreme -- all the rich in Corrrington, all the poor in the depressed Bay City.

Most of the action is based in and around the islands, but since *Omlevex* has been stewing in the ground all these epochs, it's had plenty of time to secrete itself into the biosphere. In other words, you can have super-beings pop up anywhere you like, should the canonical locale not be to your liking. The timeline is good, offering some clever, early appearances of super-powerful people in realistic ways and avoiding a lot of the super-clichés (for example, World War II had few heroes, since so many died because of the Great War).

Dramatis personae are presented in situ, as icons of the 1960s. Drake Einstein seems to be the company's core character. An actor by trade, he and his inventor buddy set about creating the identity, and they manage the figure as much like a comic-book franchise as a superhero. When he's not making films, he's fighting crimes. Einstein flits about the skies on his floating platform, his pockets brimming with both gadgets and helpings of the special drug pellets that give him his personal abilities.

Similar to Cliffhanger, another hero who takes to the skies (via a rocket pack, this time), but whose image is that of a high-tech Nick Fury with a ray blaster. The American Gargoyle is an über-patriot whose physical appearance strikes fear even in those whom he attempts to help, but the horror genre gets a proper *Omlevex* nod in the guise of Lacey Delmont, a private detective who hunts Spring-Heeled Jack and other creatures of the night. Additional heroes, heels, and hangers-on give a pretty detailed perspective on the whole tapestry.

The characters are fairly well written, and the backgrounds (littered with the now-standard "First appeared in Drake Einstein #56" motif) do read like a comic series' history, replete with that 1960s feel. Back-stories are presented one at a time, so the unrecognized figure in one story is revealed later in his own entry, cleverly fortifying the lines of continuity. Their stats are backed up by recommendations about how to modernize the hero or villain, from the name and costume (let's face it, "Man-Cactus" is hard to swallow under the most generous circumstances) to the background and attitude. The updates even maintain that silver-age feel.

Most of the book is given over to superheroes, their funny-books, and their opponents and supporting casts. Less than a fourth of it goes to the land of Metazon, conversions, and GM and player sections. A shame, since the advice is kind of nice and characters are a lot easier to come by these days than a decent setting.

It's important for a decent superhero supplement to have the right artwork, and *Omlevex* gets it at least half right. A good bit of it does have that 1960s sheen, with shades of Kirby, Steranko, and company popping up here and there (and a few actual comic celebs have their names in the credits). You'd swear some of it really did come from the comics of the period. Other pieces are much more disappointing, being rough or even angular, sophomoric examples. Topping it all off is the cover, which will make die-hard fans drool.

If the background isn't played up too much, it's a much more palatable buy. Metazon has a forced, disjointed feel, like it was slapped together for story convenience rather than as a natural outgrowth. If you overlook the geography, you can still use the world of *Omlevex* elsewhere, and the cast presents a more tightly focused world than the travelogue.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Exosuit A-OK RPG

Published by [Deep7](#)

Written by **Todd Downing & James Stubbs with Jeff Boman & Eddy Webb**

Cover by **Steve Hartley & Todd Downing**

13-page, 903 kb PDF document; \$3.95

The 14th of Deep7's *IPG* mini-RPGs actually turns out to have been the very first written. In the five years since the line's inauguration with *Shriek: the Game of Teen Horror*, the series has covered a wide range of genres, from the historical to the fantastic. For the latest entry Deep7 once again goes East to Japan; having previously visited its history with *Dâisho: Samurai Adventure!*, they here blast into the future of the robot suit anime genre. *Exosuit A-OK* is inspired by popular animated series such as *Bubblegum Crisis*, *Appleseed*, and *Robotech*.

Once again, what few changes there are in this *IPG* amount to a few minor ones to account for the genre. This comes down to changing a skill or two; Fashion, Pose, and Geekery all belong firmly in anime. Character generation remains unchanged, with players rolling for their character's Status (Student, Outcast, Soldier, Cop, Entertainer, and Entrepreneur) and their Background (Criminal, Engineer, Exopilot, Soldier, Law Enforcement, and Street Fighter.) The Backgrounds are slightly unbalanced, in that the Criminal only gains a couple of bonuses compared to the four given for each of the others.

More important to the genre, characters also get to roll on the Gear table to see what kind of vehicle they start with. These range from civilian vehicles such as sports cars and motorcycles, and military vehicles such as the hover truck, the APC, the helicopter, the tank, and the mainstay of the genre -- the exosuit. All military vehicles, including the exosuit come with spaces for modifications, called options in *Exosuit A-OK*. Ordinary military vehicles have up to four spaces for options, while exosuit frames have room for three in light models, four in medium, and six in heavy.

The majority of those listed are single-point and two-point options, with just a few given as three- or four-point options. For example, Advanced Targeting Computer and the Laser are single-point options; Earthmover Drill and Advanced Repair are two-point options, while Large Missiles and Star Saber are three- and four-point options respectively. Some options can be upgraded, such as Enhanced Movement with Superior Movement, their effects replacing the lesser option rather than stacking with it. The rules allow for a frame to be overloaded with options, though this has a detrimental effect on the frame's response times. They also cover the repair and salvage of vehicles and exosuits, and if you look closely enough at the options, they allow the possibility of creating vehicles and exosuits that can transform or combine with others -- though they are costly to buy.

Exosuit A-OK comes with six ready to play scenarios, two each penned by James Stubbs, Jeff Boman, and Eddy Webb.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The first of the two by James Stubbs is "More Human Than Human" and is inspired by *Bladerunner* as much as it is *Bubblegum Crisis*. The player characters are members of Seattle's elite Artificial Construct Enforcement unit tasked to enforce law and order among the city's android population, who face a growing number of cases of android rebellion.

His second, "Zaibatsu Ranger Zero," depicts a darker, murkier setting in which the characters are mercenaries and bounty hunters conducting deniable, clandestine operations against a rival government. Jeff Boman's first scenario is also very obvious in its inspiration. "Ramus and Julia" is essentially a replay of *Romeo and Juliet*, played out with battlesuits instead of rapiers, and is thankfully not as cheesy as it sounds. The inspiration is equally obvious for his second, "The Dirty Half-Dozen," which put criminals and those with a shady past into battlesuits and sent on dangerous missions to make up for their deeds. Their first assignment is the rescue of the US ambassador to Nicaragua kidnapped by rebels, and the players are encouraged to roll up a second character given the lethality of the assignment. Youth is the common factor in Eddy Webb's two scenarios. In "Raid On Outpost Gamma," the Earth Federation is fighting a war with the Wargmon and assigns rookie space marines to locate and destroy an enemy base. The characters are even younger in his "Demon Attack," where mere teenagers are the only ones capable of piloting the mecha needed to battle a demon invasion of Japan.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Unfortunately *Exosuit A-OK* is not quite perfect. There are one or two typographical problems, but there are also a small number of things missing from the game. Most notably these are the statistics for any vehicle other than the exosuits, and while they are included as options, the actual ability to transform or combine is not expanded upon and the GM is left on his own if he wants rules for either. Another tweak that the authors could have made is an alteration to the double character sheet given at the back of the document. This could have been adapted to give proper space for a character's vehicle or exosuit details to be recorded, and while there is space enough already for this, such a change would have been one more professional touch.

Yet these are still minor problems in what is otherwise a fast and furious entry into the anime-inspired battlesuit genre dominated games such as Dream Pod 9's *Heavy Gear* and *Jovian Chronicles*, and FanPro's *BattleTech*. The game can be expanded upon to make exosuit frames more resilient and to turn it into more of a miniatures games using the rules from the [The IPG Companion: A Toolkit For Deep7's Beer & Pretzels RPGs](#), and the extra stats needed for this are given for each frame size. Further, the game could easily make use of Deep7's *Star Legion: The Game of the Space Opera*, swapping out the fighters and so on and replacing them with battlesuits. This *IPG* also has the benefit of being one of the best supported with lots of scenarios available from the publisher's website.

After the boundary-pushing shenanigans of [Hero Force: IPG Super Adventure!](#) Deep7's 14th *IPG* is more in keeping with the majority of the line. That means that it gets in, gives you the necessary rules, and gets out again, leaving you to play an uncomplicated game of robot battlesuit action. With *Exosuit A-OK*, that action does not come any cheaper or any easier.

--Matthew Pook

Spring Forward, Feedback

So as you read this, I am probably either in a truck containing all my worldly belongings, in my new apartment Pennsylvania, or -- ironically -- back in Orlando, where I may be helping with the final World Yo-Yo Contest of my (former) Day Job career. (As for me, I'm still sitting in an apartment in Tallahassee typing furiously and waiting until I get to call my truck-rental company to yell at them. Please ignore any such real-world trivialities; my "final" Tallahassee column was [last week](#), and I'd hate to ruin a perfectly fine goodbye with facts.)

Anyway, I confess I find myself in need of a pretty straightforward column . . . ideally one that can be written in the wee hours, or while I'm on hold with the truck-rental company. So I thought I'd talk a bit about *Pyramid*, with a nod to gaming.

For those who haven't noticed, we've been making a real effort to tweak with *Pyramid* lately. We've added our first "official" every-other-week feature since Ken Hite came on board ("The Omniscient Eye"), a new column (Chris Aylott's "More Questions Than Answers"), and the contributions of Phil Reed, whose short articles will be filling in holes with some outside-the-box diversity. We've also dubbed Owen Stephens' contributions an honest-to-goodness column ("Icosahedron Adventures"), which it has been in all but name for a loooong time.

We've been trying to ramp up our [chats](#), using various means to blackmail the best and brightest minds in the gaming world to stop by and say "Hi!"

And, as seen this week, we've been trying to shake things up a bit with a few more events. This week kicks off our Iron Ref extravaganza, which will appear for the first week of the month from now until November. Although Iron Ref was popular at the time, it has not made an appearance in three years. We hope you like it. Not too long ago, we presented "[The Last Adventure](#)" series, which posited the last adventure of particular genres.

Extending backwards a bit, the past year has seen the appearance of our [10th Anniversary Issue](#) and our most ambitious [April Fool's Issue](#) yet. We've seen the return of Dork Tower and Murphy's Rules and the appearance of Irregular Webcomic.

In short, we've been trying to keep things exciting, while still maintaining the spirit and appeal of *Pyramid*.

Really, this isn't too different from any long-running gaming group. The GM often needs to balance the desire to spice things up with the need to keep the elements of the campaign that appealed to players in the first place. In some cases this is easy. For example, adding a gaming group mailing list is not dissimilar to beefing up the chats in *Pyramid*, in that they are added features that supplement the primary draw (the gaming session or the weekly mag, as appropriate to the metaphor). But tinkering with the game itself can be trickier; adding, say, a monthly "flashback" adventure series to the gaming group is not dissimilar to our current Iron Ref series, and folks who aren't a fan of the experiment may be turned off.

Fortunately, that's where feedback becomes so useful. By getting comments and reactions, the GM can figure out what works and what doesn't with any experiments or deviations. That way, any tinkering can be made with some degree of confidence.

And, of course, *Pyramid* loves your comments and feedback as well. We try to make it as easy as possible. We have a [discussion group](#) where you can post your thoughts, you can send us [e-mail](#), or you can stop by [the chat](#) and say hi or fling insults at me (I'm "SMarsh," by the by).

So, in my opinion, any good gaming group should try to give the players [what they want, but not what they expect](#). That's what we're trying to do with *Pyramid* as well. We hope you've enjoyed it; if so, tell your friends! We can always use more subscribers, and we try to be generous with our [referrals](#).

Now if you'll excuse me, I've got to go call a certain truck rental company and scream incoherently until they give me

a truck. But in the meantime, pretend that I'm not in Tallahassee anymore.

* * *

As long as I'm cranking out a straightforward issue consisting partly of administrivia, I should note that some of you have gotten in the habit of sending *Pyramid* mail to my personal address, which was marsh@nettally.com.

Please don't!

The right address to use is pyramid@sjgames.com. Go with that, and you should be able to reach me for as long as I'm clinging to *Pyramid* with my cold, dead fingers.

Now, astute readers will note my use of "was" three paragraphs above. I assure you, it's difficult to contemplate letting go of an e-mail address I've had as long as I've been online, but apparently my ISP doesn't offer any kind of forwarding service. From your end, it shouldn't make a difference, since it's not like I have multiple mailboxes; mail to pyramid@sjgames.com just forwards immediately to my "real" address, wherever it should be at the time.

We thank you for your consideration.

* * *

As another aside, please keep in mind that this month is shaping up to be one of the most busy and logistically challenging of my life. As such, if I'm not sprightly in replying to e-mails or message board posts, you'll know why. I hope to hop online when I can, but I'm not certain when that will be. Fortunately, our readers are good, patient, and understanding.

(Unlike me, when I'm on the phone with the truck rental people . . .)

--*Steven Marsh*

Leaving Tallahassee

(and Turning the Lights Out as I Go)

I am leaving the state that has been my home for 24 years.

Given that's a good 80% of my life, I'm treating this with a certain amount of solemnity.

Anyway, my original plans had me departing my fair Tallahassee, Florida yesterday (Wednesday the 28th), so this was to be my farewell swansong "Hasta la Vista, Tally!" column. But owing to a last-minute change of plans, I'm not leaving until Friday, or possibly Saturday. Or, at the rate I'm going, maybe I'll be placed gingerly into a crystalline spaceship by a porcine Kryptonian and launched toward my new home.

So my master plan from several weeks ago was to have this issue done several days earlier, so that I could get everything else ready. Oh, well . . . so much for that plan. (Mind you, an unexpected pinched nerve - wherein any attempt to move my head more than 0.01857° -- resulted in a sharp pain. Not only did this put a crimp on packing or typing, but it also meant I spent most of my time walking around like a Conehead.)

Furthering my goals for my master plan, on July 12th I sent out an e-mail to a dozen of my Tallahassee friends that I was leaving behind:

Dear [Insert Name Here],

I'm not sure how far the tendrils of the Tallahassee rumor mill extend, but I'm moving away from Tallahassee at the end of the month.

Anyway, I'm trying to put together a Tallahassee tribute column for the gaming magazine I edit online, and I figured a neat thing to do would be to tap some of the various gaming personalities I respect in Tally to see if they have any pearls of wisdom they'd like to share. (I assure you, I'm -not- doing this as a cheap stunt to get other people to write my column for me at a time when I'm hideously busy. Yeah, that's the ticket...)

To that end, I'd like to see if you had any pearls of wisdom to offer on any one of these questions:

- 1) What's the best (or most unintuitive) piece of advice you would offer to players?
- 2) What's the best (or most unintuitive) piece of advice you would offer to GMs?
- 3) Any other gaming/philosophical observations you'd like to offer.
- 4) The funniest gaming story you have.
- 5) Any other observations about life you'd like to offer (although, given that this -is- a gaming magazine, this question is only offered as an out for those who would like to contribute to my Tally tribute column but can't think of anything else to say gaming-related).

If you're not interested, no worries at all... I completely understand. If you would be interested, I'd like something in the 100-word range by July 19th (less is fine,

although over 200 words might be a problem... contact me if you have something big and brilliant).

Regardless, thanks for being a friend, and for being one of the reasons that makes leaving Tallahassee a difficult decision.

Sincerely,

Steven Marsh
Editor of Pyramid Magazine
pyramid@sjgames.com

(And, yes, I actually inserted their names into the header.)

Anyway, the math of my plan was ingenious. Ten friends times 100 words equals one 1,000-word column. Copy, paste, post, drive!

This was especially expected to be an easy column because, for the most part, my friends are incredibly literate and - more importantly - eager to talk. Several are professional or semi-professional writers. At least three have English degrees. Over half of them are willing to spend large amounts of time on various game mailing lists.

This was gonna be the piece of proverbial cake.

Sadly, said cake could not be simultaneously had and eaten.

Of the dozen e-mails I sent out, half of them wrote back saying they'd try to get me something (with various degrees of "If I can think of anything," and so on). I exchanged an e-mail or two with most of those.

And, in the end, I received exactly *one* submission, from my friend Josh (whom I might be suckering into helping me load the truck as well). Which I paste here posthaste.

When considering running a game of any kind, but especially a roleplaying game, the most important consideration is to be fair and follow the rules. This, at first, seems to make perfect sense yet is so often ignored in everyday practice. Follow the rules means it's important to read the book and know the rules, many experienced gamemasters or roleplayers use rules that were often made up by other players or gamemasters without even knowing it. If the players can trust that a gamemaster to "stick to the book" then they can know what to expect, it makes integrating new players easy and it allows the gamemaster a level of authority to appeal to. Every time a gamemaster strays from the rules of the book he finds the players more likely to push him in directions he does not wish to go and to bend rules he otherwise would have kept. Stick to the rules as much as possible and when straying state clearly to all players why the exception has been made.

I would like to point out this answer is exactly *why* I asked my friends for their wisdom. Not because I particularly agree with this advice, but because I *don't* necessarily agree with it. Although I can get a separate column out of the idea of fairness or unfairness alone (and possibly will at some point), the very fact that I was exposed to an alternate viewpoint is one of the reasons I respect my friends so much . . . and why it's difficult to leave their geographical proximity.

I've read a number of news articles that state Americans are becoming more polarized; they tend to live near others who share their values, ideas, political thoughts, and so on. I suspect the same thing is true of those of us in the gaming world; with a large enough gaming audience, it's easy to dismiss those who don't share your views in favor of those

who do. And, indeed, I believe that to a certain extent this is a *good* idea; there's no need in pointlessly antagonizing each other if your views are incompatible. But this only matters if the views are incompatible *and* they affect everyone's enjoyment of the game. For example, it would probably mess up a game if one person believes solely in roleplaying and character development while the other is only interested in tactical combat. But having one player who vehemently believes in luck while another who believes solely in statistics will probably have a negligible effect on the game.

However, I generally *like* spending time with people whose views don't align with mine. After all, if two folks are exposed to alternate viewpoints, it can force each to think about his own view, potentially strengthening both.

And that's what I'll probably miss most about my group of friends in Tally. Sure, we have a lot in common, but we also have a good number of alternate views, which lead to spirited conversations and good-natured debates.

So, this column didn't end up being quite the tribute I wanted to the friends I leave behind. Rather, I guess I'll just raise a glass before I depart, and use my warm fuzzy memories of my friends to encourage you all: Treasure your friends; respect their alternate views; and don't be afraid to befriend someone even if he doesn't seem to see eye-to-eye with you. The odds are pretty good that you'll both be enriched.

Just don't try to trick them to write a column for you; it probably won't work out.

* * *

Say! Are you going to be in a 17-foot van, driving 1,100 miles to a new state on Friday night?

No? Then you may want to stop by the [Pyramid chat](#) on Friday, July 30th, at 7 P.M. Central Time and see David Pulver and Sean Punch discuss the combat rules for the upcoming *GURPS Fourth Edition* game. Oh, and Andrew Hackard will be on-hand, signing autographs and answering the Managing-Editorial-type questions.

And if you *are* in a 17-foot van driving 1,100 miles, watch out for the other folks on the road driving 17-foot vans.

--*Steven Marsh*

Like The Roaring Of Young Lions: Death In Tsavo

"If the whole body of lion anecdote, from the days of the Assyrian Kings till the last year of the nineteenth century, were collated and brought together, it would not equal in tragedy or atrocity, in savageness or in sheer insolent contempt for man . . . the story of these two beasts. To what a distance the whole story carries us back, and how impossible it becomes to account for the survival of primitive man against this kind of foe! . . ."

-- *"The Lions That Stopped the Railway," **The Spectator**, March 3, 1900*

In 1898, on the cusp of a new century and the edge of civilization, a drama as old as Hercules played out in the Tsavo wilderness of southeastern Kenya. Legendary monsters, perhaps older than time itself, preyed on the weak at will. A hero killed them, and years later scholars doubted whether he was a hero and whether his monsters were really monsters at all. But aside from the blood and heat of this tale, there are tracks leading off into the deeper forests of the unknown. But we can't follow them into the darkness. That would be dangerous, and foolhardy. For now, we can only throw more wood on the campfire, tell the story, and speculate about where the trail might lead.

"From the time of Herodotus until to-day, lion stories innumerable have been told and written . . . A lion story is usually a tale of adventures, often very terrible and pathetic, which occupied but a few hours of one night; but the tale of the Tsavo man-eaters is an epic of terrible tragedies spread out over several months, and only at last brought to an end by the resource and determination of one man."

-- *F.C. Selous, Foreword to **The Man-Eaters of Tsavo***

In March of 1898, Lieutenant-Colonel John Henry Patterson arrived in the wilds of Kenya to build (or rather, to supervise the building by large gangs of sweating Indians and Africans of) a permanent railway bridge over the Tsavo River between Mombasa and Nairobi. Beset by the normal problems of Victorian-era engineering (poor initial surveys, worker unrest including at least three actual mutinies), Patterson made good initial progress -- until the lions started attacking. Over the next nine months, a pair of man-eating lions seemingly materialized out of nothing, killed workers with impunity, and vanished back into the thick thorn scrub. They jumped nine-foot fences, pulled workers out of 15-foot trees, and penetrated the thickest thorn hedges not only without difficulty but without noise.

Patterson, who had hunted big game in India, had to hunt the lions or see his workforce (the undevoured portion of it, at least) down tools and melt away. They seemed uninterested in poisoned bait (preferring, in Patterson's words, "live coolie"), and evaded his forays into the scrub with ease. They preyed on the hospital, drawn by the smell of blood -- and when Patterson moved the injured to a new location and staked out the old one, they attacked the new hospital. They left [severed heads](#) behind, and drank the blood from the corpses. Night after night, the attacks continued, always where Patterson was not: "Shouts would then pass from camp to camp, 'Beware, brothers, the devil is coming,' but the warning cries would prove of no avail, and sooner or later agonising shrieks would break the silence, and another man would be missing from roll-call next morning."

On December 1, after 135 deaths (by Patterson's later count), the workers simply left the camp, refusing to "be food for lions or devils." Patterson began grimly staking donkeys and cattle as bait, and waiting. On December 3, one lion fell into Patterson's trap, walking into a "rail-car" designed to slam shut on its target. Despite three men firing continuously into the lion from mere inches away, no bullet struck home -- except on the latch of the trap, allowing the lion to escape! Finally, on December 9, 1898, Patterson killed the first lion (later named "Ghost" by the screenwriter William Goldman) from a jury-rigged firing platform over a half-eaten donkey. Three weeks later, on December 28, Patterson waited in a tree where the second lion ("Darkness") had attacked a man before, and shot the lion successfully -- although he nearly died when the lion attacked him the next day as he followed its blood trail into the jungle. With six bullets in it, though, it finally succumbed. Both lions were nearly 500 pounds, and over nine and a half feet long from nose to tail. Patterson eventually sold their pelts and skulls to the [Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago](#), where they can be seen (at about two-thirds life-size) today.

"In surveys during both dry and wet seasons of 1999, Kays and Patterson determined that maneless males are prevalent in well trafficked areas of Tsavo East. In fact, none of the eight prides they documented was tended by a maned male."

-- *Field Museum of Natural History, "Why Are Tsavo Lions Maneless?"*

At first glance, the Tsavo lions' most unusual feature is their lack of manes. Both "Ghost" and "Darkness" were adult male lions, who normally have thick, luxuriant manes. But in Tsavo, the lions -- especially the man-eating lions -- have no manes, or only patchy ones at best. Scientists have come up with any number of reasons why this might be; Bruce Patterson (no relation) has theorized that it might be "male pattern baldness." Tsavo lions may produce more testosterone for some reason, making them bulkier, more aggressive, and balder. Other researchers blame Tsavo's environment. Much hotter than the Serengeti, and choked with thorn bushes (which tear manes, and tangle their bearers), manes would not be a survival trait for lions there. This doesn't explain the frequent sightings of maned lions in Tsavo, seemingly unconcerned at their disadvantages. The Field Museum zoologists Thomas Gnoske and Julian Kerbis Peterhans have the best theory of all, one sadly not particularly well supported by DNA testing. Their theory is that the large, maneless Tsavo lion is a "missing link" to the cave lion (*Panthera leo spelaea*), which [cave drawings](#) show to be larger than "prairie lions" -- and maneless. Cave lion skeletons also have some peculiarities very similar to those of Tsavo maneless lions. We know from historical evidence that the lion once ranged as far north as France -- and many of the lions depicted on ancient friezes and heraldic devices have smaller manes than the familiar lords of the Serengeti. Could the killers of Tsavo have emerged from the primordial mists, from the temple walls of Asshur and the cave walls of the [Gévaudan](#)?

"So Ghost and Darkness didn't do what they did because they were incapable of hunting four-footed prey. They had other reasons, good reasons; every condition known to cause man-eating was present in Tsavo in the late 1890s . . ."
-- Philip Caputo, ***Ghosts of Tsavo***

Having served without great distinction in the Boer War, Patterson turned his experiences into a book, the 1907 best-seller *The Man-Eaters of Tsavo*, brimming with stiff upper lips and pukka sahib heroics. (As with all such books, it is a corking good read and in this case, a literally ripping yarn.) He served again in Kenya, but was forced to retire after the mysterious March 21, 1908 suicide while in his company of Audley James Blyth, son of Baron Blyth -- and husband of Patterson's mistress. Later scientific opinion has similarly shunned Patterson's narrative -- Gnoske and Peterhans note that Patterson's field reports identify only 28 Indian coolies as lion kills (although they admit that nobody knows how many Africans died on the line, of any causes). Modern scientists pooh-pooh the "supernatural" element of the case, noting that big cats, and Tsavo lions in particular, kill people all the time. Even Dr. Henry Livingstone encountered them; his party killed two man-eaters in East Africa in 1858, and others throughout his career. Between 1932 and 1947, three generations of lions killed 1,500 people near Njombe in Tanganyika, for example. And the notion that only old lions kill people can be disproved -- of the 29 "problem" lions shot in Tsavo by the Kenya Wildlife Service in the 1990s, 24 were young or prime-age.

Equally, modern science pooh-poohs the "motiveless" element of the case, noting that one of the 1898 lions suffered massive dental damage (probably from a buffalo kick), and needed to hunt softer prey such as antelopes -- or people. Human game has always been plentiful in Tsavo -- which means "place of slaughter" in the native Kikamba language. Masai raiders and Arab slavers would scatter the area with corpses; even the Kamba left the bodies of "peasants and women" out in the open. Ivory traders also killed sick or injured (or shirking) porters rather than delay their march; the slaughter of Tsavo's elephant herds left human bodies in their wake, too. Given that lions are both predators and scavengers, they can easily get a taste for human flesh in such country. Famines and smallpox epidemics left corpses all over Kenya in 1897 and 1898. Worse yet, an outbreak of rinderpest in the mid-1890s killed off virtually all the Cape buffalo in Kenya, leaving the lions of Tsavo starving without their favored game. Modern science, in other words, is a big buzz kill, and we'll speak no more of it around this particular campfire.

"Their methods then became so uncanny, and their man-stalking so well-timed and so certain of success, that the workmen firmly believed that they were not real animals at all, but devils in lions' shape. Many a time the coolies solemnly assured me that it was absolutely useless to attempt to shoot them. They were quite convinced that the angry spirits of two departed native chiefs had taken this form in order to protest against a railway being made through their country, and by stopping its progress to avenge the insult thus shown to them."
-- John Henry Patterson, ***Man-Eaters of Tsavo***

Both of the man-eaters Livingstone encountered in 1858 were "entirely destitute of mane"; Livingstone also notes that

one had teeth that were "mere stumps" while the other's were "white, perfect teeth," which also interestingly fits the pattern of the Tsavo killers. Even more interestingly, like Patterson, Livingstone also ran into a tribe who believed that their chiefs' souls entered the bodies of lions. His memoirs seem oddly diffident on the subject, and he never names the tribe directly; from internal evidence, it may be either the Makololo or the Kebrasa, among the latter of whom Livingstone spotted Egyptian and Assyrian influences in jewelry, hair style, and facial structure. The Egyptian belief in the transmigration of souls into animal forms is well-documented. Whether the Assyrians so believed (and that's why only the king was allowed to hunt lions in Assyria) remains murky. Another track on this trail turns up in the writings of the third-century neo-Platonist Porphyry, who explicitly states that the "first dogma" of the Mithraic mysteries is the transmigration of souls. Even more interestingly, Porphyry continues: "Thus they denominate the males who participate in the same mysteries lions . . ." The medieval bestiarists believed that the male lion breathed life into his cubs after three days of stillbirth; could this be an echo of not just the transmigration of souls into lions, but of their descent through leonine generations, until the outside world is once more ready?

"For I will be unto Ephraim as a lion, and as a young lion to the house of Judah: I, even I, will tear and go away; I will take away, and none shall rescue him. I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early."

-- Hosea 5:14

Could this be what the prophet Ezekiel meant, when he asked Judah, in exile among the ruins of Assyria: "What is thy mother? A lioness: she lay down among lions, she nourished her whelps among young lions." (The Bible describes both Judah, the southernmost tribe, and Dan, the northernmost tribe, as "whelps of lions.") Something lurks there, in the thorn bushes of Biblical history, the lion hunts of the Mesopotamian kings, and the mysteries of Mithra that arose in those same Assyrian ruins. Interestingly, after the Assyrians carried away the Ten Tribes of Israel, they settled "men from Babylon" in Samaria -- and according to II Kings, "the Lord sent lions among them, which slew some of them." The Assyrians sent priests conversant with ancient rites, and the killing stopped. The Bible piously claims that one of the priests was "of Israel," but in the very next sentence it admits that the Samaritan Babylonians continued to worship their old gods. Lions show up a lot in the Bible, most interestingly perhaps elsewhere in Ezekiel as emblematic of Tarshish -- "the merchants of Tarshish, and the young lions thereof" are identified among the future opponents of [Gog](#). Tarshish, interestingly, seems to have been in two different places; Jonah leaves Jaffa (on the Mediterranean, going west) for Tarshish, which produces "silver, iron, tin, and lead" -- which means that Tarshish might be Britain, the only reliable source of tin west of Jaffa. (Jonah was trying to avoid going to Assyria, of course. Hmmm.) On the other paw, there aren't any lions in Britain, but the other Tarshish, with which Jehoshaphat trades from Ezion-Geber (on the Red Sea, going south), supplies "ivory, apes, and peacocks." All of which, along with lions, are plentiful in East Africa. And Tsavo, specifically, was the richest ivory storehouse in the world. But there aren't any "lost cities" in Tsavo, are there? Well, one never knows -- since the Shetani lava flows, which cover miles of the Tsavo plain, are only 200 years old. Perhaps Satan (yes, indeed, "Shetani" is cognate with the Arabic Shaitan) destroyed Tarshish to prevent its "young lions" from defeating Gog.

So the trail leads from Tsavo to Samaria to Assyria; and another leads from Assyria to Tarshish, and to prints here and there in east Africa and Britain. Seem a little thin, still? Spoor not clear enough? Perhaps. But in connecting Tsavo and Israel and Britain, through the skeins of Tarshish and Assyria, we are not entirely alone. You see, by an odd coincidence, Lieutenant-Colonel John Henry Patterson also returned from Africa believing intensely that the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel -- the "whelps among young lions" -- were to be found in Britain, scattered by the Assyrian fleets. (Perhaps the Tribe of Dan becomes the Danu, who invaded Britain right around then, give or take 200 years.) He became an ardent Zionist, commanding the Zion Mule Transport Corps at Gallipoli in 1916, and the Jewish Legion in Palestine and the Transjordan in 1917-1918. Let's try following the trail again, then: A lion attacks Livingstone at Mabotsa in 1843, but for some reason does not kill him, although he is never quite the same man again. Livingstone encounters two maneless man-eaters, one with bad teeth, and kills them in 1858. A biblical 40 years later, two maneless man-eaters, one with bad teeth, emerge from the "land of slaughter," and possibly from the primordial past. Both look into the eyes of John Henry Patterson before he kills them; the first on the feast of [Astraea](#) (a form of Cybele) and the second on a feast of Hecate. (Ezekiel ties Tarshish to [Sheba](#), on this track.) On the spring equinox of 1908, he practices some strange love-death ritual with the son of a lord, and then surfaces again leading the "whelps of lions" back to Judah and Samaria. Did Patterson learn the arts of shapeshifting and metempsychosis in India, among the [manticores](#)? Or was he "awakened" by the breath of the lions of Tsavo? Whose plan is unfolding in the shadows of

Tarshish? Perhaps the last words belong to the book of Job: "The roaring of the lion, and the voice of the fierce lion, and the teeth of the young lions, are broken. The old lion perisheth for lack of prey, but the stout lion's whelps are scattered abroad." Don't let the campfire burn low.

Meta-Traits

A "meta-trait" is a collection of traits that are typical of a particular mental, physical, or supernatural state. In game terms, it functions much like a regular advantage or disadvantage. A meta-trait can be part of a racial template or bought by an individual with exotic abilities. Record a meta-trait instead of its components on templates and character sheets.

With GM approval, you may modify elements of a meta-trait, altering its cost; e.g., to be able to carry things when you have Body of Air (see below), reduce the ST penalty and the corresponding HP bonus, and delete No Manipulators.

Elemental Meta-Traits

Variable

Your body is wholly composed of a particular substance. This is an entire category of meta-traits, one for each class of substance ("element").

The main use for these meta-traits is to create "elemental" creatures. Those who can switch into and out of elemental form -- a common super-ability -- should buy Alternate Form (p. 83) and take the relevant meta-trait as their alternate racial template.

Body of Air: Your body is made of gas. ST 0 [-100]; +10 HP [20]; Doesn't Breathe [20]; Flight (Lighter Than Air, -10%) [36]; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30]; Injury Tolerance (Diffuse) [100]; No Legs (Aerial) [0]; No Manipulators [-50]; Vulnerability (Vacuum and wind-based attacks ×2) [-20]; and Taboo Trait (Fixed ST) [0]. *36 points.*

Body of Earth: Your body is made of sand or earth. Doesn't Breathe [20]; DR 2 [10]; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30]; Injury Tolerance (Diffuse) [100]; Pressure Support 3 [15]; Sealed [15]; Vacuum Support [5]; and Invertebrate [-20]. *175 points.*

Body of Fire: Your body is a living flame! If your flames are very hot, increase Burning Attack and DR. ST 0 [-100]; +10 HP [20]; Burning Attack 1d (Always On, -40%; Aura, +80%; Melee Attack, Reach C, -30%) [6]; Doesn't Breathe (Oxygen Combustion, -50%) [10]; DR 10 (Limited: Heat/Fire, -40%) [30]; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30]; Injury Tolerance (Diffuse) [100]; No Manipulators [-50]; Weakness (Water; 1d/minute) [-40]; and Taboo Trait (Fixed ST) [0]. *6 points.*

Body of Ice: Your body is made of ice. Doesn't Breathe [20]; DR 3 [15]; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30]; Injury Tolerance (Homogenous, No Blood) [45]; Pressure Support 3 [15]; Sealed [15]; Slippery 3 [6]; Terrain Adaptation (Ice) [5]; Vacuum Support [5]; Fragile (Brittle) [-15]; Vulnerability (Heat/fire attacks ×2) [-30]; and Weakness (Intense normal heat; 1d/minute; Variable, -40%) [-12]. *99 points.*

Body of Metal: Your body is made of metal. Doesn't Breathe [20]; DR 9 [45]; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30]; Injury Tolerance (Homogenous, No Blood) [45]; Pressure Support 3 [15]; Sealed [15]; and Vacuum Support [5]. *175 points.*

Body of Stone: Your body is made of rock. Doesn't Breathe [20]; DR 5 [25]; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30]; Injury Tolerance (Homogenous, No Blood) [45]; Pressure Support 3 [15]; Sealed [15]; Vacuum Support [5]; and Fragile (Brittle) [-15]. *140 points.*

Body of Water: Your body is made of liquid. Amphibious [10]; Chameleon 1 [5]; Constriction Attack [15]; Doesn't Breathe [20]; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30]; Injury Tolerance (Diffuse) [100]; Pressure Support 3 [15]; Slippery 5 [10]; Invertebrate [-20]; and Vulnerability (Dehydration attacks ×2) [-10]. *175 points.*

Machine

25 points

Your body is mostly or completely mechanical, composed of non-living materials such as metal, plastic, and composites -- although you might have a few organic parts, such as an outer layer of skin or a brain. Examples include robots, vehicles, and full cyborgs.

This meta-trait includes Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30], Injury Tolerance (No Blood, Unliving) [25], Unhealing (Total) [-30], and several 0-point features:

* You have an eight-hour energy reserve and need refueling three times a day. You can modify this with appropriate advantages (e.g., Doesn't Eat or Drink, for a reactor that can run for years) or disadvantages (e.g., Increased Consumption, for a "gas-guzzler" engine).

- You neither have nor can spend Fatigue Points; see Machines and Fatigue (p. 16).
- Your body does not age. Instead, it wears out, with effects similar to aging.

Note that your Unhealing disadvantage means that the only way for you to regain lost HP is through repairs with Mechanic or Electronics Repair skill (as appropriate).

Several traits not included above are common among machines, notably the advantages Digital Mind, Doesn't Breathe, Pressure Support, Sealed, and Vacuum Support, and the disadvantages Electrical, Fragile, Maintenance, Numb, Restricted Diet, and Social Stigma (Valuable Property).

Mentality Meta-Traits

Variable

These traits represent common types of nonhuman intelligence:

AI: A computer mind. Absolute Timing [2]; Digital Mind [5]; Doesn't Sleep [20]; Intuitive Mathematician [5]; Photographic Memory [10]; and Reprogrammable [-10]. *32 points.*

Automaton: A mind lacking self-awareness and creativity. This is typical of many hive-creatures, magical constructs, undead, and simple AIs. You can combine this with the AI meta-trait. Hidebound [-5]; Incurious (6) [-10]; Low Empathy [-20]; No Sense of Humor [-10]; and Slave Mentality [-40]. *-85 points.*

Domestic Animal: A farm animal, pet, mount, or a trained wild animal. Cannot Speak [-15]; Hidebound [-5]; Social Stigma (Valuable Property) [-10]; and Taboo Trait (Fixed IQ) [0]. *-30 points.*

Wild Animal: An ordinary animal found in nature. Bestial [-10]; Cannot Speak [-15]; Hidebound [-5]; and Taboo Trait (Fixed IQ) [0]. *-30 points.*

Morphology Meta-Traits

Variable

These meta-traits describe some nonhumanoid body configurations that might appear on the racial templates of animals, robots, etc. Feel free to create meta-traits for other body layouts, using these examples as guidelines.

Ground Vehicle: Your body is like a car, tank, etc. Horizontal [-10]; No Legs (Tracked or Wheeled) [-20]; No Manipulators [-50]; and Numb [-20]. -100 points.

Ichthyoid: You have a fish-like body (a "merman" would just delete No Manipulators). No Legs (Aquatic) [0] and No Manipulators [-50]. -50 points.

Quadruped: You are a four-legged creature with no arms (a "centauroid" would simply take Extra Legs -- plus Hooves, if equine). Extra Legs (Four Legs) [5]; Horizontal [-10]; and No Fine Manipulators [-30]. -35 points.

Vermiform: Your body is similar to that of a snake or a worm (a snake-man with a humanoid upper torso would drop No Manipulators). Double-Jointed [15]; No Legs (Slithers) [0]; and No Manipulators [-50]. -35 points.

Spirit

261 points

You are a noncorporeal entity: ghost, being of pure thought, etc. You are invisible and intangible (except to others with this meta-trait!). You can temporarily become visible, or even solid, but this is draining. However, your senses can perceive the material world at all times, and your magical or psionic abilities, if any, can always affect the physical world.

Spirit includes Doesn't Breathe [20], Doesn't Eat or Drink [10], Doesn't Sleep [20], Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30], Insubstantiality (Affect Substantial, +100%; Usually On, -40%) [128], Invisibility (Substantial Only, -10%; Usually On, +5%) [38], and Unaging [15].

Many spirit abilities from folklore are not part of this meta-trait; e.g., Injury Tolerance (Homogenous or Diffuse), Magery, and almost any ESP, PK, Telepathy, or Teleportation psi ability (see Chapter 6). Common spirit disadvantages include Compulsive Behavior, Dependency, Divine Curse, Dread, Maintenance, Obsession, and Weakness.

Astral Entity: An astral entity is a spirit that cannot materialize, become visible, or use its supernatural powers in the physical world. Doesn't Breathe [20]; Doesn't Eat or Drink [10]; Doesn't Sleep [20]; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30]; Insubstantiality (Always On, -50%) [40]; Invisibility (Substantial Only, -10%) [36]; and Unaging [15]. 171 points.

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Baron Janos Telkozep

Character Concept by Kenneth Hite
GURPS Fourth Edition Stats by Brian Hogue and Sean Punch

Born in Castle Telkozep, Hungary in 1571, the year of the great victory at Lepanto, Janos Telkozep succeeded to the barony when his father died fighting the Turks in 1589. At a glittering Twelfth Night feast at Castle Bathori a few years later, the young Baron retired to the chambers of the beautiful, widowed Countess Bathori. To his shock (though not entirely, it must be admitted, to his surprise) he discovered the next morning that she had transformed him into a vampire. Telkozep's family connections kept him out of trouble when the King of Hungary eventually tried the Countess for murder and imprisoned her in a distant castle without food or light, but he learned from her example. She had allowed her vampiric appetites to corrupt her judgement, and that, Telkozep vowed, would never be his fate.

Over the next two centuries, the Baron repeatedly "died" and took over the Castle as his own heir, continuing to ally himself to kings and archbishops, maneuvering ever more gracefully through the byzantine paths of European politics. Recognizing earlier than most nobles that the wave of the future would be in banks and tradinghouses, rather than acres of barley or ransomed Turkish generals, the Baron taught himself the new intricacies of ducats and marks, pounds and roubles. By the 19th century, he had steadily enriched himself through six or seven wars, three changes of dynasty, and two vampire panics. During the latter, he often acquired the estates of the condemned at knock-down prices, feeling no guilt at profiting from the deaths of vampires more foolish and rash than himself. Slowly, he began to accumulate vampiric foes -- the great Pavane des Vampires in Paris declared him anathema, and others tried to stalk or betray him in their turn.

He studied the occult, seeking new weapons against his fellows, and learned that his ancient lover, the Countess Bathori, had somehow escaped her prison through sorcerous means. She had become a Grand Master of the Cabal, a secret society of monsters and magi descended from ancient Egypt, and she offered him sanctuary. Telkozep accepted . . . but she had learned little from her long life. During the disasters

Baron Janos Telkozep



of the 1940s, her rashness nearly destroyed the vampire brotherhood in the Cabal - and the war she helped spark did destroy Telkozep's beloved Hungary. In 1956, he left Bathori and the Cabal behind, beginning 30 years of shadow warfare in boardrooms and blasted heaths across Europe and America.

A full-color PDF is [also available!](#)

Although his vampiric powers kept him alive, and his fortune kept him hidden, the Cabal (and his vengeful ex-lover the Countess) came ever closer to destroying him. Telkozep could see the inevitable future; just like the pathetic vampires of the 17th century, he was alone and friendless, with every hand against him. A stake in the night, or the Final Dawn, awaited him -- unless he could change the game. Where once he had researched money, and then magic, he now sought allies. He discovered that the Cabal had their own enemies -- and one of them dwelt on another Earth, where the Countess' reach could not so easily extend. Telkozep put all his liquid wealth into portable assets and waited for an opening. In 1989, he walked through a megalithic barrow under a full moon, and into another Earth. He flitted from timeline to timeline, through gateways marked in an ancient codex he had purchased from the bankrupt National Museum of Budapest, until he was sure he had eluded the Cabal. He then set out to attract the attention of outtimers like himself, with clever advertisements in the papers and subtle manipulations of key stocks. When the Infinity Patrol knocked on his office door, he was able to present them (and eventually ISWAT, who took over once they realized what they had) with an attractive offer -- employment as their star vampire (and financial expert) in exchange for protection from the Cabal.

Baron Janos Telkozep

535 points

5'8", 197 lbs. (SM 0).

ST 20 [40]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 15 [100]; **HT** 10 [0].

Dmg 2d+2*/5d-1*; *BL* 80 lbs.

HP 24 [0]; *Will* 16 [5]; *Per* 18 [0]; *FP* 10 [0].

Basic Speed 8.00 [55]; *Basic Move* 8 [0]

Dodge 11; *Parry* 9 (Saber).

Social Background

TL 8 [0].

CF 18th-Century Europe [0]; Homeline [1].

Languages: English (Accented/Native) [5]; French (Native) [6]; Hungarian (Native) [0]; Latin (Broken/Native) [4]; Russian (Broken) [2].

Advantages

Charisma 3 [15]

Independent Income 10 [10]

Legal Enforcement Powers [15]

Mind Control [50]

Striking ST 5 [25]

Talent (Business Acumen) 3 [30]

Temperature Control 3 (Cold, -50%; Uncontrollable, -10%) [6]

Vampire (see below) [150]

Wealth (Filthy Rich) [50]

Disadvantages

Berserk (9) [-15]
Bloodlust (9) [-15]
Callous [-5]
Duty (To ISWAT; 15 or less; Extremely Hazardous) [-20]
Enemy (The Cabal; Hunter; 6 or less) [-20]
Frightens Animals [-10]
Greed (6) [-30]

Quirks

Code of Honor (Aristocratic manners) [-1]
Dislikes mirrors [-1]
Old-fashioned language and idioms (-1 to some uses of Fast-Talk, Propaganda, etc; GM's option) [-1]
Patriot (Hungary; minor Fanaticism; -1 reaction from patriotic Turks and Romanians) [-1]
Vow ("Never let vampiric appetites corrupt my judgment") [-1]

Skills

Administration-17† (IQ+2) [1]
Area Knowledge (Hungary)-15 (IQ+0) [1]
Body Language-17 (Per-1) [1]
Brawling-12 (DX+1) [2]
Connoisseur (Visual Arts)-15 (IQ+0) [2]
Current Affairs/TL8 (Business)-16 (IQ+1) [2]
Detect Lies-17 (Per-1) [2]
Diplomacy-14 (IQ-1) [2]
Economics-16† (IQ+1) [1]
Finance-16† (IQ+1) [1]
Guns/TL5 (Pistol)-12 (DX+1) [2]
History (Hungary)-15 (IQ+0) [4]
Intimidation-20 (Will+4) [16]
Market Analysis-17† (IQ+2) [2]
Merchant-13†‡ (IQ-2) [0]
Mimicry (Animal Sounds)-14 (IQ-1) [2]
Occultism (Vampirology)-18 (IQ+3) [12]
Propaganda/TL8-17† (IQ+2) [1]
Saber-12 (DX+1) [4]
Savoir-Faire (High Society)-15 (IQ+0) [1]
Sex Appeal-11 (HT+1) [4]
Teamster (Equines)-14 (IQ-1) [1]
Tracking-18 (Per+0) [2]

* Includes Striking ST

† Includes +3 for Business Acumen

‡ Default from Market Analysis

Vampire

150 points

This is a “Bram Stoker”-style vampire. It possesses some, but not all, of the powers and weaknesses that fiction ascribes to bloodsucking undead. Notably, horror-movie vampires often have Supernatural Durability instead of Unkillable (increases cost by 100 points).

Attribute Modifiers: ST+6 [60].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: HP+4 [8]; Per+3 [15].

Advantages: Alternate Forms (Bat, Wolf) [30]; Doesn't Breathe [20]; Dominance [20]; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30]; Injury Tolerance (Unliving) [20]; Insubstantiality (Costs Fatigue, 2 FP, -10%) [72]; Night Vision 5 [5]; Speak With Animals (Wolves and bats, -60%) [10]; Unaging [15]; Unkillable 2 (Achilles' Heel: Wood, -50%) [50]; Vampiric Bite [30].

Disadvantages: Dependency (Coffin with soil of homeland; Daily) [-60]; Divine Curse (Cannot enter dwelling for first time unless invited) [-10]; Draining (Human Blood; Illegal) [-10]; Dread (Garlic) [-10]; Dread (Religious Symbols; 5 yards) [-14]; Dread (Running Water) [-20]; Supernatural Features (No Body Heat*, No Reflection, Pallor*) [-16]; Uncontrollable Appetite (12) (Human Blood) [-15]; Unhealing (Partial) [-20]; Weakness (Sunlight; 1d/minute) [-60].

Features: Sterile.

* Except after feeding.

More Questions than Answers

Greed is Good?

by Chris Aylott

I was going to talk about time management this month but, well, we're rescheduling. Something happened the other weekend that I'm twitching to share.

No, it's not that I discovered that I was a woman in a man's body. I don't know why you people keep expecting that one.

Every year, the city of Northampton holds "sidewalk sales." Despite occasional attempts to dress the event up with face-painting, live music, and a name like "Summerfest," the premise is always the same. The merchants of Northampton pick out the items that aren't moving from their inventory and slap sale prices on them, and the people of Northampton turn out in droves to snap up the bargains. Commerce happens, along with some nods to the town's social conscience such as the "1% for Schools" fund drive. More on that in a moment.

In the past, our store ignored the sales. We were too far away from Main Street to benefit from the increased traffic, and many of our regulars avoid the crowds by staying as far away from town as possible. I also have a bee in my bonnet about sales events -- I can't get my head around the idea that an item is worth less money only on certain days of the year. Seems to me that what you're really saying is that it's overpriced the rest of the time.

Add it all up and you can guess that when sidewalk sales roll around, the Space-Crime cash register starts gathering dust. For eight years, it's been a weekend best described as "glum."

This year, though, I wanted things to be a little different. We're in a new location, just a few feet off Main Street with plenty of foot traffic. We've got a new look, new books, some buzz building up, the sidewalk sales could be really good for us. Just one hitch: I still hated the idea of a weekend of sale pricing, so what could we do to have a sidewalk sale that isn't a sidewalk sale?

I Have an Idea . . . But We're Gonna Need a Barn and Judy Garland

For some reason, I have most of my ideas in the shower. Maybe it's the warm water relaxing my muscles and brain, maybe it's because there's not much distraction to be had standing in a four-foot-square box. Whatever the cause, two weeks before the sidewalk sales I'm scrubbing suds and thinking.

Maybe we could give the space to some kids and let them sell lemonade. Gotta be a Little League or band around that needs a fundraiser. We should finish off the pasta salad for dinner tonight. We could get some used books or remainders cheap, maybe sell those. Mmm, the sweet smell of dandruff shampoo. Hey. What if we got some used books and made a fundraiser out of it?

I mentioned the "1% for Schools" program earlier. It's just what it sounds like. Every year, about a third of the stores participating in the sidewalk sales agree to donate 1% of the weekend's sales to the local schools. (I have no idea why the other two-thirds don't participate, but my working theory is that they're cheap jerks. It's not much money and it's for schools, fer cryin' out loud.) Last year the program raised \$2,200, which isn't bad but isn't all that impressive either.

Once the basic idea lit up in my head, the rest fell into place. We don't sell used books, so we had to get some fast and cheap. The best way to do that is to ask around and see if anyone has old books they want to donate. It's churlish to try to make a profit on donated books, so the next obvious move is to donate all the sales to charity. There's not much time to find a charity, but the 1% for Schools program is right there waiting to have a check written for it . . . at this

point I was towed up and absent-mindedly squirting shaving cream in my armpits. By the time I had wiped it off and found the deodorant, I had a plan: Get donations of used books, sell them, and donate all the money to the schools.

I went to work, wrote an announcement in our [Live Journal](#), put up some signs, made up a flyer, and sent out some press releases. This is all stuff I do any time we're running an event, and most of the time it gets a mediocre response. I figured that if we got 200 books and made \$50 for the schools, we'd be doing good. We certainly couldn't expect much more than that.

Silly me.

Things Get Out of Control

The local paper picked up on the press release and ran a page 3 story. Our pediatrician turned out to be a board member for one of the organizations funded by "1% for Schools"; she sent out an email on the high school mailing list. And the books started to come in.

Two bags here. Ten boxes there. A guy who hauled in a laundry bag full of books every day for a week. Dozens of books in our basement, then hundreds. Not too long after that, thousands. Books from parents, teachers, kids, from young couples and widows and lifelong bachelors.

The first day of the sales arrived -- Thursday -- and the books kept on coming. It wasn't until Saturday that we ended a day with less inventory than we started with. We lost track of exactly how many books we had early on, but our best estimate is that the people of Northampton donated just under 3,000 volumes.

The sales end of the sale was just as frenzied. Folks would walk by the books and I'd pitch our price. "Three dollars for hardcovers, paperbacks are two, kids' books are just a buck," I'd call out, and just as their ears were perking up, I'd lay down the whammy. "And every penny goes to the schools!" I quickly learned not to stand between the customers and the tables when I said this; too much risk of getting trampled.

It was a frantic weekend, because we really weren't prepared for how much we had to do and how quickly we had to do it. But when the dust settled on Sunday night, our little bookstore had raised \$2,070 for the Northampton schools.

What the Heck Happened?

Since the sale, I've been trying to figure out just what went right. Why did we get this overwhelming response when so many of our events have fallen flat? It's not just that this sale was "in a good cause." We've done charity events before, and while they are more successful than our other events, they usually only appeal to a fraction of our customers.

There is one thing about this event that seems to be different than our previous events. Most of our charity drives have emphasized giving as an end to itself or as the admission to a special event. We've run a giving tree where our customer can buy books for schools, a *Lord of the Rings CCG* tournament where the admission fee is a can of food, things like that. Our previous events emphasized generosity, and they only drew a moderate level of response.

In this book drive, greed played as big a part as generosity. The folks who swarmed our table weren't just donating money to a good cause, they were getting great books dirt cheap. Most of the folks who were donating books were thrilled to be reclaiming shelf and closet space; the good cause may have triggered the giving but I don't think it explains the glee. Our school contacts hoped for (and got) a bigger check; the newspapers got some good headlines. Everybody pulled together because everybody had something to gain.

If a balance of generosity and greed really did trigger the avalanche, then I desperately want to find it again. I don't know if we can; this first time was certainly an accident. But we're going to try.

Missing in Action

There was only one major segment of our customer base missing during the book sale: the gamers. Granted, we didn't target our gamer base with specific marketing or ask outright for donations of games. But we did expect to see some games come in, if only as part of a larger donation.

No dice, literally as well as figuratively. We got histories, we got art books, we got science fiction and mysteries and romance in all conditions and qualities. We got comic books and kids books, a collection of ribald Russian fairy tales and not one but two copies of *All Too Human* by George Stephanopoulos. (Neither sold.) We got a horror movie script written and autographed by Dee Snider. We got videos and audio books. But the only games we got were a copy of the *Dungeons and Dragons Player's Handbook* and the *Rune RPG*.

Both sold, actually. And there were a few of our regular gamers shopping at the sale, but it was fewer than I would predict given the total number of regulars we saw. We did see our usual gaming customer traffic, but most of those customers went right past the piles of used books and headed for the game section.

I'm not completely surprised by this. A lot of our gaming customers show very little interest in non-gaming books. But when I think about it, I realize that I haven't seen too many gamers participating in our other charity events. And despite a few exceptions -- for instance, the annual 9/11 Remembrance Tournament run by [Team Whiplash](#) -- I haven't heard of many fan-run charity efforts in the gaming community.

That's odd.

When you think about it, it seems like gamers should be great at community service. Many of us are well-educated and subscribe to progressive social agendas. Most of us have disposable income for game books and plenty of free time for RPG sessions and CCG tournaments and LARP weekends. We gather regularly in small groups that overlap in a larger local network; we mingle at larger events such as conventions and tournaments. We make daily use of computers and other weapons of mass communication. And we all enjoy saving the world (while getting phat loot) in our games.

Gamers have all the resources and opportunities they need to form their own service organization, a Kiwanis Club where the uniform is a black *Dork Tower* T-shirt. So why don't we?

Twenty years ago, the popular media saw gamers as wild-eyed college cultists plotting Satanist mayhem in steam tunnels. We've beaten that rap, mostly by convincing the rest of the world that we're too nerdy to be dangerous. Today, the image of gamers is a bunch of geeky boy-men sitting around playing *Dungeons & Dragons* and never, ever -- one exception: the guy in the GE commercial -- getting the girl. We got out of the steam tunnels, but as far as the rest of the world is concerned all we did was move back into our parents' basements.

Would that image be different if our hobby had a tradition of public service? What would people think of us if your local game store ran blood drives? What if your college game club ran a tutoring program for high school students, or sponsored a mile of highway cleanup? If every gaming group in town rounded up their soda cans and gave the deposits to a homeless shelter, how big a check could they write?

Is it just that we haven't hit on the right combination of greed and generosity, that we haven't yet found the motivation to feel good about doing good? Or do we find it more rewarding to slay paper dragons than go out into the world and take on the real monsters?

Is being a hero just a hobby for us?

Dai Blackthorn

Character Concept by Kenneth Hite
GURPS Fourth Edition Stats by Brian Hogue and Sean Punch

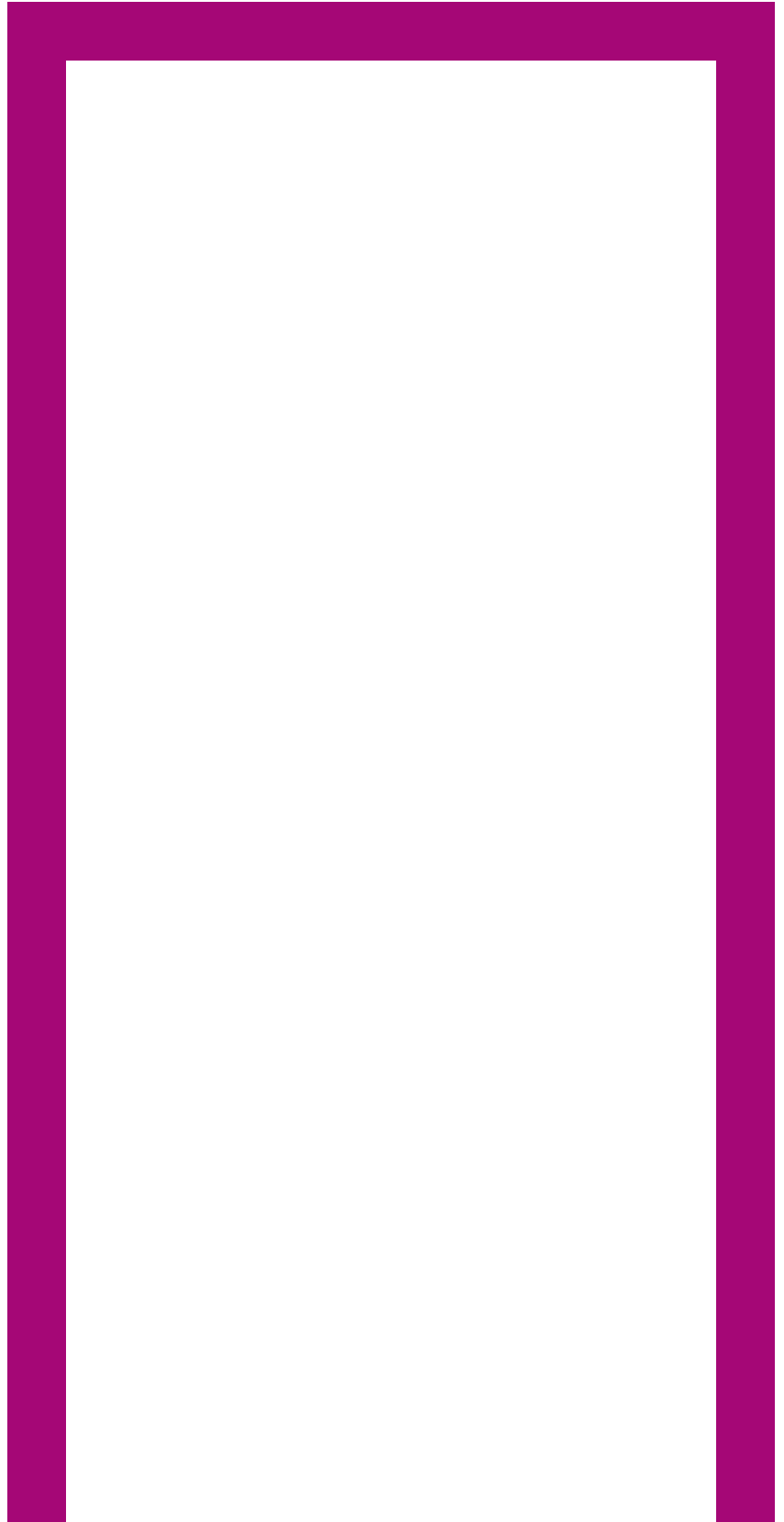
Dai's career started on Yrth, a medieval fantasy world populated by descendants of Crusades-era folk pulled from Earth by a dimensional rift. He remembers nothing of his birth or early childhood; he was a street kid. When he was about seven, he was taken in by an old thief who taught him to be a pickpocket and second-story man, and Dai learned well. But the Thieves' Guild didn't like the competition, and when Dai was 15, the Guild set fire to the old man's house, and picked off the fleeing occupants with crossbows. Only Dai escaped.

At the time, he thought that he had made a terror-fueled leap from the burning building's roof to the next one. Later he realized that that jump had been impossible. Something else had happened. In fact, the fear of death had unlocked his psionic gift of teleportation, though it took time before he realized the truth and gained control of his abilities. When he did, he became a master thief indeed, living in quiet comfort and reveling in the marketplace talk of "impossible robberies" that no lock and no wizard could stop.

Then Dai crossed paths, and swords, with an equally formidable rival . . . a world-jumping criminal using stolen technology to loot Yrth's treasures. Matters were complicated further by the arrival of an ISWAT team pursuing the world-jumper. When the dust had settled, two of the agents owed their lives to the little thief . . . but he knew too much. They couldn't just let him go.

So they recruited him. After all, a good teleport is hard to find. As for Dai, he was ready for new challenges . . .

Dai Blackthorn



Dai

A full-color PDF is [also available!](#)

5'6", 115 lbs. (SM 0).

ST 8 [-20]; **DX** 15 [100]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 12 [20].

Dmg 1d-3; *BL* 13 lbs.

HP 10 [4]; *Will* 12 [0]; *Per* 15 [15]; *FP* 10 [-6].

Basic Speed 7.00 [5]; *Basic Move* 7 [0]

Dodge 10; *Parry* 10.

Social Background

TL 8 [0].

CF Homeline [1]; Yrth [0].

Languages: English (Native) [0]; English (Accented) [4].

Advantages

Absolute Direction [5]

Danger Sense (ESP, -10%) [14]

Flexibility [5]

Honest Face [1]

Legal Enforcement Powers [15]

Perfect Balance [15]

Warp (Psionic Teleportation, -10%; Range Limit: 10 yards, -50%) [40]

Disadvantages

Duty (To ISWAT; 15 or less; Extremely Hazardous) [-20]

Light Sleeper [-5]

Overconfidence (12) [-5]

Sense of Duty (To his squad) [-5]

Wealth (Poor) [-15]

Quirks

Dislikes deep water [-1]

Loves high places [-1]

No drugs or alcohol [-1]

Sensitive about his height [-1]

Showoff [-1]

Skills

Acrobatics 15* (DX+0) [2]

Body Sense 16† (DX+1) [1]

Climbing 18*‡ (DX+3) [1]

Escape 16‡ (DX+1) [1]

Fast-Draw (Knife) 15 (DX+0) [1]

Fast-Talk 12 (IQ+0) [2]

Filch 14 (DX-1) [1]

Guns/TL8 (Pistol) 15 (DX+0) [1]
Holdout 12 (IQ+0) [2]
Knife 17 (DX+2) [4]
Lockpicking/TL8 15 (IQ+3) [12]
Observation 15 (Per+0) [2]
Pickpocket 15 (DX+0) [4]
Shortsword 15 (DX+0) [2]
Stealth 16 (DX+1) [4]
Streetwise 12 (IQ+0) [2]
Thrown Weapon (Knife) 17 (DX+2) [4]
Urban Survival 14 (Per-1) [1]

* +1 for Perfect Balance

† +3 for Absolute Direction

‡ +3 for Flexibility

The Omniscient Eye

Where Are the Flying Cars?

Retro-futures are "in" these days, what with assorted steampunk fictions and upcoming movies like *Sky Captain & the World of Tomorrow*. Ignoring questions of unrealistic 20th-century optimism, and setting aside the issue of money in a foolhardy manner . . . why *don't* we have flying cars, or personal flight backpacks, or dirigible mass transit? Is there a valid engineering or technical reason?

-- Bob Portnell

All of those have been built, but none of them perform well enough to justify buying them.

A quick google on "flying car" will turn up many examples of flying cars, many of them technically adequate, none of them commercially successful. To get a sky full of flying cars they have to not be just technically practical and financially affordable, but also better than competing options. No flying car has beaten out buying separate planes and cars. That's a common combination; almost all private plane owners also have a car. There's a similar situation with the amphibious car -- lots of people own a car and a boat, but only the US Marines are buying brand new amphibious vehicles.

A flying car is a compromise between cars and planes. This keeps it from matching the performance of either one. A pure airplane doesn't have to provide engine power to its wheels, or keep its wings narrower than a standard road lane. Regular cars can have tall cabins to increase passenger and cargo space (which would trash a plane's aerodynamics) and include strong structures to make them safer in an accident (more weight than a plane can handle). So if you want to fly out to Nantucket you'd be better off in a Cessna than in your flying car; it'll have better performance and probably handle bad weather better. For the grocery store a minivan would let you do the errand in one trip instead of two, and it won't vanish without a thump under the wheels of a SUV. Advances in technology will improve the performance of flying cars, but they'll also help the planes and cars so the relative advantages will stay the same.

The closest we may come to the world of flying cars is when helicopters or some other vertical take-off aircraft get cheap and powerful enough to become your only vehicle -- dropping right into the grocery store parking lot. That would be a "flying car" for most purposes, but it'll never go farther along the ground than the distance from the driveway (now a landing pad) to the garage. And you'll probably have a non-flying van to handle anything too big or heavy for your aircraft.

Unlike flying cars, the personal flight backpack's day may someday come. Inventors have come up with both [rocket](#) LINK1 and [helicopter](#) versions of them and even had successful flights, but none of them have been good enough to justify their price tag. Most just give a short hop through the air and land with empty fuel tanks. That gives you a long walk back with a very heavy backpack. Both the US and Soviet militaries have considered them for giving infantry a boost but never followed up. Between the logistical hassles and the safety issues it was just easier to get a helicopter to do the job. With the typical infantryman carrying 50-80 pounds of gear already, there was no point in handing him a 50-pound gadget that could only be used once.

Once the backpack booster is improved to where it can be on the order of a motorcycle's cost and allow round trips of more than 10 miles there'll probably be some sales. But this will probably require strapping a fusion reactor to your back to get the necessary power-to-weight ratio. After the first few hundred are sold the Department of Motor Vehicles will start requiring you to license them, and a thousand *Ghostbusters* jokes will die.

Unfortunately airship mass transit will always be a dream. There are 29 airships operating today, and about the same number of companies trying to develop new ones. Most are cargo carriers or mobile billboards but at least one [carries passengers](#). This is for a tourist lark, not as anyone's primary transportation. Despite the wishful projects of their fans,

airships don't seem to be breaking out of their niche any time soon.

Lighter-than-air vehicles are slower than airplanes, carry less payload, and are more vulnerable to bad weather. This is fine for an advertising platform or airborne communications node. Cargo transport is more of a problem -- not only are you facing a slow delivery but it could be further delayed or lost to a storm. Slow cargo travels more safely by ship. People traveling don't want to spend more time in transit than they have to, so they've switched to jet aircraft, putting rail lines and ocean-crossing passenger ships out of business. Tourists aren't in a hurry but they demand amenities -- good food, lots of drinks, and games for when they've gotten bored with the view. Cruise ships have the weight capacity to provide that and stand up to bad weather as well. Airship tourism will probably remain confined to short trips over scenic areas. But for mass transit a vehicle needs to carry lots of passengers, move quickly, and be sturdy enough for people to depend on it to keep their jobs. Airships can't do that.

While all this answers the specifics of the original question, what about the more general problem, "Why do some technologies get generally adopted while others don't?" This applies not only to weird science gear like rocket packs, but more generally to central technologies in many settings, such as cybernetics, psychotronics, or the industrial magic of *GURPS Technomancer*. While a large number of factors can explain limited adoption of new technologies in a campaign (for example, limited presence of qualified users such as psis or mages, or suppression by groups such as Yrth's Ministry of Serendipity), the most general are economic. The first factor is that a new technology will only be adopted if it provides more benefits than similar investments in existing technology. For example, at the beginning of the 20th century, the automobile faced nearly as many problems as flying cars do today: no infrastructure, limited production runs, no laws governing their use, and so forth. However, the automobile, even in its infancy, provided a package of benefits that weren't available from other modes of transport: trains could only go where there were tracks, horses got tired, feet couldn't go very fast, and boats didn't tend to do well crossing Kansas. Thus, money spent on cars provided a high marginal benefit to early adopters, and they provided the necessary base for all the work required to bring cars to the technologically and socially mature state they're in today.

That maturity brings up the second major factor: the need to overcome sunk costs in other technologies. Turning our attention to zeppelins, assume we've found a niche where they have an advantage in marginal benefit over airplanes, rail, and ships. We're then faced by the likelihood that zeppelins would require special facilities for refueling, boarding, and loading and unloading of cargo, different from those used by competing technologies; just upgrading existing airports to include zeppelin docks would probably run a few million dollars each. Switching focus, jetpacks might not require as much in the form of physical infrastructure, but establishing licensing, setting safety standards, and addressing all the other legal and bureaucratic details required for their use could easily take years. While all the existing technologies undoubtedly required infrastructure investments that probably dwarf what stands in the way of widespread use of zeppelins or rocket packs, those expenditures have already been made over decades, and thus the existing technologies have a major advantage, even in the face of potentially superior alternatives.

So, what does all this mean in practice? It means you have some tools for justifying the dominance or absence of different technologies in your campaign worlds. For example, you can easily replace a real world technology with an alternative simply by making even a primitive version of the alternative available before widespread adoption of its competitor, which eliminates the problem of overcoming the competitor's sunk costs. For example, if you declare that the Wright Brothers launched a flying car at Kitty Hawk in 1903 instead of an airplane, they'd have hit the headlines the same year that Horatio Nelson Jackson made America's first cross-continent car trip (as seen recently on PBS). At that early point, when there were no airports or interstates, and no FAA regulations or traffic laws, flying cars and automobiles would have been on more or less a level playing field, making the dominance of flying cars much easier to swallow. Going along the same lines, you could reduce the investment required by the new technology to match existing sunk costs (i.e. in an AI-controlled air traffic environment, it shouldn't be hard to just plug flying cars into the same net and have them follow the same rules), or raise the investments required for the real-world technology you want to displace (i.e. introduce illuminated Horse Barons who monopolized the US horse industry, and have them block road building projects and rationalization of traffic laws, but ignore flying cars).

Switching to the issue of marginal benefit, you can alter the balance between two technologies several ways: reduce the costs or increase the capabilities of the desired technology, increase the costs or remove a capability from the "undesirable" technology, or increase the value of an existing advantage possessed by the desired technology. In this

case, let's look at jet packs again, and assume we want them to be a significant military technology in a pulp campaign. One possibility is to make them more effective than in real life (a common approach), either by making them much more energy efficient, or using a fuel which can be easily acquired in the field. Alternatively, though, one could focus on raising the marginal benefits gained from their tactical capabilities, and decide short hop rocket packs were introduced by military geniuses as a way of short-circuiting the trench warfare of WWI, which provided an impetus to both incremental improvements of initially dodgy designs, and integration of rocket infantry into standard military tactics in spite of their limitations. With this adjustment in marginal benefit, they may still be flawed, but they *will* be available, and in the hands of a square-chinned hero, could still spell the difference between doom and success in the fight against the Spider King of the Amazon.

Alternatively, you can make some minor changes to the universe to make it more hospitable to your favorite gadget. The danger in this is trying to foresee all the ramifications of the change. A dramatic increase in the price of oil would favor airships over jet planes, but that would also make cars unaffordable. So adventurers hurrying to get to their dirigible on time will be whipping the horses, not stepping on the pedal. Conversely, a high-power engine could make flying cars and jet backpacks useful tools, but the same engine might give you supersonic motorcycles. A simpler change can be to declare that "X doesn't work in this world." If heavier-than-air flight is impossible, airships are the only option.

In today's world, you can go get a flying car or airship if you have the money. But you're going to be in the minority because other vehicles work better for most people. Technologies compete in Darwinian fashion and the losers go extinct or have tiny niches. Which one succeeds depends on what's useful to the typical customer rather than the inventor or niche user. VHS beat Beta because most customers wanted to have long record times instead of high picture resolution. If you want to change which technology wins you have to change the environment or eliminate a competitor. Our current technologies beat out a lot of other possibilities to wind up on top. They're not going to be displaced by a minor change.

--Karl Gallagher & David Spitzley

Sages theorize that the Omniscient Eye might actually be composed of a panel of Experts chosen through mysterious and arcane means. Regardless, the Omniscient Eye is benevolent, and every other week it is willing to share its lore to all. Or, at least, to all with valid *Pyramid* subscriptions.

The Omniscient Eye seeks to answer questions that are tied to knowledge of the real world, providing information with a perspective that is of use to gamers. The Omniscient Eye does not concern itself with specific game systems or statistics.

Do you have a question for the Omniscient Eye? Feel free to send it to pyramidquestions@yahoogroups.com, and the Omniscient Eye might answer it!

A Nation Of Shopkeepers

for *GURPS*

by Stephen Dedman

In almost every RPG, there comes a time when the PCs will go shopping for something they can't make themselves, be it sollarrets or starships. And until the invention of Amazon.com and Warehouse 23, it was almost inevitable that they'd meet merchants. (Even after that date, would you trust your life to a space shuttle you'd bought on e-bay?)

With that in mind, here is a collection of merchant NPCs designed for use as contacts, enemies, allies, dependents, Illuminati dupes, hirelings, or random encounters. All are designed with a particular worldbook in mind, but require only minor changes to adapt for almost any setting from the invention of money to its abolition.

Bastian "Rocky" Rhodes, Pawnbroker

Bastian "Rocky" Rhodes grew up poor in Cassiopeia City, and became a pawnbroker and fence mainly through inertia -- he needed a job, and it was the only one available which required no qualifications. He showed an aptitude for the business, and bought the shop, The Crystal Sphere, when his boss retired.

When repressive martial law was declared in Cassiopeia City, Rocky hid as much of his now-illegal stock as he could, and handed the rest in before the amnesty ended. To his delight, Cassiopeians desperate to buy passage from the city were eager to accept bargain prices for their goods, and many soldiers (including military police) were willing to pay well for illegal goods. Though he's had to become very careful what he buys and sells, and to whom, Rocky has found that his business is actually bringing in more money -- enough that he's managed to buy a used Lemon Angel robot, Chika, as a shop assistant and sex toy. The main difference is that he's paying protection to the MPs instead of the Organization.

Campaign Uses

Rocky can fence gear that the PCs have stolen, sell them legal goods at a bargain price, or provide illegal weapons and other equipment at high cost. Most of his stock is LC 6, sold for 40-90% of list price (-1d×10) depending on condition. Roll LC or below on 1d, at -1 per 10lbs weight or \$1,000 cost, to see if he has any less legal items in stock, then multiply the price by 6-LC.

Rocky can also serve as a Street Contact (connected, Streetwise-12, somewhat reliable), an Ally, or an Enemy. He may also be able to provide information on his customers' financial status, buying habits, or addictions -- for a price, of course.

Other Settings

Rocky is designed for a *GURPS Space* or *Traveller* adventure in a CR 6 (Total Control) setting, but the 25-point version would require only minor tweaking to fit into other times; pawnbrokers have been around since the Renaissance, if not before.

Bastian "Rocky" Rhodes, Pawnbroker (75 points)

ST 12 [20]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 12 [20]; HT 10 [0]

Speed: 5.25 Move: 2 Dodge: 5 Parry: 5

Damage: Thrust 1d-1; Swing 1d+2.

Advantages: Contact: Police, Effective skill 18, available on 9 or less, Usually Reliable [6]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Lightning Calculator [5]; Reputation (+1, a man who can get you anything without asking questions, recognized on 7 or less) [1]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10]. Cyberwear: Adjustable Heart with Steady setting [20]; Flesh Holster [2].

Disadvantages: Addiction (Neural Stimulator -- highly addictive, legal, \$400/week in maintenance costs) [-10]; Code of Honor (Businessman's) [-5]; Fat [-10]; Gluttony [-5]; Greed [-15].

Quirks: Dislikes his first name [-1]; Enjoys watching sports for fat people (sumo, weightlifting, etc.) [-1]; Hates exercise [-1]; Staid [-1]; Wants to be a chef in his own restaurant [-1].

Skills: Accounting-10 [1/2]; Area Knowledge (City)-13 [2]; Armory/TL10 (Beam Weapons)-11 [1]; Beam Weapons/TL10 (Sonic)-13 [2]; Brawling-10 [1]; Computer Operation/TL10-11 [1/2]; Cooking-12 [1]; Detect Lies-13 [6]; Electronics Operation/TL10 (Security Systems)-13 [4]; Exoskeleton-10 [2]; Fast-Draw (Pistol)-9 [1/2]; Fast-Talk-14 [6]; First Aid-11 [1/2]; Holdout-11 [1]; Intimidation-12 [2]; Jeweler/TL10-9 [1/2]; Mechanic/TL10 (Robot)-12 [2]; Merchant-14 [6]; Savoir-Faire-11 [1/2]; Scrounging-12 [1]; Shortsword-10 [2]; Streetwise-12 [2]; Wrestling-10 [2].

Gear: Stunners, with Nauseator setting, and select switch for use as one-shot screamer; Sonic Stinger; Bioplas vest. Under counter, Machete with monowire edge; Laser Torch; Drug Analyzer; Smart Bandage; Privacy Field; Credcard cracker, and a Dumb Office Minicomputer (Complexity 4) with peripherals. Shop also contains a fitted ST 20 Exoskeleton, a Fire Extinguisher, Emergency Medkit, Basic Armoury and Electronic Tool Kits, and Rocky's "assistant" -- Chika, a Lemon Angel, who will defend her boss if attacked.

Appearance: Age 48; Brown skin, dark brown eyes, shaven head, black walrus mustache. 5'9", 240 lbs. (80 lbs encumbrance).

- *25-point version:* Reduce ST to 11; Remove Cyberwear, Police contact, and High Pain Threshold; Reduce Detect Lies skill to 12.
- *100-point version:* Add Danger Sense; Increase IQ and Mental skills by 1.

Chika, Rocky's "Partner" (233 points)

ST 12/10 [10]; **DX** 11 [0]; **IQ** 9 [-10]; **HT** 12/9 [5]

Speed: 5.25 Move: 2 Dodge: 5 Parry: 5

Damage: Thrust 1d-1; Swing 1d+2.

Disadvantages: Dead Broke [-25]. Skills/Software: Accounting-20 [4]; Beam Weapons (Sonic)-13 [4]; Brawling-13 [4]; Computer Programming/TL10-17 [4]; Cooking-13 [2]; Datalink; Detect Lies-16 [4]; Domestic; Electronics/TL10 (Credcards)-17 [4]; Erotic Art-11 [4]; Forgery-15 [4]; Merchant-14 [3]; Sex Appeal-15 [2]; and Voiceprint Recognition.

Gear: Sonic stinger; Pocket aerosol (paralysis gas); Clothing belt over transparent bioplas bodysuit.

Appearance: Apparent age 23; dark brown skin, shoulder-length black hair, hazel eyes. 5'5" tall, 102.54 lbs.

Chika is a "Lemon Angel" Android Companion (p.RO119) who assists Rocky by cooking, cleaning, clerking, and cracking credcards.

Christina Nero, Investment Banker

Christy Nero acquired a taste for wealth and influence when she was still a cheerleader at high school, dating the son of a successful banker. She was soon fraternizing with corporate high-flyers not just for their generosity, but for what they could teach her about finance. Within a year of receiving her MBA, she was running the currency exchange section of a major bank. Soon after this, she met a wealthy lawyer whose clients included a major drug cartel, and

began using the bank to launder the cartel's money. She now controls billions of dollars from various corporations, political parties and criminal syndicates, which she moves around a complex web of tax havens, dummy companies, and genuine investments.

Nero's short-term goal is to become a millionaire before she turns 30; her ultimate dream is to become incredibly rich and use her influence to turn the United States (and ultimately the world) into a plutocracy with herself as near the top as possible.

Campaign Uses

Christy Nero is always looking for projects to invest in, and may become a Patron (or, more probably, Secret Patron) bankrolling gunrunners, treasure-hunters, or Gadgeteers working on new weapons. She is only interested in transactions of at least \$100,000.

Nero makes a dangerous Enemy, but is also a useful and usually reliable Street or Business (effective skill 18) Contact. Filthy Rich PCs may also have use for her money-laundering services.

Other Settings

In an *Illuminated* campaign, Christy Nero is a conspirator in the employ of the Gnomes of Zurich: whether or not she is aware of their existence, she is in perfect sympathy with their aims. In a Voodoo campaign, she may be one of the Snake People.

In a *Deadlands* campaign, Nero may be an investor in one of the railways, as well as acting as Patron to several Mad Scientists. In a Space campaign she may lend the PCs the money they need to buy expensive cyberware or a spaceship. Of course, if the PCs can't pay up on time, she may demand they smuggle drugs or illegal immigrants, or steal some business secrets.

The 400-point version of Nero is a criminal mastermind known as Silver Shadow. She uses her Elastic Skin and Mimicry advantages to gain information and access to valuables, or to frame the PCs or their friends if they frustrate her money-making schemes. Though she wears the best concealable armor available at her tech level, she prefers to leave combat to her hirelings.

Christina Nero (100 points)

ST 9 [-10]; **DX** 12 [10]; **IQ** 13 [30]; **HT** 12 [30]

Speed: 6 Move: 6 Dodge: 6 Parry: 8

Damage: Thrust 1d-2; Swing 1d-1.

Advantages: Alcohol Tolerance [5]; Attractive appearance [5]; Fashion Sense [5]; Lightning Calculator [5]; Status/1 [0]; Strong Will/1 [4]; Voice [10]; Wealth (Wealthy) [20].

Disadvantages: Fanaticism (self) [-15]; Greed [-15]; Megalomania [-10]. **Quirks:** Attentive; Fond of cocaine and other stimulants; Homophobe; Incompetence (Cooking); Technophile.

Skills: Acrobatics-10 [1]; Acting-13 [2]; Accounting-12 [1/2]; Administration-14 [1]; Carousing-11 [1/2]; Computer Operation/TL8-12 [1/2]; Dancing-10 [1/2]; Diplomacy-14 [2]; Driving/TL8 (Car)-10 [1]; Economics/TL8-13 [4]; Guns/TL8 (Pistol)-14 [1]; Judo-12 [4]; Law (Specialization: Tax law)-17 [4], (other)-11 [0]; Make-up/TL8-12 [1/2]; Merchant-16 [8]; Politics-13 [1/2]; Psychology-13 [4]; Research-13 [2]; Savoir-Faire-17 [0]; Sex-Appeal-15 [2]; Singing-14 [1/2]; Streetwise-12 [1].

Gear: Upper-class clothing; Porsche; Glock 17; palm-top computer; small apartment crammed with high-tech gadgets.

Appearance: 28 years old; fair complexion, strawberry blond hair, blue eyes; 5'4", 120 lbs.

- *150-point version (Patron)*: increase Wealth to Very Wealthy; +2 to IQ and IQ-based skills; +1 to HT and HT-based skills.
- *400-point version (Supers campaign)*: add Charisma/1 [5], Doesn't Sleep [20], Elastic Skin [20], High Technology/+1 [20], Immortality (Special Enhancement, can age in either direction at will) [143], Mimicry [15], and Pheromone Control [25] advantages, and Disguise-15 [2] to 150 point version. TL8 version carries a Gauss Needler, TL9 version a Gauss Pistol or Blaster.

Matthew Alhazred, Bookseller

Matthew Alhazred was 15 when he inherited his uncle Mustafa's business, the Book Bazaar. An avid reader and bibliophile, he ignored his widowed mother's plea to sell the shop and maybe make enough to put himself through college; instead, he left school to work full-time in the shop.

Matt is not an enthusiastic salesman and detests any form of physical work, including cleaning (which he leaves to his mother), but he is not intellectually lazy: he reads almost every book he buys before he can bring himself to sell it. The small shop is also crammed with oddities that Mustafa bought over the years -- including some original Pickman paintings, some decidedly strange sculptures, and a few antique weapons.

Campaign Uses

Matthew prides himself on his knowledge of obscure facts and his ability to find out anything he doesn't know. He is designed mainly as a source of information for Horror, Cliffhangers, Voodoo or Cthulhupunk campaigns, but the shop may also be the favorite haunt of a copycat serial killer, or a meeting place for spies in an Espionage campaign. The 250-point version of Matthew calls himself Eibon; he may be a mostly harmless metavillain who specializes in stealing books, a nemesis of Nazis and other book-burners, or an eccentric super-spy on either side of the law. The 25-point version may be a PCs' dependent, a minor enemy, or an important witness who needs protection.

Other Settings

The Book Bazaar may be found largely unchanged (and probably unswept) in almost any era since printing was invented, and people like Matthew have probably worked there for all that time.

Matthew Alhazred (25 points)

ST 9 [-10]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 12 [20]; **HT** 9 [-10]

Speed: 4.75 Move: 4 Dodge: 4 Parry: n/a

Damage: Thrust 1d-2; Swing 1d-1.

Advantages: Eidetic Memory [30]; Language Talent/1 [2]; Night Vision [10].

Disadvantages: Curiosity [-5]; Dependent (Mother, appears on 15 or less, 60 point character) [0]; Easy to Read [-10]; Insomniac [-10]; Laziness [-10]; Oblivious [-3]; Youth [-2].

Quirks: Anglophile [-1]; Atheist [-1]; Gay [-1]; Imaginative [-1]; Loves, and secretly writes, detective stories and science fiction [-1].

Skills: Accounting-10 [1/2]; Archaeology-10 [1/2]; Astronomy/TL6-10 [1/2]; Conspiracy Theory-13 [4]; Guns/TL6 (Pistol)-12 [1/2]; Forensics/TL6-10 [1/2]; History-11 [1]; Languages (English)-14 [0], (Arabic)-13 [1/2] (French)-13 [1/2], (Latin)-13 [1/2], (Spanish)-13 [1/2]; Linguistics-10 [1]; Literature-14 [3]; Merchant-11 [1]; Motorcycle/TL6-10 [1]; Occultism-13 [2]; Poisons-10 [1/2]; Research-13 [2]; Scrounging-12 [1/2]; Speed-Reading-12 [1]; Thanatology-11 [1]; Writing-11 [1/2].

Gear: Webley No. 1 revolver (under counter); old British motorcycle.

Appearance: 17 years old; olive complexion, short black hair and barely visible mustache, dark brown eyes; 5'8", 145 lbs.

- *100-point version:* Increase IQ and all mental skills by 3, and add Versatile advantage.
- *100-point version (Illuminated campaign):* increase IQ and all mental skills by one, and add Illuminated and Second Sight advantages.
- *250-point version (Supers campaign):* to 100-point version, add Breath Holding/4; Insubstantiality (Enhancement: Can carry objects up to No Encumbrance, +10%) [88]; Invisibility (Enhancements: Visible at Will +10%, Can carry objects up to No Encumbrance, +10%) (Limitation: Can be Seen in Mirrors) [44]; and Penetrating Vision/1.

Mina Vladic, Body Modifier

Mina Vladic's parents were undertakers with Russian mafia connections and a huge collection of old horror movie discs. By the time Mina was eight, they decided that her intelligence and lack of squeamishness suited her to a career in medicine, and chose her classes and extra-curricular activities accordingly. Mina did well enough academically, but also loved to party, and in her final year she was caught stealing prescription software from the university hospital's pharmacy. Rather than return home and work in the family business, she took a job in a tattoo parlor. She soon realized that there was more money to be made implanting street tech than there was in piercing navels, and after making a deal with her parents and their connection, she was soon running her own business.

From the outside, The Body Eclectic seems to be an ordinary tattoo and piercing parlor (if unusually clean and very well-equipped), but Mina really specializes in black market biomods and cyberwear. Many of these are salvaged from bodies sent to her parents' funeral home, and her parents also help dispose of the small number of her clients who die on the operating table. She charges hospital rates for surgery, and her bargain-basement bionics (20% savings) may be unreliable or breakdown-prone (see p.UTT95), but she's utterly discreet, keeps no records, and usually gives her clients a free tattoo or piece of body jewelry to preserve her cover story.

Mina is also a good source of medical and/or illegal drugs, as well as a frequent user of them (Zen when working, and Sin after hours; see p.UT91). Rather than using anesthetics, she often operates on patients while they're still conscious because she likes inflicting pain; she then erases the memory with amnesiac drugs. When not in her shop, she's usually at a party or S&M club, only returning to her apartment in the mornings to sleep, shower and/or change her outfit.

Campaign Uses

As well as providing the PCs with implants and discreet medical care (for a price), Mina may be a Street Contact, or a dangerous Enemy.

Other Settings

While the 100-point version of Mina is specifically designed for a Cyberpunk, Cthulhupunk or later campaign, unregistered street doctors might be found almost in almost any era.

Mina Vladic (100 points)

ST 10/12 [5]; **DX** 11/12 [14]; **IQ** 13 [30]; **HT** 10 [0]

Speed: 5.25 Move: 5 Dodge: 5 Parry: 6

Damage: Thrust 1d-2; Swing 1d.

Advantages: Beautiful appearance (Off-the-shelf looks, -50%) [8]. Biomods/Cyberwear: Bionic eyes with Acute Vision +1 [2], Microscopic Vision/2 [8] and Retinaprint [5]; Two bionic hands (ST 12, DX 12) with

micromanipulators [15]; Cyberhair, long [5]; Eros Plus [0].

Disadvantages: Compulsive Carousing [-5]; Impulsiveness [-10]; Insomnia [-10]; Sadist [-15].

Quirks: Broad-Minded [-1]; Doesn't drink wine [-1]; Intolerance (Morning people) [-1]; Mild claustrophilia and arachnophilia [-1]; Not interested in long-term relationships [-1].

Skills: Artist-10 [1/2]; Brawling-10 [1/2]; Carousing-10 [2]; Computer Operation/TL9-12 [1/2]; Detect Lies-10 [1/2]; Disguise/TL9-13 [2]; Electronics Operation/TL9 (Medical)-12 [1], (Security Systems)-12 [1]; Fast-Talk-13 [2]; Guns/TL9 (Needler)-14 [1/2]; Holdout-11 [1/2]; Judo-9 [1]; Knife-12 [1]; Merchant-14 [4]; Physician/TL9-12 [2]; Sex-Appeal-10 [2]; Streetwise-12 [1]; Surgery/TL9-13 [8]; Tattooing-13 [2].

Gear: Gauss Needler; Small knife with monowire edge; Medium arachnoweave bodysuit (black and skintight, with zips over each piercing); Nightshades; Doctor's Black Bag; Medscanner; Drug Analyzer; black overcoat; boots.

Appearance: 27 years old; beautiful neo-goth, with pale complexion, wazist-length black hair, black eyes, and multiple piercings; 5' 8", 125 lbs.

- *60-point version (Street Doc, any TL):* remove all cyberwear and bodymods; reduce Carousing and Sex-Appeal skills by 1 point each; appearance becomes Attractive.
- *300-point version (vampire street doc):* add Vampire package (pp.U82-83) to 60-point version.

Quentin Quinn, Traveling Salesman

Quentin Quinn is a "drummer," a salesman who travels the small towns of the old West with a catalog from a very large mail-order firm and a trunk full of samples of his merchandise. He loves traveling by rail or paddle-steamer and has an uncanny knack of turning up when trouble is about to strike, but always seems to have exactly the right item to save his skin.

When encountered, the soft-spoken Quinn may be carrying any combination of items from his catalog to deliver to mail-order customers or to show shopkeepers -- always including at least two Colt revolvers, one Bible, one deck of cards, a few corsets, and some boxes of ammunition in whatever caliber the PCs need. In a Deadlands campaign, he may also be carrying Gatling pistols, bulletproof vests, and other gadgets. When trouble strikes, he will attempt to sell his merchandise to the PCs, firmly maintaining it would be dishonest to give them away or even lend them out.

Campaign Uses

Quinn is a combination of Gizmo advantage and guardian angel, but he can also be a dependent or an ally -- or even an enemy, able to outfit a posse to track down lawbreaking PCs. He can also be used as a 1-point Business Contact.

Other Settings

With minor tweaking, Quinn might be selling items out of the trunk of his car in any 20th- or 21st-century campaign. He might even be a passenger on a starship, taking prototypes of TL11 equipment to merchants on other worlds.

Quentin Quinn [25 points]

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 11 [10]; **HT** 10 [0]

Speed: 5 Move: 5 Dodge: 5 Parry: n/a

Damage: Thrust 1d-2; Swing 1d.

Advantages: Charisma/1 [5]; Language Talent/1 [2]; Patron (Employer, appears on 6 or less) [8]; Rapid Healing [5]; Serendipity [15].

Disadvantages: Bad Sight (nearsighted, wears glasses) [-10]; Sense of Duty (Employer) [-10]; Skinny [-5]; Weirdness Magnet [-15].

Quirks: Always wears a derby [-1]; Loves opera [-1]; Mild phobia (snakes) [-1]; Sleepy drinker [-1]; Very polite, especially to women [-1].

Skills: Area Knowledge (North American railways)-11 [1]; Armory/TL5 (Rifles and Handguns)-10 [1]; Detect Lies-10 [2]; Diplomacy-10 [2]; First Aid/TL5-10 [1/2]; Gambling-12 [4]; Guns/TL5 (Pistol)-14 [4], (other)-10 [0]; Languages (English)-12 [0], (Comanche)-10 [1/2], (French)-10 [1/2], (Mandarin)-10 [1/2], (Spanish)-10 [1/2]; Merchant-13 [6]; Riding (Horse)-9 [1]; Savoir-Faire-11 [1]; Speed-Load (Revolver)-9 [1/2].

Gear: Colt Cloverleaf pistol; steel skullcap and breastplate under good suit, duster, and bowler hat; pocket knife; spare eyeglasses; travel trunk full of merchandise.

Appearance: 34 years old; tanned complexion, receding dark blond hair, hazel eyes behind wire-rimmed glasses; 5'9", 100 lbs.

- *100-point version:* Increase IQ and Mental skills by one; add Cinematic Gadgeteer advantage and one Gizmo; increase Armoury skill to 16 and Riding to 10.

Robert Blackstone, Alchemist

Robert Blackstone's mother was a renowned magical healer, or a witch, depending on who you ask. He grew up fascinated by things magical, and both he and his mother were disappointed when he proved to have little or no magical aptitude. In a spirit of compromise, his mother apprenticed him to the local alchemist.

Robert has done his best to carry on his mother's business of providing healing to the small town where he was born -- herbal remedies and first aid to locals who can't afford elixirs, and powerful potions for those with more money and less patience. He makes an average income as an alchemist, and has never ventured more than ten miles away from his home. The 100-point version of Robert also provides magical healing and occasionally enchants items (and probably lives in a slightly larger town), but his personality is still the same.

Robert is expert in the creation of the following elixirs: Aesculapius, Agni, Argus, Atalanta, Chiron, Delphi, Ephialtes, Hydra, Janus, Morpheus, Orion, Poseidon and Prometheus.

Campaign Uses

Robert's main use in most campaigns will be to provide elixirs to the PCs before their adventures, and medical care to the survivors. He is too easy-going to make a worthwhile enemy, but he might be an ally or dependent, or even an unconnected street contact. He may also hire the PCs occasionally to obtain hard-to-get ingredients, such as scale of dragon.

Other Settings

Robert will require very few changes to fit into any setting where alchemy works, including *GURPS Technomancer*.

Robert Blackstone (25 points)

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 11 [10]; **IQ** 13 [20]; **HT** 9 [-10]

Speed: 5 Move: 5 Dodge: 5 Parry: 6

Damage: Thrust 1d-2; Swing 1d.

Advantages: Literate [10]; Reputation (skilled healer, honest merchant): +2 reaction, sometimes recognized, small

group of people [2]; Resistant to Poison [5].

Disadvantages: Charitable [-15]; Curious [-5]; Overconfidence [-10]; Unfit [-5]; Workaholic [-5].

Quirks: Attentive [-1]; Considers making love potions beneath his dignity [-1]; Dislikes travel [-1]; Incompetence (Poetry) [-1]; Very fond of mushrooms [-1].

Skills: Alchemy/TL3-13 [8]; Astrology-10 [1]; Cooking-12 [1/2]; Crossbow-10 [1/2]; First Aid/TL3-13 [1]; Glassblowing-10 [2]; Herbalist-12 [2]; Knife-10 [1/2]; Merchant-12 [1]; Naturalist-11 [1]; Occultism-12 [1]; Pharmacy/TL3-10 [0]; Poisons-11 [1/2]; Research-13 [2]; Savoir-Faire-12 [1/2]; Staff-9 [1]; Streetwise-11 [1/2].

Gear: Staff, enchanted with Seek Plant spell; Small knife; Home workshop; Doctor's black bag; Reference library; 1 dose Aesculapius potion.

Appearance: 48 years old; pale complexion, bright blue eyes, white hair and beard and all his teeth; 5'6", 140 lbs. When in lab, wears lower-class tunic and pants, cloth gloves, and shoes, all stained with reagents.

- *100-point version:* Increase HT to 11; Increase Alchemy to 14 and Staff to 11; add Longevity, Wealth (Comfortable), and Magery, Limited (Solitary Magery/2) advantages, and the following spells: Awaken-13 [1]; Beast-Soother-13 [1]; Cure Disease-14 [2]; Detect Magic-13 [1]; Enchant-14 [4]; Insect Control-13 [1]; Lend Health-13 [1]; Lend Strength-13 [1]; Major Healing-14 [4]; Minor Healing-14 [2]; Neutralize Poison-14 [2]; Recover Strength-13 [1]; Scroll-13 [1]; Sterilize-13 [1].

Adventure Seeds

The Petrified Forester (*Fantasy*): When Robert Blackstone hears that a basilisk may be haunting a nearby wood, he offers \$1,000 in silver or \$2,000 in elixirs to the first person to bring in the corpse (parts of which are useful for concocting certain potions).

Unfortunately for the heroes, they won't be the only ones hoping to kill the monster and gain the reward -- and the basilisk is actually the familiar of a powerful and bad-tempered wizard.

Trained Wolves (*Deadlands*): The PCs are aboard a train when it's stopped by ties across the tracks, and robbed. Nothing unusual about that, perhaps -- except that some of the robbers are werewolves.

The only character on the train with any silver ammunition is Quentin Quinn; 50 rounds, \$4 each, in .38 caliber (if the heroes don't have guns that fire that caliber, he also has four Colt Lightnings). The bullets are pre-sold and locked in his trunk, so the PCs will have to persuade him to sell them by using Fast-Talk, Intimidation, Sex-Appeal or a similar skill. Worse still, the trunk is locked in the express car, 20 carriages behind them, and the werewolves are already forcing their way in.

Protection (*Horror*): There's a new goon collecting protection on Matthew Alhazred's street, and Matthew thinks he may also be behind a few gruesome murders. He asks the PCs to follow the heavy -- who seems extremely strong, never opens his mouth very wide, and always wears sunglasses even though he only appears after dark.

The goon may be a dominated vampire, flesh golem, Snake Man (pp. VO101-102), or other monster. He delivers the money he collects to a wealthy banker (use stats for Christina Nero).

Bestseller (*Supers/Illuminati*): Silver Shadow (Christy Nero) hires Eibon (Matthew Alhazred) to steal a grimoire, supposedly written by Baron von Knigge, from a private collection. The PCs learn that the grimoire contains powerful divination and mind control spells, and must be sealed or destroyed -- but they're not the only ones trying to get it. Nero wants to sell it to the highest bidder, and doesn't care what the buyer wants it for.

Loan Star (*Space*): When smuggler Rani Diaz defaults on a loan from Christy Nero, skip-tracers fall over each other

trying to collect the \$.5M bounty, and Diaz goes to Mina Vladic's chop shop in Cassiopeia City for a new face.

By the time the PCs (also in Cassiopeia City) hear she's in town, Vladic is the only one who can identify Diaz, and she won't betray her friend and client. Rocky Rhodes offers to arm and equip the PCs for a share of the bounty, but can he be trusted? What sort of cyberwear did Diaz buy? And what happened to her ship?

GURPS in 2005

By Andrew Hackard

Andrew Hackard has been Managing Editor at Steve Jackson Games since early 2002. In that time, no project has been bigger than *GURPS Fourth Edition*. With the first major supplements in the pipeline, Andrew turns his eyes to the new year in this sneak preview for *Game Trade Monthly*:

We've already released some teasers about what people can expect for *GURPS* next year. Some of that information is even still true. We're very excited about our plans for 2005, and while things may change between now and next December, this is what we're aiming for right now. As always, keep watching our website (www.sjgames.com) for updated announcements and other random silliness.

Worldbooks

Next year, our showpiece worldbook will be *GURPS Banestorm*, which updates the world of Yrth to Fourth Edition. Think you know Yrth? Think again . . . there are plenty of surprises on the horizon for one of the oldest *GURPS* settings.

We're also releasing the long-awaited and oft-delayed *GURPS Vorkosigan*. This is a full *GURPS Fourth Edition* release -- and like all of our *Fourth Edition* books, it will be hardback and full color, with great Bob Stevlic art. We know fans of the Miles Vorkosigan books have been waiting a long time to grab this, and it's going to be worth it!

Also coming next year is *GURPS Traveller: The Interstellar Wars*, which is both a Fourth Edition conversion of the *GURPS Traveller* rules and a fascinating look into the history of the Imperium. Marc Miller has given us the chance to play in a time that no one has ever explored deeply, and we can't wait to show you what we've got!

Later, we'll have the *Girl Genius Sourcebook and Roleplaying Game*, by Kaja Foglio and our own Michelle Barrett. It's a bit too early to be saying anything about this, other than that it will be excellent!

You Want Crunch? You Got It!

With the new edition of *GURPS* comes the chance to revisit some old favorite "crunchy" books, such as *GURPS Ultra-Tech* (by original *Ultra-Tech* and *Ultra-Tech 2* designer David Pulver and certified gearhead Kenneth Peters), a wholly updated *GURPS Bestiary* (by Michael Suileabhain-Wilson and Peter Dell'Orto), and, on the horizon, new versions of *GURPS Vehicles* and *GURPS High-Tech*.

The new kid on the block is *GURPS Powers*, by *GURPS* Line Editor Sean "Dr. Kromm" Punch and *Mutants & Masterminds* co-designer Steve Kenson. This book will show you how to emulate every kind of psionic or superpower you can think of -- and lots you haven't, either! We're planning to have this one out just in time for GenCon 2005, and we know you'll love it!

Build-Your-Own-Game Toolkits

We've got some great genre books coming out next year, too. Jon Zeigler and James Cambias are teaming up for the new version of *GURPS Space*, which will explore everything from the Third Edition book and plenty more besides!

Later in the year, Ken Hite delves into a topic dear to his heart in *GURPS Conspiracies*, which takes Nigel Findley's work on *GURPS Illuminati* and builds on it to explore lots of other secret societies and fringe cults, real and imaginary. If you miss this one, you might as well be watching network news.

And William Stoddard and Jonathan Woodward bring us ***GURPS Fantastic Cities***, which will build on Bill's superb work on ***GURPS Fantasy*** to show you just how to create a realistic city in a fantastic setting. Or vice versa! We're really looking forward to this one.

It's All Just Ones and Zeroes

We haven't forgotten you computer geeks, either. We're planning for wholly new versions of ***GURPS Character Builder*** and ***GURPS Vehicle Builder*** next year or possibly early in 2006. We're also planning plenty of online support, both through [e23](#) (our new online electronic files store) and *Pyramid* -- keep watching!

... And Beyond?

We are already planning into 2006 and even later. It's far too early to talk about exactly what's going to be released then, of course, but we've got some very cool ideas in development, and we're looking forward to bringing them to you.

Whatever type of game you want, whatever sort of heroes you like to play, ***GURPS*** brings it to you! Thanks for your support over the last 16 years, and join us as we make the best generic RPG even better.

Pyramid Review

Frenzy

Published by [Fantasy Flight Games](#)

Designed by Eric Lang, Darrell Hardy, & Kevin Wilson

Edited by Darrell Hardy, Rob Vaughn, & Christian T. Petersen

Graphics & Art by Scott Nicely, Tyler Walpole, Hans Michaelson, Steve Ellis, & Thomas Denmark

42 cards, rules sheet, & full color; \$9.95 per deck (both players need a deck)

Fantasy Flight Games hasn't let up on what is turning into an onslaught of new games from the card, board, and roleplaying arenas alike. *Frenzy* is a fantasy fighting game played without turns.

Frenzy doesn't offer anything in the way of background -- it's your garden-variety fantasy world in which all the races somehow make a living kicking each other's teeth in on the field of battle. The object is to have the most points after the third round is finished.

Both players must have their own deck, purchased separately and chosen from the four races: Humans, Dwarves, Orcs, and the Undead. A deck consists of Warriors, Battlefields, and Heroes. The three Battlefields (you only need one player's set of three) are placed in a row in the middle of the table, and players hold their deck in one hand.

The game is played without turns, so players simply place cards as fast as they can. Next to each of the three Battlefield cards, players place a Warrior card on their side of the row. This new rank of cards is called the Battle Line. Warriors have a Strength score from one to four, and whoever has the highest score on his side takes that field (no one scores in a tie). Another row forms behind this, called the Supply Line. This also comprises Warrior cards, but here their Strength scores represent how much materiel you get as spoils when you defeat your enemy. The winner of each Battlefield takes the top card from both of the two attendant Supply Line stacks.

These numbers will change through the game as the cards pile up in response to your opponent's plays. You can place a new card over the old one to change the values. You may up the ante by laying a tougher Warrior card over a weaker one, or you may play a lower value onto a Supply Line stack to decrease the points your enemy gets. The armies must take care to strike a balance: If you pour all your high cards into the front lines, you may win the Battlefields at the expense of lowered Supply Line values.

Basic Heroes -- the Wizard and the Assassin -- are special cards. Assassins can negate the Strength values of the toughest Warriors; this way, not every game ends up with two Battle Lines full of four-Strength fighters. A Wizard reduces the points won. If you win a fight and there's a Wizard in either Battle Line (yes, even your own), you lose the point card of your opponent's choice.

All armies have these basic Heroes, but each race sports its own advanced Warrior (for use in the advanced game). The Undead have the Lich, who beats everything but a Human Knight (and vice versa), and who can ignore the effects of a Wizard in his fight. The Knight takes the top two score cards from the Supply Line instead of just the one. The Orcs employ an Ogre, who beats any Warrior, and the Dwarven Bodyguard can duplicate the effect of any card in its Battle Line.

The last stack of cards is the Headquarters, placed behind the Supply Lines. The game continues until someone empties their hand of cards. It also ends if someone plays three Heroes into the Headquarters; this allows someone who can see they're in a winning position to try to freeze the game. Each Battlefield is numbered, and this helps track which round is being played. After each round, some of the used cards are discarded and the cycle restarts. When the third round ends, points are totaled.

There are a couple of differences between decks aside from the advanced Heroes, but the only one with a game effect is that the distribution of your Warrior cards -- 1s, 2s, etc. -- are not the same from one deck to the next. The rest of the distinctions are graphic. Each race has its own color scheme, and the artwork varies. Someone put serious effort into it, because the illustrations are closer to what you'd expect on the cover of a book, not the underside of a card.

It's impossible to ignore the similarities between *Frenzy* and James Ernest Games' real-time card game *Brawl*. Both entail freeform card play on either side of three contested "base" cards. But whereas *Brawl* plays with a certain amount of ease, the placement of cards coming as a matter of reflex with a little practice, *Frenzy* isn't so obvious. There's a definite strategic element that cannot be ignored, lest it cost you the game.

The speed of the game and the need to track the strengths and weaknesses of your assault can be a real source of frustration, but it also puts some distance between Fantasy Flight's work and the somewhat lighter work from Ernest. It's anyone's guess what breed of player will prefer this brand. It takes some of the whimsy out, but it also makes this a harder-fought test. This is combined with a troublesome page of rules. The distinction of fighting for three Battlefields and doing it over three rounds can throw you; there's already one erratum included in the box; and basic Heroes, while part of the basic rules, are explained under the advanced rules section.

Once all these details are worked out (and rules questions are easily settled, as they're mostly about the yes/no of mechanics and not which player gets the advantage for it), *Frenzy* is a far better game than its painfully simple rules set suggests. While not a consuming passion, it's certainly an affordable pastime from a company that continues to step up its production as well as its approval ratings.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Crime Scene: Forensics (for d20 System)

Published by [Hogshead Publishing](#)

Written by Mark Ricketts & Ian Hunt

Cover by Lee Moyer

Illustrated by Marcio Fiorito, David Esbri Molines, Chris Pepper, Sheila Thomas, & Ursula Vernon

64-page b&w softcover; \$15.95

In its quest to present the two entwined worlds of law enforcement and organized crime, it is no surprise that sooner or later that Hogshead Publishing would get to the subject of forensics. *Crime Scene: Forensics* is the publisher's third book in the series and opens up the world of forensic investigation for the *d20 System*. And since the figure of the forensic investigator is a favorite of both fiction and television, whether the Medical Examiner of *Quincy* and Patricia Cornwell's Kay Scarpetta novels, or the forensics team depicted in the *C.S.I.* series, then *Crime Scene: Forensics* should prove useful in depicting such characters within a game.

Behind the book's dark cover, the layout seems decent enough, as does the artwork. Upon closer inspection, the text turns out not be error-free, and these errors mar both the layout and the writing. Plus several pieces of artwork are reused, often to detrimental effect. In each case, the piece has been expanded in size to fill an empty space and has pixellated in the process.

Crime Scene: Forensics is organized into a series of short chapters. The first few give a brief history of forensic science, an all-too-short look at how a forensic type of game is played, and descriptions of several forensic organizations. In keeping with the rest of the *Crime Scene* series -- which is exclusively US-orientated -- these are all American, and include the National Response Team of the ATF, its National Explosives Tracing Center, and the infamous Body Farm run by the University of Tennessee. There is also a list of the differences between, and the responsibilities of, the Medical Examiner and the Coroner. Then it gets down to character generation.

The supplement details seven new classes, including the Anthropologist, the Arson Investigator, the Crime Scene Investigator, the Criminalist (the specialists of the forensics world, trained in everything from ballistics to geographical profiling), and the Forensic Pathologist. The duties of each role are well described and they should certainly help a player gain a grasp on what each does and how they should be played. There is a frugality to the design of these classes, as beyond their skills and feats, they possess nothing in the way of frills.

They are supported by 25 new skills that include Knowledge: Ballistics, Blood Splatter Analysis, Crime Scene Recording, and Toxicology. Some of these skills do make an appearance from other *Crime Scene* sourcebooks. The 30 or so new feats include Bite and Claw Analysis, Fingerprint Taking, Respected in the Field, and Take Charge, this last helping a character to organize and control a large crime scene. Others such as Strong Stomach, allow an officer to remain unshaken by gory scenes, while Crack a Joke lets an investigator know when to say something funny that will ease the tension of a stressful situation.

While the design of these classes is both solid and simple, the problem comes in the rules intended to represent a character's prior experience. Woefully underpowered, the seven Starting Departments each provide a character with

two extra skill ranks for two skills. This feels inadequate for a Crime Scene Investigator, for example, who will have served at least three years as a police officer, and for an Anthropologist, who will hold at least a doctorate. To offset this weakness in character generation, a GM may want to use these new classes in conjunction with the [*d20 Modern Roleplaying Game*](#), which allows characters to have one or two character levels before they begin play.

Once character generation is out of the way, the remainder of the book -- almost half -- takes the reader through a point-by-point tour of its subject matter. This starts out with securing, entering, and examining the crime scene, and includes documenting, photographing, and collecting the evidence. Then it guides the reader through the various types of evidence that can be collected and what they might indicate: fingerprints, ballistics, blood splatter analysis, toxicology, and DNA Profiling. Other chapters look at determining the cause of death, dumped bodies, and three particular causes of death -- through fire, explosions, and hit and run. All of this is written in a no-nonsense style, and while it could have dwelled upon the more gruesome aspects of the subject, the author keeps well away from doing so. His decision to keep the more distasteful side out of the *Crime Scene: Forensics* makes the supplement suitable to a wider audience.

Yet should the reader want to learn more about this subject beyond that contained within its pages, *Crime Scene: Forensics* is far from helpful. Simply, there is no bibliography to support what is otherwise a sound introduction to the science. Unfortunately, nor is there anything included to help a GM run an forensics orientated game, or any suggestions given to help integrate this information with either the rest of the books in the *Crime Scene* line, or with other *d20 System* games.

What you get in *Crime Scene: Forensics* is the bare bones necessary to run an investigative type of game, as well as an excellent primer and introduction to the science of forensics. Yet the failure to apply the information to any kind of gaming context may make some purchasers wait for the next supplement upon the subject.

--Matthew Pook

Controlling the Flow of Ideas

Things have still been chaotic with me, although not as tumultuous as might be expected after a week involving 30 hours of driving plus packing and unpacking my worldly belongings. To call me "moved in" would not be exactly accurate, since my apartment currently resembles the warehouse at the end of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* mixed with some footage from *Twister*. (Meanwhile, all my game books and comics are being stored in a *real* warehouse while I sort through my other boxes . . . meaning that, among other anomalies, I have nine large empty bookshelves without any indication that they ever *will* be anything interesting on them; insert your own "Presidential Library" joke here.)

Anyway, I'm moving in, I don't have reliable phone or Internet access (more on this development as I milk it for next week's column), I don't have a Day Job, and I'm editing *Pyramid* on a 15-inch screen, which is a far migraine-inducing cry from my standard 19-incher.

So instead of forging new ground, coming up with topics relating to this new and wondrous land I find myself in, I'm going to milk a topic from my Last Days of Tallahassee this week.

For those of you not up on your Marsh history (and, really, no big shakes if you're not), I moved to Tallahassee originally for school, when I attended my alma mater Florida State University. This was back in 1991 . . . and it took a while for me to escape the city's gravitational well.

Before I left, I tried to wrap up things as best I could with those I was leaving behind. One of the folks I said good-bye to was my old Poetry professor, who was also one of the guiding forces behind the Creative Writing department. We met for lunch (the first time I'd seen him since I graduated), and had a great conversation.

As an aside, for those who might be moving from a place they've called home for a while, I heartily recommend trying to meet anyone who's touched your life for that farewell lunch or coffee. I imagine this is especially the case with teachers and other instructors, since they don't get enough appreciation as it is . . . and seeing them several years later can provide a useful laboratory report in a "How did Student X turn out?" kind of way. It's hard to envision a scenario where you'll say, "I wish I hadn't said good-bye to this person . . ." but it's easy to think of the opposite.

Anyway, during that lunch we discussed all manner of topics, from Tallahassee to college to writing to food to the difficulty of picking out someone you're looking for in a crowded restaurant or airport. And during that lunch I formulated a theory -- no doubt espoused by other folks, but which I've never heard myself -- about writing, which also corresponds directly to gaming. And I have a corollary, which I'll share as a rebuttal.

While the professor and I were discussing the early poetry workshops I'd taken with him, one of the aspects of those classes that I recalled was that many of my fellow aspiring poets seemed to be "holding back"; in fact, if pressed, several of them said that they were afraid to use up their good ideas. The reasons for this were varied:

- They were afraid they wouldn't be able to do their ideas justice.
- They worried because, if they used their good ideas, they wouldn't have anything left to "fall back on."
- They didn't want other people to steal their good ideas and make them "better."

Whatever the reason, while reminiscing about this with my professor I made my realization: Don't worry that you're using up the "good ideas." Ideas are like dandelion seeds; scattering them to the winds is a sure way to end up with more.

I never held back on using ideas in my writing classes; even if I had a weekly deadline, and I was down to one idea, I'd use it. Sure enough, I'd generally have another the next time. It's a policy that served me through gaming, character creation as a player, and writing my columns for *Pyramid*. (Of course, some of you might ask, "Does this mean that each week's column *really* represents the best idea you had that week?" My answer to that question would depend entirely on how you find the quality of my efforts.)

Anyway, while I obviously can't make promises for everyone, I'd still recommend that you go ahead and use your "good" ideas whenever possible. I suspect that the brain uses a *dearth* of good ideas as an excuse to come up with more: "Oh, shoot! The pantry's empty! Better start firing random neurons again!" With multiple good ideas in the larder, the brain gets chubby and lazy, devoting CPU cycles to *The Apprentice*, Monty Python quotes, and trying to figure out what "[pompatus](#)" means.

Having offered my "Use your good ideas" advice, I have a corollary: Don't try to cram too many ideas into one piece. Whether it's an RPG adventure, a character concept, or a game world, for those just starting out there can be a temptation to try to use *all* those ideas at once:

"And it turns out that Prince Tharkum is really . . . his deceased brother! He assumed his brother's guise after killing him accidentally. Oh, and he's really living . . . *backwards* in time! So he knows the future, but is mystified by the present and past. Except that, unbeknownst even to him, he's not even really alive, but rather a solid light hologram! Oh, and he's filled with these tiny things I call 'midichlorians' . . ."

In general, I've found that, for any given adventure or character, one "Wow!" element is about all that can be handled *per aspect of the creation*. So, for example, having an adventure where it turns out all the PCs are actually unknowing clones of the "original" PCs, complete with copies of their memories, is probably enough of a "good idea" for the premise of the adventure; it doesn't need any other techniques such as being told in flashback. On the other hand, if the GM would like to use a good idea with the Master Villain (such as he *knows* he's the villain, and actively encourages the PCs to stop him because -- although he can't stop himself -- he doesn't like himself any more than the Good Guys do), that would probably be okay . . . but, again, don't use *two* weird ideas with him. And so on.

Now, this advice can obviously be tossed out the window if you have two good ideas that work well together. For example, if you'd like to have a Master Villain who is also a seemingly good NPC that encounters and helps the heroes, that idea would work well with the "being who lives backwards in time" -- knowing events from the future he understands there's a great threat looming, but he doesn't know that he was (will be) its own catalyst. But, again, even layering compatible good ideas, it's possible to overdo it.

In all, I suspect that there is a protective desire in many of us that borders on the parental; we want to ensure that our good ideas find the best audience possible, and we want to ensure that good audiences get our best ideas. But it's possible to err on either side of the equation; have faith in your flow of ideas, and your flow of ideas probably won't let you down.

Which is more than I can say about certain local phone companies . . .

--*Steven Marsh*

Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic





A Game for Two to Four Players

by P.D. Magnus

The year is 2050. It is a dark time to be a gamer. In half a century of mergers and buy-outs, the rights to every game design on the planet have come to be held in fewer and fewer hands. Last year, in a move to acquire the secret process for producing the gum that comes with sports cards, the Leetgum Corporation ended up owning the design to every game ever invented. Abetted by strange developments in international law, Leetgum now owns patents on the basic mechanics of trading card games, the concept of a roleplaying game, and even the rules of chess. Leetgum controls the trademark "game" to describe these products, but has no interest in producing any of them. Their real business is in manufacturing petroleum-based comestibles, and so all those great game designs languish in their data banks.

What are gamers to do in this dark age? Hack in to Leetgum's mainframe, of course, and take whatever they can. Lucky for you, Leetgum doesn't own any patents for network security technology.

1. About the Game

[Click here for the PDF!](#)

You take the role of a gamer and hacker, sending your digital Avatar into the Leetgum network, searching for gaming gems, and smuggling them back out. It's only a matter of time until somebody at Leetgum notices and shuts down the network, so work quickly.

Play involves hacking into Data Nodes to obtain Secrets and then hacking into Broadcast Nodes to move the Secrets off the network and into your Portfolio. Your objective is to either accrue 30 points in your Portfolio or to have the most valuable Portfolio when the Security Pool is exhausted. All of this is explained in greater detail below.



Don't get confused about this: This is a game about raiding computer networks in a fictional, dystopian future. Raiding real computer networks is bad. The game isn't meant as any kind of guidebook, as subtle commentary, or as an enticement to evil. We don't live in the cyberpunk world of Leetgum. Intellectual property in the real world is worth respecting.

[Click here for the PDF components!](#)

1.1 Components

You get: (These all come in a PDF file, and some assembly is required.)

- the game board -- in two pieces -- can be printed onto normal weight paper, cut out, and taped together
- a 48-card game deck -- see below
- 8 raider cards -- fine on paper or cardstock, as you like
- a reference card

Some options for assembling the game deck:

1. Print the cards onto cardstock and cut them out. Many printers have trouble feeding cardstock.
2. Print the cards onto paper, glue them to cardstock, and cut them out.
3. Print the cards onto paper, photocopy them onto cardstock at your local copy center, and cut them out.
4. Assign each game card a corresponding card from a standard poker deck. Memorize the assignments, and play the game with the poker deck.

You supply:

- an ordinary, six-sided die
- a pawn to represent each player's Avatar
- 24-36 pennies to use as Security Chits -- they don't have to be pennies, but you want something small and stackable
- a pile of counters to use as Code Fragments -- anything will do: nickels, glass stones, chocolate chip cookies, etc.

1.2 The Deck

There are 4 kinds of cards in the deck: Secrets, Programs, Modifiers, and the Shuffle card.

Secrets

Secrets are valuable information; the number on the card is the value of the Secret. On the network, a player's Avatar can't do anything with a Secret besides transmit it off. Some Secrets have special results when they are broadcast, as explained on the card.

Secret cards have a number in the upper left corner.

Programs

Programs are executable code. A player can play a Program card, causing the effect indicated on the card before discarding the Program. Programs may also be transmitted off the network just like Secrets -- programs have their value indicated on the lower right of the card. If you move a Program to your Portfolio, however, you cannot play it for the indicated effect.

Program cards have a number in the lower right corner.

Modifiers

There are two Modifiers: "Bonanza" and "Raw Deal." Played when someone transmits a Secret off of the network, these cards change the total value of the Secret. Modifiers can not be played on program cards. It is possible for a Secret to be both a Bonanza and a Raw Deal, but it can not have two Bonanza or two Raw Deal cards played on it.

Modifier cards have a number in the top center of the card.

Shuffle

This card says to "Shuffle the Deck." When someone draws it, they immediately shuffle the deck, returning any discarded cards. After shuffling, players draw any cards they should have gotten.

2. Starting the Game

Someone should shuffle the deck and place it in the center of the board.

The Security Chits should be gathered together as the Security Pool. As the game progresses, the Security Chits will be placed on Nodes of the network to indicate increased scrutiny. When the last chit is taken out of the Security Pool, the network administrators become so concerned that they shut down the network and the game is over. The number of Security Chits effectively determines the length of the game. For 2 players, 24 chits is a good number. For 3 players, use 30. For 4 players, 36.

Each player should draw a random Raider card. Each Raider has a different nick, personality, and special ability. Players may keep their identity secret until the first time they use their special ability.

Players now place their Avatars on different Log-on Nodes. (The Log-On Nodes are the spaces on the board showing die faces 1, 2, 3, or 4.) The player who has most recently chewed bubblegum goes first. That player takes a turn, and play proceeds clockwise.

3. Turn Sequence

There are usually five phases in a player's turn. In the descriptions, the "current player" is the player whose turn it is.

1. Respawn
2. Move
3. Avatar Conflict
4. Node Action
5. Checksum

3.1 Respawn

If the current player's Avatar is not already on the network, it must be Respawned. The player rolls the die. On a roll of 1, 2, 3, or 4, the Avatar is placed on the indicated Log-on Node; the player moves as normal. On a roll of 5 or 6, the raider is unable to find a way onto the network this turn. The Avatar remains off-board, and the player's turn ends.

3.2 Move

The current player may choose to leave his Avatar where it is; he declares that he is doing so and skips ahead to the Avatar Conflict phase. Otherwise, he rolls the die. (If he Respawned this turn, he must roll to move.)

On a roll of 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5, the current player may move his Avatar the indicated number spaces in either direction around the board. The Avatar must move the full distance and may not cross the dashed connection between the two halves of the board.

If the Avatar starts on a Log-on Node, entering the main board counts as the first space of movement. Once on the network, an Avatar may not reenter a Log-On Node.

On a roll of 6, the the current player may move his Avatar to any node on the same side of the network as the Node which it presently occupies. That is, it may not cross the dashed connection in the center of the network.

3.3 Avatar Conflict

If the current player's Avatar ends its move on the same Node as the Avatar of another player, the two Avatars may come into conflict. If the current player chooses to make trouble, he rolls the die and consults the chart below. If there are more than two Avatars on one Node, there may be more than one Avatar Conflict. The current player chooses the order in which they are resolved. (Note that some conflict results will make further conflict impossible.)

Avatar Conflict Chart

- 1 Hack the directory. The current player may look at the other player's hand.
- 2 Hack one file. The current player takes one card at random from the other player's hand.
- 3 Hacked for one file. The current player must give one card from her hand to the other player.
- 4 To hack and be hacked. The conflicting players trade hands.
- 5 Deadlock. Both Avatars drop off the network. The current player's turn is over. Both players must Respawn on their next turn. Their Avatars are not corrupted, however, so they should not discard their hands.
- 6 Mutual disaster. Both Avatars are corrupted. Remove them from the network. Both players must discard their hands.

3.4 Node Action

After resolving any conflicts, the current player may take a Node Action appropriate to the node occupied by his Avatar. A current player may choose not to take a Node Action.

Log-on Node



A Log-on Node takes incoming connections from the world at large. It has a few legitimate uses, but hackers know it as a way into Leetgum's private network. Avatars won't occupy Log-on Nodes when it comes time for Node Action; there's nothing to do there.

Data Node



Data Nodes are where Leetgum keeps the games. By hacking into Data Nodes, players can acquire secret gaming tech and the code to experimental programs. On a Data Node, the player rolls the die and adds +1 for each Security Chit on this Node. Consult the table below.

- 1 Success! You flawlessly extract one file without anyone noticing. Draw one card from the deck.
- 2 You successfully hack the Node, but download too much data not to draw attention. Draw three cards from the deck. Add one Security Chit to this Node.
- 3 You stealthily download one file, but someone notices you downloading the second. Draw two cards from the deck. Add one Security Chit to this Node.
- 4 You hack the Node, but quickly draw someone's attention. Draw one card from the deck. Add one Security Chit to this Node.
- 5 No luck. Add one Security Chit to this Node.
- 6 or more You've tripped an alarm! Your Avatar has been corrupted. Remove it from the board and discard your hand. Add one Security Chit to this Node. You must Respawn on your next turn.

Broadcast Node



Broadcast Nodes are the secure uplinks from the Leetgum network. By hacking into Broadcast Nodes, hackers can move secrets from their Avatars on the network to their Portfolios out in meatspace. In game terms, this means that players can move cards from their hands to their Portfolios. The Portfolio is a stack of cards on the table which is not discarded, even if the player's Avatar is corrupted. When a player moves a card to his Portfolio, he should declare what the card is and place it face-up.

On a Broadcast Node, the player rolls the die and adds +1 for each Security Chit on this Node. Consult the table below.

- 1** Success! You hide the transmission in a stream of marketing data, and network security notices nothing. Move one card from your hand to your Portfolio.
- 2-5** You successfully hack the Node, but someone notices the traffic. Move one card from your hand to your Portfolio. Add one Security Chit to this Node.
- 6** No luck. Add one Security Chit to this Node.
- 7 or more** You've tripped an alarm! Your Avatar has been corrupted. Remove it from the board and discard your hand. Add one Security Chit to this Node. You must Respawn on your next turn.

Routing Node



Routing Nodes direct the flow of network traffic. Avatars can use them to move around the network or to manipulate the network's security programs. On a Routing Node, a player may either move his Avatar to another Routing Node anywhere on the Network (even across the dashed connection in the middle) or remove one Security Chit and return it to the Security Pool. (If the current player uses the Routing Node to move to the same space as another player, he may not then initiate Avatar Conflict since the phase for that has come and gone.)

Code Node



Code Nodes hold buffers full of strange and unreliable subroutines. On a Code Node, a player takes a Code Fragment chit. Later in the game -- after any player rolls the die for any reason -- the player may discard the Code Fragment to change the outcome of the die by one. The roll cannot be raised above 6 or lowered below 1 in this way. If multiple players have collected Code Fragments, a spending war may ensue.

3.5 Checksum

If the Security Pool is empty or if the current player's Portfolio is worth a total of 30 or more, the game is over. Regardless of when these things happen, the game does not end until the Checksum phase.

4. Ending the Game

If there are no chits left in the Security Pool, then network operations becomes so concerned that they shut the network down. Players should discard their hands and count the value of their Portfolios. Each card is worth the value indicated by the number in the corner. The player with the most points has accrued the best stuff. That player is crowned Prince of the Gamer People, or at least would be if gamers were monarchists. In any case, that player wins the game

If the game ended because a player's Portfolio was worth 30 or more, players should not discard. Instead, they should count the value of their Portfolios and add half the value of the cards in their hands (round up). The player with the highest total wins, attaining such a reputation that the other players could do nothing to eclipse it. Note that although the winner will probably be the one whose Portfolio total ended the game, upsets are possible.

5. Details

Program cards indicate when they may be played. Unless a card says so specifically, it may not be played between a die roll and its consequences -- even if it says it may be played "at any time."

If cards and Code Fragments are both played to change a die roll, they take effect in the order they were played. For example: A "Redundancy" card played after several Code Fragments allows an unhampered re-roll, although further Code Fragments can be played on the new result.

6. Text of the Cards

For your perusal, this section repeats the text of the game and raider cards.

6.1 The Game Deck

This is a complete list of cards in the game deck, along with their values and special text. One value is listed for each instance of the card.

Project Aleph (6,7,8)

If you have three files from Project Aleph in your Portfolio, they are worth 8 more altogether.

Project Barbarosa (3,3,3)

If you have two files from Project Barbarosa in your Portfolio, each is worth 5. If you have all three, then each is worth 7.

Project Cephalus (3,4,5)

If you have two or more files from Project Cephalus in your Portfolio, then all Widgets in your Portfolio are worth double.

Project Damocles (2,2,3)

When you broadcast a file from Project Damocles, take an extra turn.

Project Electra (3,5,9)

When you broadcast a file from Project Electra, discard one card of your choice from your Portfolio.

Unsorted Files (3)

If the Unsorted Files are part of your Portfolio, any Assorted Files there count double.

Secret Plans (7)

Widgets (1,2,2,3)

Assorted Files (1,1,2,2)

Bonanza (+5, +5)

A Secret is worth more than its usual value. Add this card to your Portfolio along with the Secret.

Play when you broadcast the Secret.

Raw Deal (-3, -5)

Another player's Secret is worth less than its usual value. Add this card to their Portfolio along with the Secret.

Play when the Secret is broadcast.

Hack Ace (1)

Subtract one from your die roll at Data Nodes.

Play at any time. Put this card face up in front of you. Discard only if your Avatar is corrupted.

Ace Crypto (2)

Subtract one from your die roll at Broadcast Nodes.

Play at any time. Put this card face up in front of you. Discard only if your Avatar is corrupted.

Data Compression (2)

You may broadcast multiple Secrets from the same project in a single Broadcast Node Action.

Play at any time. Put this card face up in front of you. Discard only if your Avatar is corrupted.

Tempest (2)

Put a card into your hand as it is being discarded.

Play when another player discards for any reason.

Override (2)

Change the result of a die roll to any roll you prefer.

Play when you make a die roll for any reason.

Security Failure (3)

Remove all Security Chits from the network. Set the Chits aside; they are not added back to the Security Pool.

Play at any time.

Relax Security (1)

Roll the die and return that many Security Chits to the Security Pool.

Play at any time.

Network Failure (1)

Remove all Avatars from the network. Players must Respawn, but do not discard.

Play at any time.

Terminal Conflict (1)

Ignore the result of the Avatar Conflict Table. Instead, the opposing Avatar is corrupted.

Play when involved in an Avatar onflict.

Conflict Mastery (1)

Choose the outcome of an Avatar conflict from the chart without rolling.

Play when there is an Avatar conflict, even if you are not involved directly.

Backup (4)

Discard this card, but keep the rest of your hand.

Play when your Avatar is corrupted.

Routemaster (0)

Move to any Node on the network.

Play instead of rolling and taking a normal move.

Routemistress (1)

Move to any Node on the network.

Play instead of rolling and taking a normal move.

Code Bug (0)

Nullify the effect of a card.

Play when the card is played.

Double Redundancy (2)

Reroll twice and take the best of the three rolls.

Play when you make a die roll for any reason.

Redundancy (1,1)

Reroll and take the better of the rolls.

Play when you make a die roll for any reason.

Code Archive (2)

Take 4 Code Fragment chits.

Play at any time.

Shuffle the Deck (none)

Shuffle in all of the discards, including this one. After shuffling, complete your draw.

6.2 The Raiders

Lady C

The hacker known as Lady C is a meticulous planner who moves cautiously around the network.

After rolling for movement, Lady C's Avatar may move the player's choice of either 1 or the rolled amount.

NetPuppy

NetPuppy is just starting out and has spent the last week practicing how to get on the network.

The player playing NetPuppy may reroll any 6s when trying to Respawn.

Pirate R

Pirate R has an uncanny knack for getting the most out of warez.

After playing a program card, Pirate R's player may either put the discard on the discard pile as normal or put it on the top of the deck.

Iconoclast

The hacker known as the Iconoclast only uses hardware built before 1980, which opens connections that would be too slow for more modern equipment.

The Iconoclast's Avatar may move across the dashed connection in the middle of the network.

Redeye

Redeye claims to be psychic, but no one believes it. Regardless, Redeye seems to know the network better than anyone.

On a Routing Node, Redeye has the option to both move to another Routing Node and remove a Security Chit from the network.

CHawk

CHawk consumes extreme amounts of caffeine in order to hack very, very quickly.

After rolling a "Success!" or "No luck" result at a Data or Broadcast Node, CHawk may choose to immediately hack the same Node again.

Haicku

Haicku's search for enlightenment reveals ways to avoid confrontation.

When another player initiates an avatar conflict with haicku, Haicku may decide before the die is rolled to drop off the network and avoid the conflict. Haicku's player does not discard, but must Respawn.

Enigma

The hacker known as the Enigma is mysterious and secretive.

The Enigma is too mysterious for special abilities. Add +3 to the final value of the Enigma's Portfolio.

7. Credits

Game design: P.D. Magnus

Graphics: P.D. Magnus, with some help from old public domain patent illustrations

Playtesting: Nathan Brown, Sean Lambert, Cristyn Magnus, David Van Slyke

Invasions and Plagues in Citadels

A *Citadels* Variant

by Philip Reed

Citadels, Bruno Faidutti's game of city building, is superb and a perfect game for gamers and non-gamers alike. This variant, while adding a little complexity, adds a random element that can significantly alter the outcome of the game. This variant is simple enough to use with non-gamers.

Once any player plays his fourth district card there is a chance of an invasion or plague. At the beginning of the next turn character cards are selected as described in the basic rules and then, before the king starts calling out characters, one six-sided die is rolled. On a roll of 1-2 a plague takes place; 3-4 nothing happens and play proceeds as normal; 5-6 an invasion takes place.

If a 3-4 is rolled nothing happens and the game continues.

Game play then proceeds as described in the basic rules but each player rolls one six-sided die -- after his character is called -- and on a roll of 1 that player loses one in-play district card. Additionally, each character's specific power is altered as described under the two below events. These variant character rules are used for one turn only -- play returns to normal after this one turn has passed.

Plague

A horrible disease washes over the land, devastating life in all of the cities and slowing growth and expansion.

Assassin: The assassin, through patience and skill, builds an immunity to the disease and becomes a carrier for it. The assassin may announce two characters to murder. After this turn the character's power returns to that described in the basic rules.

Thief: In addition to the basic power, the thief takes advantage of the situation and steals two gold from the player to his immediate left. If that player has no gold there is no effect.

Magician: In addition to his basic power, the magician may spend two gold and not lose a district card no matter his die roll.

King: The king suffers with all of his kingdom. For every district card that is lost to the plague the king player loses 1 gold. If the king does not have enough gold to cover his losses he loses all of his gold and all of the cards in his hand. If he has no cards he suffers no additional effect. This is in addition to the king's basic power.

Bishop: The people flock to the bishop during these troubling times. In addition to his basic power, the bishop does not have to roll for district loss and if all of the other players lose a district he takes the top district on the deck and places it into his hand.

Merchant: The merchant, visiting so many (green) trade districts, has a greater chance of suffering from the plague. In place of his basic power, count the number of (green) trade districts in the merchant's city and roll one six-sided die: if the roll is equal to or less than the number of (green) trade districts in his city the merchant loses one in-play district card.

Architect: The architect does not have the manpower this turn to construct any districts and may not draw any district cards.

Warlord: His opponents weakened, the warlord may destroy one district this turn by paying a number of gold equal to two less than the loss of the district. A district of 1 or 2 cost is free to destroy, 3 costs 1 gold to destroy, 4 costs 2 gold to destroy, etc.

Invasion

Enemies from a distant land invade the region, attacking all of the players' cities.

Assassin: The assassin is secretly in league with the invaders. Whichever character the assassin player tries to murder this turn loses all of his gold.

Thief: Increased vigilance in the city prevents the thief from using his power this turn.

Magician: The magician is called to help defend the city and is unable to use his power this turn.

King: During the invasion the king collects more taxes from his people. In addition to his basic power, each player must pay the king player one gold or one district card from their hand (king's choice). If a player cannot pay he loses one in-play district card (in addition to any lost due to the invasion).

Bishop: The invaders are strongly opposed to the bishop's church and devote additional resources to combating his city. In addition to the bishop's basic power, count the number of (blue) religious districts in the bishop's city and roll one six-sided die: if the roll is equal to or less than the number of (blue) religious districts in the bishop's city he loses one in-play district card.

Merchant: The merchant profits from the hysteria surrounding the invasion. For this turn, the merchant receives two gold for each (green) trade district in his city.

Architect: The city gives the architect greater resources during the invasion. After his action the architect draws three extra district cards and places three of them in his hand. The architect may build up to four districts during this turn -- but only if all four are (red) military districts.

Warlord: Distracted by the events of the invasion, the warlord cannot build districts or destroy districts this turn (he may only take an action).

Pyramid Pick

The Deep (for d20 System)

Published by [Mystic Eye Games](#)

Written by Susannah Redelfs

Illustrated by Matt Bober, Marcio Fiorito, Hunter Frederick McFalls, Jeremy McHugh, Tamara Pressman, & Roel Wielinga

256-page b&w hardcover; \$39.99

"The deep is no lair. It turns out to be the planet's main address."
-- William J. Broad, *The Universe Below*, as quoted in *The Deep*

The Deep is a trove of information for a niche audience: gamers who want to take their adventurers underwater. While there are several *d20 System* books that cover ocean-going possibilities, most of them do so with an eye toward landlubbers getting their feet wet. Sailors, pirates, and merchants get plenty of coverage in these other books. *The Deep* comes right out on page 3 and clarifies its position: the ocean's surface is not part of its milieu. It recommends Living Imagination's *Broadsides!*, Fantasy Flight's *Seafarer's Handbook*, and Mongoose's *Seas of Blood* for players and GMs who want that information. Mongoose's upcoming *The Book of the Sea* will attempt to cover action both on and under the waves, but until then *The Deep* plumbs this frontier alone.

Physically, *The Deep* is a 256-page hardcover that makes excellent use of the space allotted. No vast expanses of dead white anywhere, tight tables and illustrations, and overall great layout. Word-for-word, customers will get their money's worth.

The book starts with a short table of contents and ends with a bibliography, glossary, index, and OGL boilerplate. In between, the book is split into general information for undersea characters and their GMs (128 pages), a complete setting called "The Sea of Ishamark" (105 pages, including 37 pages of NPC write-ups), and "Depths of Reason," an adventure in Ishamark for four 6th-level (land-going) characters (14 pages). There is some bleed-through from the general information section to the Ishamark setting, such as the "Ishamark Mers" text box in the merfolk character race description. But mostly the division works.

Before going through the blow-by-blow of each chapter, I will pause here. The book is well written by an author who obviously enjoys her topic. I am about to pick a few nits as I go through the book, but if the cost of the book in comparison to the contents summed up above seems reasonable for the amount of underwater adventuring your group might do, taking into account whether you will be able to use the Ishamark setting, which requires an uninterrupted expanse of ocean stretching from the arctic to the equator, then you really have enough information to make your purchase . . .

Okay, back to the chapters. *The Deep* starts off with an introduction that stretches on for about 19 pages. It turns out that this is where most of the information about ocean regions, temperature zones, seafloor terrains, currents, and physical and psychological obstacles faced by surface-dwellers are found. It appears that the introduction should have been about a page long and the heading "Overview: The World's Oceans" should have been the chapter title. Perhaps the layout would not accommodate that, and even readers who normally skip over introductions should realize something is different as they flip past nearly 20 pages, including charts and maps.

The author does a good job of emphasizing the variety of environments underwater -- it is not just a homogenous bucket of saline out there. While most of it is steeped in real-world research, there are also notes about possible fantastic elements, such as the Playwaters where magic use becomes unpredictable.

The section on physical hazards for surface-dwellers includes some text boxes covering the problems that will face aquatic creatures that venture up into the air. First nitpick: the text box on p. 17 contradicts the one on p. 15 about the amount of damage Huge and Gargantuan creatures take each round on land (2d6 or 3d6 respectively on p. 17, 1d6 on p. 15).

The next chapter deals with aquatic races. Stats are given for playing delphines (intelligent dolphins), merfolk, selkies, sel'varahn (an aquatic humanoid race), and sharken (intelligent sharks). The delphines in particular may have been subjected to a minor "kewl" lens, as "due to their versatility and flexibility, delphines may choose any class as their favored class" despite earlier notes about the scarcity of clerics and monks and their alignment tendency towards chaotic good.

Notably absent from the race roll call are the sahuagin, tritons, kuo-toa, and locathah. Space considerations are blamed for the absence, but I would have certainly preferred to lose a few of the 37 pages devoted to NPCs in exchange for more information on these classic races and their roles in Ishamark.

A chapter on classes follows. Notes on the underwater presence of all the core classes are included, along with two changes. Kahuna are the marine druids and mariners are the underwater rangers. Obviously, these mariners differ from the prestige class of the same name detailed in Kenzer and Company's *Kingdoms of Kalamar Player's Guide*. Eight new prestige classes are detailed: Wave Dancer for delphines, Sharken Reaver for sharken, and six non-race-specific choices.

Chapters on skills, feats, and equipment in the underwater environment are next. These cover everything you would expect, and they throw in a few surprises as well. The imagination behind the weapon types available for the delphines and sharken is impressive. Then there is an extended treatment of underwater alchemy with new compounds, jellies, permeant baths (originated in Bastion Press's *Alchemy & Herbalists*), poisons, and special items as well as rules for tempering items in hydrothermal vents. This last bit brings us to our second nitpick: the feat Craft Vent-Tempered Item is described once in the alchemy section and again in the feats section, but the descriptions do not match. The first requires a spellcaster level 5th, while the second requires a spellcaster level 9th, which is a rather large jump.

A short chapter (five pages) on underwater combat and movement covers buoyancy for non-aquatic creatures; tactical, local, and migration movement underwater; and combat, which leads nicely to the next chapter on aquatic creatures.

The aquatic creatures chapter starts out with a table listing aquatic creatures by CR. It is admirable in that it lists not only the creatures actually detailed in *The Deep*, but also creatures from the System Reference Document, *Fantasy Flight's Seafarer's Handbook*, *Mystic Eye's Nightmares & Dreams Collections* (both volumes), and *Mystic Eye's Bluffside: City on the Edge*. The descriptions in the chapter are divided into fantastic creatures, creature templates, and aquatic animals. Just over seven pages are devoted to the cetis, intelligent whales, covering their various species. They also get their own list of ceti sounding effects, which serves as a spell list.

The templates include one for mers other than mermen and mermaids (which would be mer-fish merfolk in the nomenclature used here). Mer-eels, mer-octopuses, and mer-crabs are given as examples. Templates for the genie offspring half-marids and the undead udrals round out the section. Finally, 16 normal sea creatures including piranha and electric eels are presented.

Two chapters on magic, covering first spells and spellcasting then items and crafting, complete part one of the book. The spell section includes a new type of magic: coral magic. In this book, all coral "provide a vast intelligent well of magic and power." Underwater wizards can serve as hosts to coral worms to become coral wizards. Thirteen pages of new spells and two pages of reef-related true rituals (a spell type originated in *Sword & Sorcery's Relics & Rituals*) follow. The magic items chapter begins with advice on how to substitute appropriate crustaceans, anemones, and other unintelligent creatures as living magic items instead of the typical metals and textiles. Boots can become barnacles, for example. It's an odd concept, but imaginative.

Part Two of *The Deep* details the history, religion, and geography of the Sea of Ishamark. The main focus is given to Crater Bay, so named because it was formed when a meteor struck the area in ancient times (and the lingering effects give the temperate waters some tropical temperatures). The land cities of Sordadon and Highscarp occupy the vertical extremes of the cliff next to crater bay. Descriptions of various locales of interest (LOIs) and places of interest (POIs) make up the bulk of the first three chapters in Part Two. I am unsure why those abbreviations are there, but they appear beside the spelled-out terms many times in the book and never by themselves.

The setting is rich with historical events actually reflected in current affairs and religious details in the background as well as foreground. My only nitpick here is that I would like to know the alignments of the various deities detailed in the "Gods of the Deep" section.

The NPCs are great examples of what can be done in this setting. All the races are represented (and why not, when you've got 37 pages to play with). A mer-octopus walker below (new prestige class) leads the pack, and before it is finished we pass a ceti ghost, a half-marid elf coral wizard, several tritons, an urdal merfolk wizard, a locathah rogue/barbarian, and a half-sahuagin cleric, on our way to a sephoran (intelligent squid) lich psion.

The short adventure ends the book, and is fairly typical for an adventure tucked away in the back of a sourcebook. The town (port) is in trouble (from undersea piracy this time), and will the PCs help? The adventures skips right over appendix one and presents the reader with appendix two: yet more NPCs (four and a half more pages of characters, this time to encounter during the adventure).

While this review concentrated more on the first part of the book, both parts are equally well done. The first is certainly more likely to be used in an existing campaign, as it is (mostly) generic information. This is an excellent sourcebook, and if you find yourself in its audience niche (someone with a PC about to go under), it is invaluable.

--*Hunter Johnson*

Pyramid Review

Hearts, Swords, Flowers (for Big Eyes, Small Mouth)

Published by [Guardians of Order, Inc](#)

Written by Genevieve Cogman & Alexander Williams

Illustrated by Stella Bell, Germaine Cahoon, Bob Cram Jr., Kelly Hamilton, Mark McKenzie, Jennifer Quick, RefKa, Amy Stoddard & Ursula Vernon

96-page undersized b&w softcover; \$16.95

Shoujo Manga, literally Japanese for "girl's literature," is not entirely new to roleplaying. In 2002, Seraphim Guard published *Heart Quest: Romantic Roleplaying in the World's of Shoujo Manga*, written by a group of all-male fans for the *FUDGE system*. (A revised edition has since been released and made available via [RPGnow](#).) Fans are again responsible for a new supplement devoted to the genre, *Hearts, Swords, Flowers*, though this time with more than its share of feminine input. Instead of *FUDGE*, this new supplement uses the Tri-Stat mechanics of [Big Eyes, Small Mouth](#), the leading anime RPG from Guardians of Order. Indeed, *Hearts, Swords, Flowers* has been developed under Guardians of Order's Magnum Opus imprint, which enables creator-owned RPGs and supplements to be published under license.

To the Western audience, Shoujo Manga is best typified by titles such as *Sailor Moon*, *Yami no Matsuei*, and *Weiss Kreuz*. Its emphasis is firmly upon atmosphere, character interaction and development, complex dialog, and effects of dramatic events. In comparison, Shounen or boy's Manga traditionally places its emphasis upon detailing technology and weapons, and the battles fought with them. A character profile in Shounen Manga would detail a person along with a diagram of his battlesuit or weapon, whereas a Shoujo profile would focus upon the character's relationships and personality, and the weapon replaced with (for example) her astrological chart. That said, the distinct number of differences between the two genres are diminishing, as Shounen Manga increasingly takes on the many elements of Shoujo.

Hearts, Swords, Flowers is essentially an examination of these many elements. Beginning with the basics, it explains what Shoujo is and what the genre can encompass. Its stories can be fantastical, playful, or romantic in tone, or it can be dark and threatening . . . or even worse, warped and twisted. It can even combine these elements, so that a story can be both full of comedy and tragedy, its heroes suffering if only in a comic sense. The conventions for both comedy and tragedy are handily listed in sections of boxed text. The genre is also a semiologist's dream, invariably laced with signs and symbols that signify something further. The importance of a character's back-story and history is also discussed, as well as the consequences of both this history and character actions.

Shoujo has its obvious character types, and these are examined in turn, from the Angstful Hero to Mysterious Masked Bishonen (meaning "beautiful boy"). It also suggests how they might be brought together in a group type: Destined Heroes, Team of Experts, and so on. Like the character types, these are backed up with references to various Shoujo Manga and anime, these serving as examples. This is continued to a lesser extent in the discussion of Shoujo's many themes (duty, honor, innocence, purity, strength, and forgiveness), which apply to the characters as much as they do to the tale being told. There is also an extensive section on Shoujo villain, whose motivations may differ between comic and more serious Shoujo Manga. A separate box nicely suggests a few tips for the villain, such as, "Strike dramatic poses. It will impress those around you." And, "Elegance is good. So is overkill. Try to achieve a happy medium."

Another handy list gives describes the possible inter-character relationships that could exist between both player characters and NPCs.

Hearts, Swords, Flowers takes the time to touch upon some of the potentially uncomfortable aspects of the genre, and to some extent of Japanese culture. Most notable of these are the same-sex relationships of "yaoi" (male-male) and "yuri" (female-female). These are not necessarily sexual in nature, though many are. The authors' advice is that a campaign can only explore this so far as the players involved are comfortable with. The same goes for a Shoujo campaign in general, not every player necessarily happy with the relationship intensive nature of the genre.

After a general discussion of Shoujo campaigns, the supplement presents four sample campaigns. "Mallrats Psi," "Demon Upload Crisis," "Cabal Of The Twilight," and "Chrom Kreuz" (Chrome Cross) each come with a blurb, short descriptions of the four or five central characters and their relationships, plus several plot threads. Of the four, only the first, "Mallrats Psi," is given further development by having its five core characters written up for the Tri-Stat System.

In terms of mechanics, *Hearts, Swords, Flowers* suggests the use of several optional rules from *Big Eyes, Small Mouth*. This includes point-based character creation, the use of Shock Value over Critical Injury, and skills replaced by rolls against stats or a character's CV (Combat value). Instead of skills, there is a new attribute, Enhanced Talent, and its counterpart defect, the Decreased Talent. These work to model a character's amazing ability or ineptitude at something, but without the use of skills. All five sample characters are built without skills.

What the supplement also adds are rules for "Ties and Bonds," and they model what a character cares deeply about. Rated in increasing order of intensity as Interests, Motivations, Drives, and Obsessions, they can include avenging a loved one's death, getting a boyfriend, getting rich, or just eating as much as possible. A player invests 12 points in his character's ties and bonds, the points put into each becoming essentially a Focus Pool of points that can be spent to give a variety of effects; villains also have their own Focus Pools. They include giving bonuses to skill or stat rolls, healing Health points, reflecting a character's learning, editing reality to change an aspect of the game, and aiding in decisions; they can even act as an impediment to the character. In some ways they are like the Personality Traits and Passions found in Chaosium's *Pendragon*, but with a much greater scope. When the Focus Pool points are refreshed is at the discretion of the GM.

Physically, *Hearts, Swords, Flowers* is a slim little book. It is well written, and the authors' love of the genre is very clear. Behind the pleasing cover, the artwork rarely raises above average, making the book look like the work of fans, something that the writing rises above. It is rounded with a handy appendix that provides a character checklist and ends with a bibliography. Unfortunately, this only lists the various titles and their details, *not* what they are about. This is a shame, as it at odds with *Hearts, Swords, Flowers'* goal of presenting an examination of Shoujo Manga and making it playable within an RPG, not just for the fan, but also particularly for those new to the genre. While the authors make plenty of references to several Shoujo titles throughout the book, to those that are not fans of the genre, they lack context. This could have been countered with a more developed bibliography. It also would have been nice had the "Mallrats Psi" been more developed into a more ready to play setting.

With a little more application and development -- in terms of an example setting and better descriptions of available Shoujo -- *Hearts, Swords, Flowers* would have been more user friendly. Had there not been this downside, the price would have not also been something to quibble at as much. Putting this aside, it is nevertheless an interesting read, and it is possible to apply the book's discussion and analysis to Western media; for example, much of *Hearts, Swords, Flowers* could apply to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (and its RPG). Ultimately, any gamer wanting to learn more about Shoujo Manga will find no better place to start than with *Hearts, Swords, Flowers*.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Marvel Superheroes TCG

Published by [Upper Deck Entertainment](#)

Designed by Mike Hummel, Matt Hyra, Danny Mandel, & Edward Fear

Art, graphics, designed by Mark Irwin, Kris Oprisko, Brian Bateman, David Lomeli, Anita Olmos, Scott Reyes, & Drew Struzan

Edited by Omeed Dariani & Kate Stavola

80 cards (two 40-card decks, the X-Men and the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants, each with a foil card), quick-start rules poster, rules booklet, \$15.95; *Marvel Origins* boosters: 14 cards (including one foil), \$3.99

There have been quite a few false starts on superhero games in the last few years, including a couple of Marvel Comics roleplaying games, some collectible card games, and a DC-based RPG from West End Games. Here's hoping the *Marvel Trading Card Game* doesn't fold up its tent quite as easily.

The object of the game is to eliminate all your opponents by draining their Endurance.

Each player starts with a deck, a hand of four cards, and 50 points of Endurance (which players have to keep track of themselves; there's no mechanism for it in the box, but paper and pencil work fine). Not much keeps you from throwing whatever cool cards you like in the same mix, but the most effective decks are built around a team, the loosely defined affiliations to which characters belong. One player is given initiative.

The Vs. System (available on-line at [ude.com](#)) uses four phases: Draw, Build, Combat, and Recovery. The *Marvel TCG* currency is resources. Any card can be used as a resource, but some are supposed to be. Locations, like Muir Island and Asteroid M, can be plain-vanilla resources, but most also provide bonus effects. Plot Twists, cards that provide some benefit in combat, may have ongoing effects that only work if they're introduced as resources.

You can bring out as many cards as your resource row lets you buy. (To use any "ready" card, "exhaust" it by turning it on its side.) For superbeings and their equipment cards, this is the recruitment cost, based on power -- better combat stats, abilities, and the ranged and flight symbols are pricier.

Players arrange team members in the front row or the support row. Whoever has initiative this turn attacks first. He chooses a character to attack with and an enemy to engage. Ordinarily characters in the support row are protected by those in the front row, but the flight and ranged symbols determine who can attack where. They compare their attack (ATK) and defense (DEF) values (modified by plot twists, locations, and so on) to determine how much damage is dealt.

If a superhero/villain is stunned, the card's owner loses Endurance equal to its recruitment cost. If the ATK value is higher than the DEF, the owner also loses the difference in what is called breakthrough endurance loss. A support row character can exhaust itself to absorb the extra damage, but that's all they'll be able to do this turn. If you want to bring down the enemy's heavy guns -- say, Colossus -- you can do a team attack, adding multiple characters together to give him a beat-down. This precludes any breakthrough, though, and your opponent may stun the enemy of his choice.

When everyone has finished attacking, stunned characters are recovered. If you have multiple stunned teammates, you may return one to service; the rest are "KO'd" (i.e., placed on the discard pile). New cards are drawn, initiative passes to the next player, and the battle begins anew until all but one player has zero endurance.

Play takes some serious getting used to. Although the basics are printed on a large poster included in the starter box, the details are much harder to come to grips with. This is not to say it's badly done -- it's not -- but like any TCG, there are countless variations and combinations to explore, and players spend their first few games just trying not to make silly mistakes. The starters are just that -- two 40-card theme decks for a game that demands 60.

The game is quick and streamlined, and its mechanics let nothing go to waste. Your starter has two copies of Pyro, but playing a duplicate gives that character a combat bonus, or it can go to the resource row. Not everything depends on expending resources; often you just need the right number of resource cards in play. It's all terribly well balanced, and the two starting groups -- the X-Men and the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants -- do the one-upmanship thing well. Professor X seems like a tough customer, but Magneto can take him, and Rogue can trounce him, who is outdone by Sabretooth . . .

The boosters are effective as well. Although unfocused in some ways (you can get "teams" of everything from the Fantastic Four to Skrulls to Doctor Doom in one package), they also match the starters adroitly. Multiple character cards with different names represent someone at different stages, like the Scott Summers Cyclops vs. the "Slim" Cyclops. You can count on a booster to supplement your starters. Spider-Man, Doc Ock, and DC characters are also available and forthcoming.

To know how good the artwork is, one need only glance at a few recent issues of Marvel's comics. That talent pool makes all the cards attractive, legible, and easy to use. Once players have the rhythm down, *Marvel TCG* is a fun, functional, challenging game with depth, strategy, and, one can only hope, a future.

--Andy Vetromile

GURPS Fourth Edition Preview: Updating Katrina

by David Morgan-Mar

I was quietly minding my own business in the Pyramid MOO one day when Andrew Hackard said to me (paraphrased, but only ever so slightly), "How would you like to lose your eyesight and sanity by laboriously going through *GURPS* Third Edition, *Compendium I*, and Fourth Edition; comparing every attribute, advantage, disadvantage, and skill; and figuring out everything you need to know to convert Third Edition characters into Fourth Edition ones?"

"Beauseant!" I cried, thinking that sounded a jolly good lark, indeed.

Over the next couple of months I put more wear and tear on my *Basic Set* and *Compendium I* than I had in the entire previous eight years, and became familiar with the wonders of the new Fourth Edition rules.

And what was the point of all this? To produce the latest edition of *GURPS Update!* The previous version had been a rules update to allow people with *GURPS* Second Edition to upgrade to Third Edition without buying a whole new *Basic Set*. But this time around the changes are significantly greater, and doing a similar thing would have produced an update about the size of the entire new edition.

So the latest edition of *GURPS Update* concentrates on the character generation rules. It gives you a summary of all the changes to attributes, advantages, disadvantages, and skills, plus advice on how to convert Third Edition characters to Fourth Edition quickly and painlessly. It'll be useful for anyone running or playing games that they want to convert to Fourth Edition, or for anyone who wants a distilled primer on what has changed in character creation in the new edition.

I included two approaches: *Thorough conversion* produces characters matching their Third Edition abilities as closely as possible, but takes a bit of work. *Quick-and-dirty conversion* gives you the bare minimum you need to know to produce a rough Fourth Edition equivalent, with just a few quick table look-ups. Using quick- and-dirty conversion, I estimate you could convert a typical character in under five minutes.

Updating Katrina

To demonstrate the conversion process, let's go through a thorough conversion of Katrina's character sheet (p. 216 of *GURPS Basic Set* Third Edition, Revised).

Attributes and Secondary Characteristics

Looking at the *Strength* section of *Update*, we follow its advice on human characters and keep Katrina's ST 12 unchanged. Her DX 13, IQ 12, and HT 11 also remain unchanged. The point cost of DX 13 increases from [30] to [60], while the cost of IQ 12 increases from [20] to [40]; the cost of her ST and HT do not change.

Since basic damage is the same for ST scores above 7, Katrina's thrust and swing damage stay the same. Basic lift is a new characteristic, and we calculate it to be 29 lbs ($ST \times ST / 5$, rounded to the nearest whole number).

For hit points, we have a decision to make. Katrina used to have 11 hit points, equal to her HT score, but she has ST 12, which implies 12 hit points in Fourth Edition. We could stay with 11 hit points by buying the total down from 12 at a cost of [-2], but we decide that we like the new way of determining the default number of hit points and choose not to bother with this extra bookkeeping. So Katrina now has 12 hit points. Her Will is 12, as it was before, and the new Perception attribute is also 12, equal to IQ. For fatigue points, we have the opposite situation we had with hit points -- fatigue points used to be equal to ST, but in Fourth Edition are equal to HT. Again we decide not to bother buying the default total back to the old value, and stay with 11 fatigue points, a reduction of one.

Basic Speed is calculated the same way as in Third Edition, and since Katrina's DX and HT have not changed, remains the same at 6.00. Dodge is now equal to Basic Speed+3, rounded down, which comes to 9, significantly higher than in Third Edition. This is to fit in with changes to the combat system. Basic Move is simply Basic Speed rounded off to 6, the same as before. As Katrina is an average-sized human, her Size Modifier is 0.

Parrying is not mentioned in the character creation section of Fourth Edition -- we'll leave that until later.

Social Background

For this new section of the character sheet, we need to know a bit about Katrina. She is from Yrth, which is a TL 3 society, so we record this as her native TL. Let's assume she is from the country of Megalos -- this decides her native cultural familiarity. She doesn't look to be the sort of character who has traveled extensively, so she probably doesn't have any other cultural familiarities, although we could add those now if we knew she had. Her native language will be the common tongue of Megalos -- English -- and since she is literate she will have both spoken and written capabilities with it. This is the assumed zero-point default level in Fourth Edition, so this costs her no points. She has no other language skills listed, so we are done with social background.

Advantages and Disadvantages

Katrina has three advantages. We look these up on the *Advantage Conversion Table* in *Update* to see how they have changed. Attractive is now recorded as Appearance (Attractive), and costs only [4] instead of [5], but works the same way. Literacy is no longer an advantage at all -- we have already accounted for it with Katrina's native language level. Toughness is listed in the table as becoming Damage Resistance 1 (Tough skin, -40%), at only [3] per level! We record this new name and point cost.

For disadvantages, we check the *Disadvantage Conversion Table*. Alcoholism, Skinny, and Stubbornness are all listed as unchanged, so we record those with their old point values. Berserk is more interesting: we see this is given with a self-control number of (12), for a cost of [-10], rather than the [-15] of Third Edition. We could lower the self-control number to (9), multiplying the cost by 1.5 and making it worth [-15] to match the old point cost -- but then we realize that Katrina's Will, which she uses to resist going berserk, is 12. So, for the same *game effect*, we decide to leave the self-control number at (12) and accept the change in point cost.

We quickly look at Katrina's quirks and decide that they are valid under the new Fourth Edition rules, so keep them unchanged.

Skills

Now we work through Katrina's skills on the *Skill Conversion Table*. On the first run through, we'll ignore point costs and just concern ourselves with any changes to skill names, specializations, and other rules.

Armoury now requires a specialization. Looking at the options under Armoury in Fourth Edition, and Katrina's equipment list, we decide that this probably represents skill in tending her bow and making arrows, so we choose Missile Weapons as the specialization. We see that Fencing skill no longer exists, being split up between a selection of individual fencing weapon skills. Since Katrina has a saber listed as equipment, we change Fencing to Saber at the same skill level. Knife Throwing has changed name to Thrown Weapon (Knife), but is otherwise the same. Savoir-Faire requires a specialization, but checking Fourth Edition we see that the most common specialization (High Society) can be assumed if no specialization is recorded. As this is the most appropriate specialization for Katrina, we leave it implicit. All the other skills look the same, so we record them with the same skill levels as before.

Next we look at the point costs for the skills. Bow has changed from a P/H skill to a DX/A skill, and the cost for Katrina's skill level drops from [8] to [4]. She had half a point in Cooking, and half-points are no longer used, but we also see that Cooking has changed from Easy to Average, so she now needs a full point in it to keep the same skill level of 11. Scrounging, on the other hand, has not changed in difficulty, so we decide to increase Katrina's skill from

11 to 12 so that she now has a full point invested in it. We also notice that Tracking is now based on Perception rather than IQ, but since her scores for these are the same there is no change in skill level or point cost. All the other skills have the same base attribute and difficulty, and none are at levels high enough to run into the point cost changes at high skill levels, so their costs remain the same.

Now we can look at Katrina's parry. This is covered in *Defending* in Fourth Edition's *Campaigns* book. Parry scores are 3 + half the weapon skill, rounded down. This makes Katrina's parry with her saber equal to 10.

Finally, we add up the points. Katrina is now a 134-point character, ready to adventure in Fourth Edition!

Katrina

134 points

5'9", 100 lbs. (SM 0).

ST 12 [20]; **DX** 13 [60]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 11 [10].

Dmg 1d-1/1d+2; *BL* 29 lbs.

HP 12 [0]; *Will* 12 [0]; *Per* 12 [0]; *FP* 11 [0].

Basic Speed 6.00 [0]; *Basic Move* 6 [0]

Dodge 9; *Parry* 10 (saber).

Social Background

TL 3 [0].

CF Megalos [0].

Languages: English (Native) [0].

Advantages

Appearance (Attractive) [4]

Damage Resistance 1 (Tough skin, -40%) [3]

Disadvantages

Alcoholism [-15]

Berserk (12) [-10]

Skinny [-5]

Stubbornness [-5]

Quirks

Dislikes heights [-1]

Feminist; likes demonstrating she's "as good as any man" [-1]

Picks fights for fun [-1]

Sleeps outdoors when possible [-1]

Talks to animals and inanimate objects [-1]

Skills

Armoury/TL3 (Missile Weapons)-13 (IQ+1) [4]

Bow-14 (DX+1) [4]

Brawling-13 (DX+0) [1]
Cooking-11 (IQ-1) [1]
Fast-Draw (Arrow)-13 (DX+0) [1]
Gambling-12 (IQ+0) [2]
Knife-13 (DX+0) [1]
Leadership-12 (IQ+0) [2]
Saber-15 (DX+2) [8]
Savoir-Faire-14 (IQ+2) [4]
Scrounging-12 (IQ+0) [1]
Stealth-13 (DX+0) [2]
Tactics-12 (IQ+0) [4]
Thrown Weapon (Knife)-13 (DX+0) [1]
Tracking-11 (Per-1) [1]

Designer's Notes

So what sort of issues came up when writing *GURPS Update*? Well, some abilities were dead easy. Flight works the same way and costs the same number of points -- not a problem. Some required a complete restructuring. Flash, for example, is a rather complex natural attack in Third Edition, with multiple effects. It doesn't exist in Fourth Edition, but there are tools to build something similar, using a new advantage called Affliction. After some questions to Kromm on how various new enhancements and limitations worked, I came up with something that does almost the same thing as Flash. And it's listed in *Update* so you don't have to figure it out for yourself.

And then there were a few (very few) abilities that just *didn't work* with the Fourth Edition *Basic Set* rules. Some are superpower-like, and will need to wait for *GURPS Powers*, and the rest are cinematic martial arts skills that need to wait for the new edition of *GURPS Martial Arts*. But the existence of these abilities -- and exposure to some of the amazingly cool new rules in Fourth Edition -- gave me an idea for another way to build some of them. So here it is, completely unofficial, but an example of how easy it is to customize the Fourth Edition rules:

New Limitation

Skill-Based (Variable)

Your advantage is not activated at will; instead you must make a successful skill roll to activate it. You must buy levels in a corresponding Activation Skill just as if it were any other skill. This means you can improve your chances of using your advantage through "training". The activation skill may be based on any attribute. The value of this limitation depends on the difficulty of the activation skill:

Easy: -10%
Average: -20%
Hard: -30%
Very Hard: -40%

Examples

This limitation can be used to construct new skill-based powers, as well as reproducing some Third Edition advantages that cannot be constructed using the Fourth Edition *Basic Set*. For example:

Invisible Boy is a superhero who can become invisible if he succeeds at willing himself to do so. This is Invisibility (Skill-based: Hard, -30%; Switchable, +10%) [32]. To use this power, he must spend points on Activation Skill (Invisibility) Will/H. As he gains experience, he will become better at turning invisible.

Mountain Heart (M/VH) is a cinematic Third Edition skill that allows you to heal 1d hit points with a successful skill roll (after entering a meditative state with Breath Control and Body Control). Something similar could be constructed in Fourth Edition as Healing (Accessibility: Only in meditative state, -30%; Injuries Only, -20%; Skill-based: Very Hard, -40%) [6], plus points in Activation Skill (Healing) Will/VH.

Dexitroboping (P/H) is an esoteric skill based on HT from *GURPS Lensman* that allows you to survive in the vacuum of space on a successful skill roll once per minute; if you fail, you still survive, but lose 1 fatigue point. This could be constructed in two stages. First, define a *Space Support* package containing Doesn't Breathe [20], Immunity to Cold [30], and Vacuum Support [5], totaling 55 points. The Dexitroboping advantage is then the package: Space Support (Costs Fatigue, -5%) [53] and Space Support (Skill-based: Hard, -30%) [39] for a total cost of 92 points. You will also need points in Activation Skill (Dexitroboping) HT/H.

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



After-Action Report: My *GURPS Cabal* Game

*"These are the Idiots' chiefest arts:
To blend & not define the Parts . . .
To make out the parts is the wise man's aim,
But to lose them the Fool makes his foolish Game."
-- William Blake, On Art and Artists*

Having done this at least [once before](#) to mild acclaim, I thought I'd present another specific example of what goes on in my own gaming, an Applied Suppressed Transmission of sorts. This campaign followed a more standard fantasy gaming arc; whether that makes it more or less useful to other gamers, I can't say.

My *GURPS Cabal* game ran 16 or so months, from April of 2003 to August of 2004. Two, then three, then four players and I met every Monday night for about four hours at a stretch to climb the Tree of the Sephiroth, with instructive stops along the way. My first two players got to decide what the game was, in many respects; I decided it would be *GURPS* on the theory that it would be nice to start running a regular game that I was regularly writing for. I then let the players decide the setting and tone; they chose a dark fantasy *GURPS Cabal* game set in an alternate history in which Victor Frankenstein infused the European aristocracy with alchemical vigor. (That setting may be found [here](#); my players took it from one of the *Suppressed Transmission* compilations.) They set the starting point (Philadelphia, 1800) and decided who their characters would be; both chose magi, as did the fourth player, who joined the game when he moved back to Chicago a few months later.

*"The Giants who formed this world into its sensual existence and now seem to live in it in chains; are in truth the causes of its life & the sources of all activity . . . Thus one portion of being, is the Prolific. The other, the Devouring . . . These two classes are always upon earth, & they should be enemies; whoever tries to reconcile them seeks to destroy existence. . . . Messiah or Satan or Tempter was formerly thought to be one of [these] Antediluvians who are our Energies."
-- William Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (Plates 16-17)*

Given the starting place and time, I decided to begin William Blake as a keystone of the game. At the time, I was just beginning to get a handle on Blake, and was very taken with the quote above, which I made the Secret Epigraph of the game. (I later introduced it into a player handout.) Working from that quote, I identified Blake's Giants or Antediluvians with the Nephilim, the "giants in the earth" destroyed by the Flood, submerged beneath the decanic universe as presented in *GURPS Cabal*. This is actually a fairly reductionist, reactionary reading of Blake, as became obvious several months into the game as I continued to do the reading and research. By that time, however, we were stuck with this "war of dueling cosmologies" as the main conflict of the game. (Next time I do a Blake game, though, the action and magic will be internal to the Blake mythos. Note to my players: You have been warned.) By all rights, I should have withstood the temptation to make Blake's work central to the game until I understood it better. Oh, well; nobody seemed to mind, and the images of Blake's giants bursting through the skin of reality gave the game a real grandeur and epic nature that would have been tougher to handle otherwise. Plus, I would have had to rewrite the *GURPS Cabal* magic system. Again.

In the initial research stage, I burrowed through S. Foster Damon's *Blake Dictionary* for the "markers" or "spoor" or "domains" of the various Blakean giants, and for their complex interrelationships. (My job was made no easier by Blake's habit of changing his mind during the poems' creation.) I then developed a list of major conspiratorial actors as per my [standard operating procedure](#). I didn't take my own advice, and probably over-detailed the background: I wound up with six main conspiracies (the reactionary Invisible College and the Reptoids were the only ones that showed up with any regularity, although the Order of the Scarlet Pimpernel got promoted when I combined it with the Rosicrucians, and the Illuminati became my "catch-all" for non-Invisible College devotees of Orc, such as Aaron Burr) and seven major independent actors (of whom [Benjamin Franklin](#) became a McGuffin, the time-traveler (from a non-magical future) Christopher Mellon became an NPC ally, and the vampire Tiberius Melmoth got quickly written out of continuity). In a word, the setting was baroque.

This may have been because I had fallen in love with another weirdness magnet, the forger and antiquarian Annius of Viterbo (1432-1502). He was a Giant-symp, who wrote a vast treatise on the Nephilim, essentially arguing that they got a bad rap, and that Noah was himself a Giant. Annius forged ancient texts to back up his thesis, and to bolster his claim that Italy was the home of the Giant civilization immediately after the Flood, and hence the most important country in the world and the center of the Golden Age and all of civilization. When Pope Alexander VI expressed skepticism, Annius took the Pope up to Viterbo to see freshly excavated Giant "Etruscan" artifacts, which Annius triumphantly translated before the astonished pontiff. This, I decided, *had* to be a previous attempt by the Nephilim to push into the upper decanic world; Annius created a vast, sprawling genealogy and history for his Giants which I adapted to the Age of Blake.

"Of course, the details given in such a book as this from the wealth of source-material are only the tip of a submerged continent of knowledge -- a country with which Blake was familiar -- and I can only report, from my own explorations, that this Lost Atlantis is a land of treasures and marvels."

-- Kathleen Raine, *Blake and Antiquity*

I brought all this stuff together using the old "occult auction" hook; since the players picked Philadelphia, I made Benjamin Franklin's sorcerous executor the center of the web. He was auctioning off a Blake Tarot card (this was a bit I stole from my friend Chris Lehigh's similarly baroque *Call of Cthulhu* game), itself the source of Vast Occult Power. The card was Lightning, which I decided pictured the giant Bromion. All the other guests at the auction were major players in the occult world; the PCs were thrown into the deep end but managed to acquire the card eventually. I had already decided that Lightning would be a major thematic element in the game, linking Earth and Heaven, and Franklin and Frankenstein. Bromion was the "tip of the spear" as the Nephilim tried to use the Promethean Lightning to recreate the world. I intended to do a lot of in-depth stuff with Franklin, with Philadelphia, and with London; I set up some cunning gates and paths and waited for the players to discover them.

Instead, the two of them added a new player. Their roommate joined the game a couple of weeks in, and played a magical construct made of sea-coal, with an Unknown Past and a hidden nest of advantages and disadvantages on his character sheet. Suddenly, I had the central enigma of the game. His Obsession was ascending the Tree of the Sephiroth. Why? Obviously because his unknown creator wanted him to. Who was his creator? I kept it vague; the construct couldn't remember anything, the laboratory (on the site of [Yggdrasil](#) in central Manhattan) yielded only the name "Morley" and a lead into the realm of the Solarian bird-people (put in to retrofit the Reptoids as beings from another dimension, too). Since I already had some notion that poetry (like Blake's) was the other sort of Lightning in the game, I was setting up the potential to make Morley into [Christopher Marlowe](#), using Words of Power to build sub-creations. Why did Morley/Marlowe want his construct to reach the Ultimate Source? As a worm, a Trojan horse containing a re-making spell/poem.

But what this meant was that my nice, subtle, Earthbound game suddenly became a Standard Fantasy Quest, up the Tree, through the Sephiroth. I forced the players to return to Earth between spheres just so I could keep throwing the Nephilimic plans of Jefferson and Napoleon into the mix, but shortly before Lewis and Clark's [voyage](#) became an epic quest, I stopped fighting it and just let the fantasy flow. The Nephilim were breaking into the Spheres, I decided, as well as the material world; as above, so below. I worked on making the scenery amazing, on building a sense of wonder and menace, with just enough period flavor (Franklin's Lightning Rod as the Spear of Destiny, for example) to keep things strange. To bird-men and snake-men I added wolf-men (who became very popular villains) and bull-men (who didn't). I kept reinforcing the themes of poetry and lightning, and introduced enough elements that when the players found continuities or patterns I could play them up. Each Sphere had a damaged (or missing) king, for example; this was sheer laziness on my part, but worked surprisingly well. I never got to introduce Johnny Appleseed, planting new worlds along the mystical Ohio River, but we did get to meet Coleridge in America, and the infant Edgar Allan Poe.

About two thirds of the way through the game, I had the inspiration to finish it at the Villa Diodati in Switzerland, 1816, where Shelley, Byron, and their set told ghost stories as the lightning crashed around them. Here, in our (and my poor lost time-traveler NPC's) history, Mary Shelley saw her first vision of Frankenstein, the original inspiration for the setting. The poets could be tools of the Giants, and I could rip off Tim Powers' *Stress of Her Regard* for all the atmosphere. Right around then, I collapsed the wave function and decided that "Morley" was, in fact, Marlowe,

explicitly linking poetry and sub-creation. (Since every so often, the PCs would try another means of finding out who built their construct buddy, it was easy as pie to slip that piece of exposition into the game -- their next attempt turned out to be the right one! Who knew?) The circuit could close; the lightning of 1752, 1782, and 1816 could all be revealed as the same Promethean spark. The players could decide what to do, and to whom; Morley's plan could be Revealed and (as was right and proper) Defeated. The characters became Archmagi, and the world was remade without those pesky Nephilim to poke their heads through.

For a game that turned out to be three parts travelogue to one part decision-making, I still managed to be surprised a fair amount. The players only rarely complained about the inherent railroading in a quest-fantasy campaign ("Oh, look. Cairo. Who knew?") and willingly found novelty in the themes as we unfolded them and explored them. They worked together well to manipulate my universe to their own ends, which is my real goal as GM in almost any game. I didn't get to use a lot of the stuff I came up with, but the game's rhythm wouldn't have allowed it. I was a passenger on a railroad of my own making, I who "formed this world into sensual existence" turned out "to live in it in chains." My next game is probably space opera; everyone including me needs a break from high magic for a while. But some day, lightning will strike again, and I'll have Blake and Franklin, Byron and Johnny Appleseed, there to catch it. Mark my words.

Temporarily Sans Power

I'm writing my column earlier than normal this week, because -- if everything has gone according to plan -- by the time I'd normally be late-night scrambling to get my column together, there's a good chance that I will instead be at my very first GenCon ever. So I'm pretty excited.

But, presently, I'm still mostly annoyed, because my efforts to get local phone service -- and with it Internet connectivity -- have been . . . frustrating. After exploring every option (short of moving to *another* state), I've concluded that my only hope is to have the internal phone wire people come and investigate. The earliest they can do this is August 24th. In other words, I will have gone for almost three weeks without phone or Internet access . . . almost a month, since the time I packed up the computer and got on the road.

As someone who is usually more tapped into the information stream than a stereotypical cyberpunk hacker, this has been a trying period.

But it *did* remind me of one of a classic trope for a gaming "hook." (Oh, c'mon . . . like I can't tie *anything* back into gaming.)

Although I consider my access to the online world to be a major part of my professional and personal life, the past couple of weeks have shown me that I can get by without it (more or less), and by improvising I've been able to overcome most of the obvious limitations. To generalize, in the comics -- as well as many action, science fiction, or fantasy series -- there is a common adventure premise of denial -- restricting or eliminating the goodies that a character normally has access to. Thus Superman tends to have his powers reduced, removed, or altered about every few months, and the general upshot of the story is that "It isn't the powers that make him Superman; it's his compassion/skill/character/indomitable will/whatever-snazzy-trait-we'd-like-to-emphasize."

For a GM, this hook is tempting; after all, PCs in many games can accumulate power at a frightening rate, and it's always easier to craft challenges for weaker characters than strong ones. But even so, it's still not the easiest idea in the world to pull off. Here, then, are some ideas for getting this technique to work for you.

First, you need to figure out how to implement the power-reducing idea. Probably the easiest is to say it "just happens" -- the heroes wake up trapped in a cell, wash ashore an unknown island, or find themselves stepping through a mundane doorway into a strange alien world. Although this kind of heavy-handedness might seem to be unpopular with players, in general I've found this hasn't been the case. All the gaming groups I've ever used this technique on have realized the unusual circumstances of the premise indicate some kind of temporariness; the heroes will escape out of the prison, off the island, or from the alien world . . . and when they do, their snazzy powers or gear will be returned. (This is essentially the technique used by the classic *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* adventure **A4: In the Dungeons of the Slave Lords** which has the heroes waking up without weapons or armor as prisoners *in the dungeons of the slave lor* . . . well, I don't want to give anything away.)

Of course, excepting the "stepping through a doorway" idea, this technique usually relies on beginning *in media res* or some other experimental style. Some GMs and gaming groups are more comfortable with [experiments](#) than others.

Another possibility -- one I can heartily recommend -- is making it (more or less) voluntary for the players to divest themselves of their goodies. For example, if a super-spy routinely uses various electronic gadgets, to stop the evil mastermind he might need to go underwater, thus making his gadgets unusable. Or, in a Supers campaign, it might be a property of the Inverdimension to render all metahumans powerless; if the heroes find themselves with a reason to go back, they will know ahead of time what they're getting into. (Of course, the first time they go into this dimension will resemble the "Surprise! You're powerless!" technique above; all latter iterations will be optional.)

In my personal experience, although this method *can* be useful, I find that players sometimes resent it more than the "Surprise!" method. I suspect it's because some players feel that, by setting up impossible situations, the GM has the ability to offer what is really a non-choice. ("Oh, gee; Dr. Cinnaster escaped with the Bombomb through our

transporter to the Inverdimension. Again. Y'know, we really need to put a child lock on that thing . . .") To help reduce potential resentment from the players, the GM should try to keep the amount of blatant manipulation to a minimum, and try to ensure there's a *real* choice. Sure, trying to track the bad guy underwater would ensure that a lot of abilities don't work right . . . but if you can figure out where he's going to strike next, it might be possible to cut him off at the pass without getting your feet wet.

Of course, if the power-reducing environment is an omnipresent part of the campaign world, then the players will probably not mind at all being temporarily powerless if they use it as a "shortcut," information source, or other cheat. For example, if entering the Astral Plane is a route for knowledge in a Fantasy game, but also temporarily cuts the PCs off from magic, psionics, miracles, and the like, then the GM can structure it such that it's never a "required" visit, but the players may wish to go there anyway. Many *Dungeons & Dragons* environments are structured such that abilities don't work right, if at all (*Spelljammer*, *Ravenloft*, or the astral and ethereal realms, just to name a few), and many Umbral realms of White Wolf's *Werewolf* function as a "cut yourself off from power temporarily to achieve some other purpose."

As a final possibility, it may be tempting to give an adversary some kind of "power-reducing ray," hit a PC on the head with a rock so they get amnesia of all their wonderful skills, and some other effect that reduces a character within a game, but isn't necessarily the focal point of the adventure. In general, I recommend against this technique, especially if it only targets a few characters (say, less than half the party). Most players get resentful if it seems they -- and they alone -- have been targeted by the Omnipotent GM Thumb to knock them down. This is *especially* true if the hero needs to go through some rigmarole to return to status quo. ("Ah, *ha!* You're powerless! Well, to regain the spark of magic, you must first climb down to the center of the Earth using some dental floss and a tube of anchovy paste. Oh, and you'll also want some moss to plug your ears from the derisive chuckling of your still-fully-empowered comrades . . .")

However, with some players -- especially those who like overcoming obstacles or wringing out pathos -- this technique may still be useful. Just be careful.

Okay; so you have some ideas for how to knock the poor PCs powerless. Now what?

Wellll . . . not to cut it too short, but now I need to get packed in a hurry and head off to Gen-Con.

Don't worry; I'll pick up this topic next week or so. But in the meantime I'm powerless to continue. (Ha! That's a little self-referential humor right there . . .)

--*Steven Marsh*

The Squire of Bonamy

by [Chad Underkoffler](#)

Genre: Fantasy

Style: Working-class heroes

Theme(s): Liberty vs. Security

To protect their homes, their families, and their way of life against enemies without and within, hometown heroes must rise on the island of Bonamy.

What Everybody Knows

North Map



Geography

The North in General

The Three Kingdoms claim control of the North: 1) *Brochengul*, isolationist, ancient, and mysterious; 2) *Backwin*, once proud but now deluded by nostalgia; and 3) *Firenward*, set on conquest of its neighbors. The Three Kingdoms dance together in a minuet of politics, espionage, and warfare.

However, in reality, the vast regions between the main fortress-capitals of the Three Kingdoms (respectively, *Dernimazon*, *Weisserbaum*, and *Brandauge*) are lawless wilderness, sprinkled with small settlements, chiefdoms, nomadic tribes, and pocket kingdoms. The former harbor village of *Vrai* is one such example: formerly a minor port of Brochengul, it is now an up-and-coming, expansionist city-state, ruled by an oligarchy: the Council of Merchant Princes.

Another example is the island of *Bonamy*, former colony (and earldom) of Backwin, located almost 250 miles off of the northern coast.

Bonamy in Specific

Bonamy Map



The island of Bonamy is blessed with warm (if wet) weather, leading to lush growth on its rolling hills and valleys. Forests of old-growth trees patch the grasslands, while the fields around the major settlements are under extensive cultivation. Beyond the fields lies rough country, free to all for farming, fishing, mining, forestry, and herding.

Bonamy possesses three large towns -- none compare to mainland cities in size. They grew up around the manors of three families of the long-ago Backwin aristocracy which colonized the island, and still bear their venerable names:

Dolarhyde is the best harbor on the southwestern coast, and has the most commerce with the mainland; as the main port of Bonamy, it is the most "cosmopolitan" of the provincial island towns.

Maunburg, the breadbasket of the island, is the closest thing to a capital that Bonamy has, if only for the reason that the majority of intra-island trade happens in its streets and markets. Crops include wheat, rye, barley, maize, root vegetables, gourds, apples, pears, and the (unique to the island) *creamfruit*. Creamfruit has a light-colored, sweet, milky-flavored flesh and a thick purple rind. When fermented, the clear juice of the creamfruit becomes an opaque beige liquor called *korova*, prized for its stimulant properties.

Robdehyde is the best harbor on the eastern coast, making it the target of many pirate raids before the War of Winds (see below). Deep-ocean fishing and aquaculture are its primary industries. Maritime trade is very much a secondary industry, owing to the existence of Dolarhyde.

The mining village of *Shorttop* sits nestled in the foothills of the island's small mountain range, and provides the island with its mineral wealth: coal, copper, tin, and silver in abundance. It is also the center of the island's timber industry, and produces a particularly invigorating variety of creamfruit.

Wats Hill is surrounded by a rolling green landscape, perfect for herding -- goats, sheep, and cattle -- and apple orchards. The region also is home to a particularly tart variety of creamfruit.

Smaller hamlets and isolated homesteads dot the remainder of the landscape, with plenty of space between neighbors. Bonamy is not thickly settled -- the total population of the island is less than one million.

The people of Bonamy fall into certain social classes, reflecting their economic status in terms of land. In rough order of importance are the following:

Largeholders own substantial amounts of land (200+ acres), which they may farm themselves or rent to tenant farmers (called *crofters*). Largeholders are titled "Squire/Squiness." They maintain their local village schools, serve as religious leaders for the annual celebrations and observances, and dispense justice in disputes between their crofters and villagers -- sometimes even called upon to do the same for their neighboring peers.

Smallholders own a smaller amount of land than largeholders (between 50 and 100 acres), and may or may not have tenant farmers. They are called "Franklin/Franklain."

Freeholders own less than 50 acres of land; some simply their own home and a garden patch. Freeholders are addressed as "Goodman/Goodwife."

Crofters are tenants who rent their land from a Squire or a Franklin (with the rents paid in coin, service, or barter); all labor in the hopes of earning enough money to purchase their croft and become freeholders (or even smallholders, for larger crofts). Crofters are addressed as "Crofter/Crofteress."

Artisans (skilled craftsmen and tradesmen -- smiths, millers, tanners, healers, merchants, sailors, and so on -- organized into loose guilds) stand somewhat outside the above structure and provide necessary goods and services to society. As artisans are not tied to the land, their "social level" reflects a combination of the quality of their skill in their profession, reputation, and wealth. Artisans are addressed by their guild rank ("Master," "Journeyman," "Prentice") informally and rank plus profession formally, regardless of their gender -- for example, "Master Smith Londwy" or "Prentice Baker Jewel."

While stemming from Backwinian aristocratic bloodlines in the far past, the division between the classes is much effaced; with pluck and luck, any Bonamite can move up the social ladder. That being said, the largeholder scions of the three old noble families yet command vast power, wealth, and respect, as well as specialized titles: the Squire of Dolarhyde is commonly called "the Harbormaster" (and recognized as supreme in all foreign affairs), the Squire of Robdehyde is also known as "the Defender of the Coast" (and is in charge of coastal defense and military forces), and the very powerful Squire of Maunburg is usually referred to as "the Squire of Bonamy" (and recognized as the first-among-equals in domestic affairs, especially commerce). The Squire of Bonamy is further responsible for the upkeep of the island's roads, runs the Postal Service, and heads the volunteer Warder Brigade during peacetime (sort of a police/fire department).

The predominant religion of the island is a low-key animism/pantheism fusion: there's a single Deity, incarnated as innumerable divine sprits related to features of the natural world. General prayers of need, want, and thanksgiving are usually addressed to the single "Great God," while specific prayers are addressed to the relevant and particular divinity (this tree, this river, this hillock, etc.). The local Squire often leads the community in seasonal festivities.

History

Long Ago (around 10 Generations Ago)

The island of Bonamy colonized during a period of relative peace between the Three Kingdoms. Cultivation by settlers begins. Crown Prince of Backwin visits Dolarhyde on state visit, and dallies with a colonist's daughter; child of this union eventually made Earl of Bonamy for services to the Throne. Bonamite products -- especially creamfruit and korova -- become popular on the mainland; due to this, trade and pirate attacks -- many sailing under Firenwardian "letters of marque" -- increase. Because of the substantial naval presence in the area, Bonamy becomes the favored site for retirement by Backwinian sailors. Towards the end of this period, relations between Firenward and Backwin become tense.

The War of Winds (up to Five Generations Ago)

Increasing friction between Firenward and Backwin finally explodes into war. While the majority of fighting happens on the mainland, there are sizable naval engagements. Brochengul comes into the war on the side of Backwin against the militaristic Firenwardians, but then withdraws support after the Travesty Charge, where thousands of Brochenguldarians are slaughtered through either "Backwinian incompetence" (Brochenguldarian theory), "Brochenguldarian cowardice" (Backwinian belief), or "Firenwardian might" (Firenwardian boast). Brochengul cuts ties with all outside lands and closes its borders. War effectively ends at the *Battle of Kapzhigh* (a major city between Weisserbaum and Vrai on the King's Road), where the spells of Backwinian and Firenwardian wizards interact disastrously. Both armies were vaporized, the city blasted off of the map, and the surrounding countryside devastated by wild magic, creating the hellish landscape known as the Twist. War formally ended by the *Treaty of Tears*, signed by the Queen of Firenward and the Crown Princess of Backwin in Brandauge; neither side is considered the victor. The vassal states of the northern continent are cut off from the centers of their respective kingdoms by the effects of the Twist; pocket kingdoms and petty empires are formed. Bonamy is essentially on its own: luckily, weather and ocean current patterns altered by the creation of the Twist make it difficult for Firenward pirates to successfully attack the island and its merchantmen; unluckily, Bonamite foreign trade decreases.

Yesterday (aka, "the Good Old Days"; up to Three Generations Ago)

In isolation, Bonamy becomes bucolic, peaceful, safe; the major crimes on the island are forms of theft -- cattle-rustling, burglary, highway robbery -- rather than assault or murder, though the latter two are not unknown. In the mind of the Bonamites, the mainland recedes and blurs; they gain their own distinct cultural identity, influenced by their Backwinian heritage, cosmopolitan borrowings, self-reliance, and slow refinement and civilization of their rough environs. The aristocratic titles and perquisites dwindle as commerce-driven egalitarianism grows. Trade with the continent becomes infrequent, and is usually limited to a seasonal flotilla to Vrai. Life is golden and serene.

Meanwhile, on the mainland, warring states around and within the Twist continue to separate the Three Kingdoms from the northern coast early in the period. This stems any major wars between the remaining major powers. However, in the middle of this era, a strong chieftain known as "Brion the Bloody" unites several of the Twist nations into "the Twist Empire." After the death of his first (Twist-born) wife, Brion marries into the Firenward royal bloodline, allying with that Kingdom. However, at roughly the same time, his grown daughter marries into the Backwinian aristocracy. Upon Emperor Brion's death at the end of this period, the issue of sovereignty over the nations of the Twist Empire becomes an international crisis. The Twist Empire falls apart, vast chunks carved away by all Three Kingdoms (Brochengul steps out of its self-imposed isolationism to grab back their "traditional lands")!

Additionally, Vrai begins to grow under the Council of Merchant Princes, rapidly becoming a minor commercial power. At the close of this era and into the next, Vrain trade ships begin visiting Bonamy in increasing numbers. . . to a mix of delight and consternation by the islanders.

Today

The world is darkening. Firenward and Backwin are stirring, gearing up for war over the lands of the Twist. Vrai looks for allies against their southern neighbors. Travelers from Brochengul are on the move, passing beyond their borders in numbers unheard of for centuries. There is the feeling that everything is about to come to a head.

While mostly isolated from these happenings on the mainland, the island of Bonamy is changing as well. The green and golden time of their grandparents is almost past. Near-drought conditions have made last two growing seasons poor, exacerbated by hard winters. Crofters chronically unable to make their rents are being evicted from land long worked by their families; many become bandits or move into other villages looking for work. While there is increased international trade (mostly through Dolarhyde), it brings in foreign ideas and itinerant workers along with foreign goods and gold. Unrest and crime in the major villages is high, spurred by increasing populations of urban dwellers and the concentration of wealth in the hands of the landowners. Piracy is returning to the ocean's waves, while highway robbery booming inland -- and many pirates and highwaymen appear to be "mysterious foreigners." The Postal Service is often robbed, and the Warders are hard-pressed on all sides.

All three of the Heirs to the rule of the island's biggest largeholdings -- Froedrich, son of the Squire; Phillip, son of the Defender, and Meredith, the daughter of the Harbormaster -- took ship for Brochengul after the spring planting, in order to study at the prestigious and exclusive Royal University of Dernimazon, to the confusion and grumbling of many (see below, *The Island Heirs*). Strange figures have been sighted in the highlands and lowlands of the island: figures cloaked in gray, carrying naked swords; vagabonds who spring up as if from nowhere and can instantly vanish into the brush; gigantic birds in the air; titanic leviathans in the sea.

With such omens, it came as no surprise when Wil Sackett, the Squire of Bonamy, fell ill late that summer. The Master Healer of Maunburg -- Salehta -- has worn herself to the bone nursing him, seemingly locked in a combat with Death itself. Meanwhile, the Squire's ambitious smallholder nephew -- the Franklin Otto -- has come to help his uncle administer his duties. While he has sent to Brochengul for his cousin, there are those who whisper that they doubt the mail ever reached the postal ship.

In the meantime, Otto has -- with the Squire's consent, in light of his illness -- taken over running both the Warder Brigade and the Postal Service. Indeed, he has folded the two groups together and increased the combined organization's size half again, in an effort to stem the rising tides of urban crime and rural robbery (see below, *Martial Law*)

Indeed, the Chief Warder/Postmaster General instituted draconian, island-wide edicts. Assented to (more or less) by the aging Harbormaster and Defender, these new laws include an evening curfew, "identity amulets" and "travel scrolls," armed patrols marching up and down the island roads, and even the rationing of goods -- especially export products, food, and korova. (Rationing has, of course, led to a booming black-market trade, bootlegging in korova, and related increases in crime.) A food riot weeks before the harvest in Wats Hill was brutally suppressed by Warders. Some islanders have spoken up against these sweeping changes; derided as foreign sympathizers, these malcontents have been imprisoned, silenced, or forced to escape to the wilderness and live as outlaws.

Right Here, Right Now

Paranoia is in the air. All islanders feel as if they are being watched, because they are -- not just by the Warders, but by their neighbors. Any suspicious activities or individuals should be reported (anonymously) to the Warders. Anyone could be a disguised enemy agent, bent on destroying the peaceful way of life of Bonamy. Violent strangers haunt the towns and highways of this peaceful little island. Individuals *suspected* of colluding with these enemies have been torn from their homes, imprisoned, and interrogated (and some say, tortured). In protest, some suspects have fled the settlements, to take up a rebel's existence -- resisting the Warders and surviving through banditry. And this just helps divide the people even more.

The freedom of all islanders depends on eternal vigilance. And isn't freedom worth suffering a little for? Bonamites must come together in this time of trouble -- only outsiders and troublemakers will protest.

Martial Law

In recent months, Bonamy has been under attack, from outside and inside. The postal service has been interrupted by highwaymen. A number of freeholder and smallholder homesteads have been pillaged and burned, as well as three entire villages (a Shorttop mining hamlet, a Robdehyde fishing village, and a small farming community near

Maunburg). Cropfields across the island have been burned. Pirates have landed on the northern coast. A Wats Hill trade caravan bound for the Maunburg Fair was slaughtered and left to rot on the road. The destruction of the village wharf in Dolarhyde by malignant cunning craft (or was it wizardry?) caused the loss of many goods, several ships, and dozens of lives.

Worse still, the retrieval of a coded letter from a fallen brigand appears to indicate that all of these attacks are coordinated by a single person: a mysterious individual called *the Black Lion* (see below).

So, Chief Warder Otto has taken bold steps, instituting draconian, island-wide edicts. In the absence of his Heir, the aging Defender has ceded substantial military powers to Otto, while he himself focuses on fortifying the main villages and training the Island Guard. And, after the wharf disaster, the Harbormaster assents readily to any instructions given by the Chief Warder.

Some of these edicts (and their rationales) include:

- *Identity Amulets*: All Bonamites must wear an "identity amulet" indicating their name, profession, and home village at all times, or be imprisoned. Amulets will be provided by the village Warder Sergeant. (Foreign invaders will not possess these amulets, and if they steal or forge them, it's an easy matter to determine if the amulet's information is false.)
- *Travel Scrolls*: To travel beyond a set distance from one's designated home village, a traveler must possess a valid "travel scroll" issued by the village Postmaster. Any off-island travel requires special papers, issued by the Harbormaster and vetted by the Chief Warder. (Foreign invaders and black-marketeers will not possess these scrolls, and if they steal or forge them, it's an easy matter to determine so.)
- *Curfew*: All must be within their homes after sunset; anyone found abroad lacking an identity amulet and travel scroll will be taken in for questioning. (There's no reason to be outside of one's village at night -- only smugglers, black-marketeers, brigands, and other criminals need to skulk around in the dark.)
- *Massive Increase in Warders*: Otto has called for all young, fit, patriotic Bonamites to join the Warders -- or the Island Guard under the Defender -- and help protect their homes and families. (There's obviously a powerful, well-organized force of enemies afoot; best be ready.)
- *Road Patrols*: Detachments of Warders patrol the island's roads, and also serve as bodyguards for travelers and caravans. Additionally, Warders are shuffled around the communities -- unlike previous years where they remained in their hometown. (Too many deaths on the roads; redistribution of Warders helps shore up weak points.)
- *Rationing*: It is difficult to sell or purchase food, drink, finished goods, or raw materials for export without the use of a "ration-stick": a thin, scored rod of tin, with different glyphs, gauges, and cross-section shapes for different goods. The local Postmaster controls the ration-sticks used for purchasing goods, while the Warder Sergeant administers the ration-sticks used when selling goods. Ration-stick-segments must be accounted for whenever asked. (This is an attempt to starve out smugglers, criminals, and bandits.)
- *Reportage of Suspicious Activity or Individuals*: All islanders must report suspicious persons or events to the Chief Warder; this testimony is held in strict anonymity. If the report leads to the capture of a criminal or enemy, or saves lives, the informant will be rewarded; however, if it is determined that a citizen neglected to report something they should have, they may be punished (fined, community service, imprisonment, or worse).

While these measures have certainly tightened governmental control of the island, they've spurred Bonamites -- and those foreign devils -- to new heights of criminality. Identity amulets, travel papers, and ration-sticks have led to widespread forgery and counterfeiting. Bribery, graft, and other forms of corruption are growing as people try to evade the new system. With anyone able to inform on anyone else for actions real or imagined, paranoia rules the roost. Rationing has created a booming black-market trade and its attendant crimes; furthermore, a food riot in a hamlet outside of Wats Hill -- caused by a waylaid shipment of ration-sticks -- was brutally suppressed by Warders. (The Warders were particularly vicious in that affray because not one of them was from the region originally, and thus had no history with the villagers.)

Some islanders have spoken up against these sweeping changes, and have been called "foreign sympathizers" or worse, "rebels." These troublemakers generally are browbeaten into submission, thrown into jail, or forced to live as outlaws.

Rebel Groups

There are two groups in rebellion against the rule of the Chief Warder:

1. *The Harrier's Hawks*: The Hawks are hostile to the new law of the island, and attack those trade caravans and Warder patrols that have embraced the new regime. They are based in the hills near Shorttop, and while many escapees from Warder-justice are openly members, they are led by a mysterious person called "The Harrier." They are dedicated to the dismantling of the new, oppressive government and the restoration of the legitimate, traditional social structure.
2. *The Ghosts of Bonamy*: The Ghosts are hostile, not just to the current administration, but *any* administration. They are against both the Chief Warder and the pre-existing social structure, demanding more rights for the crofters, artisans, and smallholders while overturning the powers and perquisites of the wealthy largeholders (granting land to those who actually work it is a core belief). Their base and their membership is unknown, but rumor claims the leader is codenamed "Thorn." They attack largeholders, smallholders, and the aristocrats' Warder running dogs.

Stereotypes

Here are some general stereotypes held by the majority of Bonamites, based on regional origin and exacerbated by the current troubles. While patently obvious that all of the people from an area do not fit these stereotypes, it is nonetheless how most folks reflexively think of "outsiders." (Think of jokes hinging on ethnicity or profession in our world.)

Domestic

Note that each region has a characteristic accent or dialect that a native islander could detect, but a foreign speaker of the Bonamite language may not.

- *Dolarhyders* are highfalutin' egomaniacs, but known for their cleverness.
- *Maunburgers* are unshakably optimistic fatsos, but can really cook.
- *Robdehyders* are utterly pessimistic and straight-laced, but have natural rhythm.
- *Shorttops* are alcoholic klutzes, but known for their perseverance.
- *Wats Hillfolk* are lecherous rednecks, but good with animals.

Foreign

- *Backwinians* are unbelievably noble, incredibly stupid, and ridiculously naïve.
- *Brochenguldarians* are known for their refined tastes, laconic terseness in speech, and inability to express emotion.
- *Firewardians* are touchy and self-important, but generous and flamboyant.
- *Twistlanders* have been warped with powerful wizardry, which has made them prone to insanity and wild runs of luck.
- *Vrain* are friendly and polite, but insanely greedy; they will apologize while stealing your life savings.

Cunning Crafts

Every profession has their own distinct, secret, limited magics -- called "cunning craft" or "craft secrets" -- jealously guarded by the Masters and only taught to the most deserving Prentices and Journeymen. Most cunning craftwork focuses on two things: 1) enhancing the performance and quality of tasks related to the profession; and 2) protecting against situations where there is risk, hazard, or chance -- those things outside of human control. Things that have little inherent danger usually do not have spells associated with them, and magic outside of the scope of the profession is unknown.

Thus, there are few smith craft secrets for drawing wire into nails, but there are small magics associated with steady heating of a forge, proper alloying and tempering, strengthening a weld, or even calming a horse to be shod. A cook's craft secrets include cantrips against a soufflé's fall, removing the bones from fish, accelerating the rise of bread dough, and interfering with food spoilage, but probably don't include spells for influencing the weather or throwing fireballs. A farmer is able to mildly influence the weather and repel small vermin, but would be at a loss in repairing a fishing net or tracking a person through magic. A healer can speed the mending of bones and cuts, bring down fevers, and ease pain, but cannot fly through the air.

It should be noted that while lighting a smith's forge quickly is very similar to lighting a baker's oven speedily, these are *different* spells, with different words and gestures and such. So, while you could place a Prentice of either profession in front of an unlit campfire and soon have a merry little blaze, each would go about creating flame in a different way. Either Prentice *could* learn the other's fire secret, but it would just be an alternate method of achieving the same goal. The only thing stopping them from sharing such is their personal integrity (from the oaths they swore upon being apprenticed) and their fear of reprisal (if they break those oaths).

Lastly, there's a great amount of extraneous information and a mild amount of self-identification involved with learning craft secrets: the individual must have studied other aspects of their chosen profession and envision themselves as a part of it to fully grasp these secrets. (Indeed, this identification is essential in order to glean totally new secrets in the course of daily work -- or through dreams -- which a craftworker may add to their repertoire, and eventually pass on to his own Prentices.) Thus, while anyone can be good at cooking, only someone who sees themselves as a Cook by education or nature gains the magic. This means that few people gain knowledge of more than a single type of cunning craftwork.

Example Occupations: Artist, Baker, Blacksmith, Brewer, Carpenter, Cook, Farmer, Fisherman, Forester, Gambler, Healer, Herder, Hostler, Jeweler, Merchant, Miner, Postal Courier, Sailor, Tanner, Tailor, Undertaker, Warder, Weaver, and even Aristocrat and Soldier.

Wizardry

Wizards have been rarely seen in Bonamy since the War of Winds. Therefore, knowledge of their abilities and nature depends upon rumors and legends. Wizards -- according to the tales -- are very old men who love to gamble, avoid salty foods, cannot drink alcohol, hold deep secret knowledge, and command vast magical powers (if craftwork is a torch, wizardry is a barn on fire).

What Everybody Doesn't Know

Squire of Bonamy's Illness

Is it really a terrible disease, or the infirmities of old age, or has the Squire been poisoned by his ambitious nephew? Both rumors dance around tavern tables, but those that speak the latter too often end up being pulled in by the Warders for questioning.

The Island Heirs

It is unknown how or why Froedrich and his companions Phillip and Meredith gained admission to the Royal University of Dernimazon in isolationist Brochengul, since tendering such permission to an islander would be incredibly unusual. Here are some options for why the trio left:

1. The Royal University is a school of Wizardry, and the three Bonamy youths have displayed the potential to become powerful magic users.
2. The Island Heirs have been fooled into thinking they are welcome at the University, to draw them away from the island.
3. The Heirs have been killed, and admission to the University is a cover story.

4. The Heirs are off gallivanting on the continent, and admission to the University is a cover story.
5. The Heirs are secretly still on the island, and admission to the University is a cover story (see also below, *Who's the Black Lion?*).
6. One of the Heirs belongs to the Brionic bloodline, and is rightful sovereign of the Twisted Empire (see below, *The Twisted Lands*).
7. Some combination of the above.

Wizardry Redux

In many ways, Wizardry is the *craft of magic*, so its secrets involve ways of dealing with the risks of magic itself, augmenting its performance, and perfecting its quality. To step upon the path of wizardry, an individual requires several things: opportunity, memory, insight, creativity, audacity, and time.

Opportunity: Every occupation practices cunning craft in an idiosyncratic way. Each secret of a craft is a piece of the larger jigsaw puzzle of magic. Only those who are exposed to spells from multiple professions with a similar result have a hope of becoming a wizard.

Audacity: A wizard must be bold -- daring enough to acquire the cunning skills of numerous craftsmen by cloaking themselves in the role of new Prentice (sometimes for years), by risking the violation of Prentice oaths (on their own part or on the parts of informants), by spying on honest workers to learn their secrets, or by obtaining the spells by other means (bribery, blackmail, torture, purchase). Additionally, the amount of self-confidence -- or egotism -- necessary to identify oneself as capable of truly excelling in numerous fields is staggering.

Memory: Being able to correctly recall all the different details of the various secret crafts is a necessity for the wizard-to-be. Each profession's hidden approach to mystic power exposes the dimension and texture of the deeper truth.

Insight: It's not enough for the hopeful wizard to simply collect the secret skills of professionals: he must synthesize this knowledge, laying out the "edges" of the arcane jigsaw puzzle. But the pieces in the middle are still lacking. . .

Creativity: . . . so that the nascent wizard must display imagination and ingenuity in filling in the holes in the puzzle. Wizards think sideways, blindsiding ideas, attacking out of the sun. Moving on to fields beyond those fenced by the cunning skills of the human professions, into realms of pure chance.

Time: Lastly, to properly integrate all of the above characteristics -- and the secret knowledge gained through their use -- a wizard needs time. Time to think, meditate, and practice. While there have been wizard child-prodigies, even those geniuses need time to be exposed to many different cunning secrets.

In any case, a wizard's power ripens like good wine over time as more secrets and insights collect in his mind. (A smart wizard-to-be quickly learns the Healing Art and its cunning skills, to prolong and improve his physical life.)

How Does Wizardry Differ from Cunning Craft?

There are three main differences between simple cunning craftwork and wizardry:

1. *Sheer Power:* If craftwork is a candle, wizardry is a blaze (and the magic of an older wizard -- see above -- is a forest fire). This is due to the synergistic power of combining knowledge: adding the smith's ability to spark a forge fire to the baker's ability to spark an oven fire equals flames stronger than both together.
2. *Transformational Power:* A wizard can translate lessons and techniques learned from one set of cunning work to that of another set of known cunning work. This means that a wizard who knew the craft secrets of both Smith and Healer could use the techniques of the forge to create fever in a person or his knowledge of ways to accelerate the body's ability to repair itself to encourage corroded metalwork to "heal."
3. *Reflexivity:* Since Wizardry is the cunning craft of magic, much of the profession's art is tied up in the ability to tweak itself. The existence of Wizardry spells that enhance, change, or counter all magic across the board is a substantial advantage.

So, You Want to Be a Wizard?

Keeping the above in mind, most wizards are self-taught (at least in Wizardry) Renaissance men. Many come from the nobility because exposure to the secret "craftwork" of the aristocrat -- in command and administration -- combines with subsequent education in a profession like Gambler, Soldier, or Healer and the leisure to put two and two together, mystically. However, roughly equal numbers stem from the common stock (with healers, smiths, and gamblers most likely to have the opportunity to learn multiple professions). Certainly, if a wizard sees potential in someone, he may take that person on as pupil and Prentice, but the pupil must still do all the work himself -- learning the drudgeries of Prentice work in several professions -- and possess the necessary characteristics; in many cases, the instructing wizard serves more as tour guide than teacher.

Wizards pursue chance and luck and measure it against skill and knowledge. This is their quest, and it often leads them down strange paths. A love of gambling, games, and riddles is common, as is a relentless curiosity and vagabond nature.

Currently there is at least one wizard on Bonamy: the Black Lion (see below).

Twisted Lands

It's the GM's call if the warping of the Twisted Lands really extends to its populace. While human, inhabitants of the Twist could have inhuman features, ranging from the minor (blue hair) to the major (functioning wings). And that's not even getting into the potentials for bent psychologies or inherently magical natures.

The kingdoms of the fractured Twist Empire are between the rock of Backwin and the hard place of Fireward. If they could somehow reunify (and pick up allies in the form of Brochengul, Vrai, or Bonamy), they just might survive the coming war. Perhaps some Twisted agents walk secretly upon Bonamite streets, searching for a rumored descendant of Emperor Brion . . .

Who's the Black Lion?

GM's choice! Here are a few options and likely goals for the mysterious the Black Lion:

- Twist Agent (searching for Brionic heir).
- Foreign Agent (seeking to subvert, weaken, or capture the island).
- Chief Warder Otto (power, pure and simple).
- One of the Heirs, assisted by his/her compadres (power or possibly outlawry against a bad-guy Otto)
- One of the Rebel leaders (see below).
- A powerful pirate, highwayman, or mercenary captain (who wishes to pluck the sleepy island like a ripe apple).

(See also *NPC Backgrounds*.)

PC Suggestions

PCs should probably be drawn from the freeholder, crofter, and artisan social classes -- a PC smallholder pushes the "working class heroes" vibe. Native islander characters are best; visiting -- and even long-naturalized -- mainlanders will attract a substantial amount of Warder attention. It's recommended that the PCs be teenagers or young adults, at the Prentice or Journeyman levels at their profession, just coming into their own -- this way the scope of campaign can grow as they grow. No PC should probably start as a Wizard. (A largeholder or Master-level artisan PC is probably too wealthy, skilled, influential, and powerful to be a satisfactory PC in the "common man" vein.)

PCs *can* start as Warders, members of a rebel band, or criminals if they want.

All that being said, it's your game: feel free to ignore these suggestions.

Equipment

Weapons & Armor: There's very little weapons and armor on the island, other than family heirlooms or repurposed farming and hunting equipment. The biggest exception is the Warders, who have traditionally worn a leather cap and quilted vest and carried a truncheon and short dagger while on duty. (However, Warders are now going on patrol wearing copper helms and leather jerkins, and carrying maces, long curved knives, and -- sometimes -- spears.)

Suffice to say, in today's paranoid atmosphere, any non-Warder seen wearing armor or carrying weapons is going to arouse suspicion and fear (increase that unease by an order of magnitude for an armed and armored foreigner).

Animals: Many pack, draft, and herd animals have been requisitioned by the Chief Warder for security and logistics purposes. It is very expensive to purchase or rent an animal for any reason. . . and those attempting to do so will attract attention.

NPC Backgrounds

Each character below has their most important *strengths* (generally positive qualities, abilities, skills, or effects) and *weaknesses* (generally negative qualities, abilities, skills, or effects) detailed. In descending order, the ranks are Master, Expert, Good, Average, and Poor. Depending upon the conception of what a character is like, any quality can be a strength or a weakness.

For example, suppose a character has "Spoiled Brat" as a quality. If it's ranked Average or above, it's a strength: the character always gets his own way, can wield undue influence by threatening to sic their Mommy or Daddy on others, might possess lots of cash or gadgets, and people may fawn over them, making life easy. But if the character has "Spoiled Brat (Poor)," this is a weakness: the character has led a pampered and sheltered life, rubs people the wrong way, and expects everyone to bend over backward to fulfill his most minor needs.

(This method of character description is based on the freely-available [PDQ System](#) from [Atomic Sock Monkey Games](#). However, since many game mechanics provide prose "benchmarks" to understand stat or skill levels, the ranked qualities below should be easily adaptable into any desired system and thus do not require the use of *PDQ*).

The Heirs:

Since the Heirs are thought to be absent from the island, they are given minimal write-ups.

- *Squire's Heir* **Froedrich:** Aristocrat, Bookish, Sensitive, Unpredictable.
- *Harbormaster's Heir* **Meredith:** Aristocrat, Clever, Gambler, Merchant.
- *Defender's Heir* **Philip:** Aristocrat, Cautious, Humorless, Soldier.

Franklin Garrick aka The Harrier: A lifelong friend of the Heirs, Garrick had intended to accompany them on their mysterious journey. Unfortunately, his father died earlier in the season, and the young man suddenly became responsible for the family's smallholding. (Angered at the Chief Warder's sweeping changes of island society, and the local Warder Sergeant's abuse of his neighbors and crofters, Garrick has secretly become the rebel leader known as "the Harrier.") Garrick is an Average Aristocrat, Good Athlete, and Expert Hunter.

Crofter Rosemary aka The Thorn: When her poor crofter father was imprisoned for non-payment of rent ("lost" by their largeholder), Rosemary and her neighbors had had enough. Behind the scenes, they began a secret reign of theft, assault, and arson aimed at destroying the wealth of their oppressors. The Warders make this hidden war all the more dangerous, but if they choose to support such an unfair social structure, anything that happens is on their heads. Rose is a Master at Commanding Loyalty, Good at Tactics, and an Average Farmer, but suffers from Poor Health, which limits her physically.

Chief Warder Otto aka Postmaster General, Acting Squire: Otto's mother married a Franklin for love, with the result that he was stuck in the smallholder social class. He wants out -- and up -- back to what he sees as his "rightful place" as a largeholder. To that end, Otto's become efficient, always eking the last ounce of value out of his endeavors. He's an Expert Aristocrat with Expert Wealth, and served as a Warder (Good rank) for a few years before his assumption of the role of Chief. Unfortunately, he is a Hard Taskmaster (Poor), which neither endears him to his subordinates nor permits him time to rest adequately, since he is no less hard on himself than he is on his underlings.

Journeyman Merchant Wiltry aka Squinty: Squinty is overjoyed at the new regime: now he can get back at everyone who ever trifled with him by dropping a word in a Warder's ear. Indeed, he's taken quite a shine to being an informer, and sneaks around at night -- sometimes on a legit travel scroll, sometimes not -- peeking in windows and listening at doors for seditious talk or activities. Squinty has a Good Relationship with the Warders, is Good at Sneaking, and has made some Good Wealth by ratting out "traitors" -- which is lucky, because he's only an Average Merchant. His Poor Eyesight gave him his nickname, and limits his abilities to snoop.

Warder Sergeant Zandimaun: As a Journeyman Miller, Zandimaun was just the local bully. As the region's Warder Sergeant, he's now a bully with government backing. He possesses Expert Strength, and is Poor at Controlling His Temper -- the combination leads directly to his being an Expert Bully. This makes him just an Average Warder.

The Black Lion aka ????: Whichever character ends up being the Black Lion should have the following qualities secretly added to their write-up: Expert Wizard, Expert Actor, Good Soldier, Good Gambler, Good Band of Agents ("the Lion's Pride").

Events & Possible Story Arcs

Cloaked Figures: A trio of strangers is at the village inn, sitting in one of the corner tables. They wear their hoods up, hiding their faces, and speak with an odd accent. What to do? Who could they be? (Foreign legit merchants, bandits on a supply run, disguised Heirs, undercover Warders, the Black Lion's men casing the joint, whatever.)

Old Crofter Withers: Someone has informed on the Vrai-born Withers, who wouldn't harm a fly. Now he's being dragged off to prison. Who framed him? Or is the kindly immigrant really a foreign spy?

Abuse of Power: A Warder Sergeant uses his authority to extort money, products, and "services." What to do? Would reporting it be truly anonymous? Would it ever get followed up on? Should matters be taken into less-official hands?

"Moider!": A corpse is found in an alleyway, stripped of its amulet and scroll. Additionally, an odd burn has obscured the face. What's going on? Is it a villager, an islander, a foreigner? Was the person murdered for their papers, or is that just a blind?

Advice, Opportunities, & Pitfalls

STYLE: Working-Class Heroes

Working Class

Not the knight, but the knave. Not the Master, but the Prentice. Not the individual of destiny, but the man on the street. A hero is the right person at the right time; one who shows courage, daring, and capability in the clinches. Real heroism involves risk and sacrifice, to and for family, friends, ideals, and self. After all, which is more heroic in defense of the weak: a knight taking on a peasant with a stick, or a peasant with a stick taking on a peasant with a knife?

This "Campaign in a Box" focuses on amplifying the danger and need for sacrifice, in order to find what it would take an average guy to dig down deep and cause change. While closer in power-level and outlook to real life than much

fantasy, the distance imposed by the nature and process of gaming can allow a PC to take risks and sacrifices that a player would be hard-pressed to consider.

As PCs act more heroic, they should become more capable. Look at Samwise Gamgee in *The Lord of the Rings*: he grows from a rustic gardener and rube to a boon companion to a staunch warrior. He is not marked by any great providence; he simply follows his heart and his duty, and becomes a hero.

The hardest parts of this CiaB for the GM are 1) interesting players in "just folks" PCs, and making the situation appropriately dire, without being utterly hopeless. (The power and scope of effective cunning crafts may help offset this.)

THEME: Liberty vs. Security

They who would give up an essential liberty for temporary security, deserve neither liberty or security. -- Ben Franklin

Why would the Bonamites stand for Otto's encroachment on their civil liberties? People tend to fear the unknown more than the known, believing that any change will be worse than the status quo. They are used to obeying the law, even when laws are wrong. They are loyal to their society, or what they think of as their society, even if it's changed underneath their feet. People are afraid of pain, suffering, and death -- both for themselves, but also for their friends, families, neighbors, co-workers. And, frankly, people are rewarded in some way for following the social order, and punished for deviating from it. Freedom does mean the freedom to do wrong and hurtful things, after all.

A last point to ponder: one could easily equate Liberty to "Chaos" and Security to "Law." In and of themselves, they describe the state of organization of something. There is no *a priori* moral dimension there; determinations of "Good" or "Evil" must develop from how Liberty/Chaos and Security/Order intersect with the world. And, in this case, too much of only one side is almost certainly an evil: police state vs. anarchy. How much Liberty are your PCs willing to curtail for Security?

GMing Advice on Cunning Craft & Wizardry

If a character wishes to use a cunning craft to perform a task, does it fit the idiom of profession (a smith working metal, a baker baking pastries, an aristocrat administering his lands)? If so, it might work. If not, it shouldn't.

With wizardry, can the character's *player* explain how the knowledge is applied to synergize, and does it make sense? (Using the player's insight for wizardry rather than the character's can serve as an interesting representation why there aren't any more wizards; in some senses, the player's imagination represents the character's magical talent.) If so, it might work. If not, it shouldn't.

If the PCs are in the neighborhood of wizardry (learning new cunning crafts and applying them simultaneously), *let them*. Let them start to realize that they are becoming wizards, and see how they react. (An interesting element might be to have a PC group that fuses their cunning secrets together for effects to become a "wizard" when operating together, even though they are not wizards separately.)

Other Resources & Inspirations

- ['Allo 'Allo](#)
- Cunning-Folk: <http://www.karisgarden.com/cunningfolk/cunning.htm> and http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Cunning_folk
- [GURPS Robin Hood](#) (OOP)
- [GURPS Scarlet Pimpernel](#) (OOP)
- [GURPS Space](#), *Second Edition* -- "Why People Support Rotten Empires" (p. S15)
- [GURPS WWII](#), "The Resistance (p. W168)" and "Resistance Fighter (p. W85)"
- ["Law and Institutions in the Shire"](#) by William H. Stoddard

- *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, "The Scouring of the Shire"
- [Martial Law](#)

The Order Of Blood & Bone

by Michael Anguiano

The Order of Blood & Bone is a cult of human mercenary priest-soldiers, predicated on combat training as an aspect of spiritual preparation for the afterlife. Order units are typically small, highly trained, well-equipped, disciplined, and experienced. A priest of the Order is usually recognizable from a distinct series of markings: blue right arm/sleeve; black ornament or decoration on throat; and silver ornament or decoration on left ear.

At A Glance

The Order of Blood & Bone is an order of priests for whom combat duty is a form of religious service. Since it fields mercenary units for spiritual rather than economic reasons, the Order has significant latitude in picking and choosing contracts. It maintains a strictly apolitical stance and refuses to pursue any agenda except to the extent of protection and development of its individual members.

The Order currently has 168,420 soldiers hired out in hundreds of conflicts across the galaxy. While a relatively small number as an interplanetary force, rumor puts the Order's planetary reserves at approximately 20 times that number. No field unit is larger than an Order "Army" (8,421 soldiers) while some units are as small as a "Hand" (5 soldiers). Larger units tend to involve greater hardware and heavier equipment. The Order, as a rule, handles all hiring contracts, although a very small number of very small field units are given discretion to handle their own contracts.

Each member of the Order is a priest who has been trained and retrained in a primary skill niche, with crosstraining in a number of secondary skill niches. A soldier who would qualify as "elite" in most other forces would barely qualify for off-planet duty in the Order. While off-planet, Order members are encouraged to learn and gather as much useful data and tech as possible. Order members are also required to tithe 10% of all earnings (in currency or in goods), although most will tithe substantially more.

The Order has an excellent reputation among both employers and other mercenary outfits. Common rumor holds that the Order has never broken a contract, although this is not strictly true. More accurately, the Order will break a contract only in exigent circumstances, usually involving contractual breach by the employer. Units may be recalled in cases of threat to the Order itself, but such incidents are extremely rare and do not usually involve contracted units who are in a mission-critical position.

The Order typically recruits at infancy from the children of Order members and occasionally from orphanages. In rare cases where testing indicates great potential, an orphan may be recruited as late as three or four years of age. If a member's child is not accepted into the Order, that child's welfare and education will nevertheless be provided by the Order through an affiliated religious institution.

In The Field

The Order is organized by four fives, called the Four Hand Rule, which creates a unit out of 20 subunits at each level of organization. Each commander thus has 20 subordinates to consider, while the overall structure is streamlined to increase communication between top and bottom.

# Soldiers	Unit Designation	Commander	Total # In Unit Incl. Command
5	Hand	n/a	5
20	Body	Sergeant	21
400	Platoon	Captain	421
8,000	Army	General	8,421
160,000	Faith	Marshall	168,421

Thus, the Order's mercenary operations currently consist of one full Faith of the Order. This suggests that the Order has another 19 Faiths which are not in the field, but the Order's full strength is a subject of much speculation and an active disinformation campaign.

Mercenary units are normally kept small to maximize the opportunity for personal development during the assignment. In rare instances, two candidates with particularly stubborn learning curves will be sent out as a lone pair (sometimes referred to as "broken thumbs" by other order units).

The priests of the Order do not believe in the glory of combat. They believe that warfare is a gory, brutal, ugly business that demeans all people and cultures that engage in it. Their devotion to the craft of war thereby frees others from that burden. If such ugliness as war must be done, best that it be done quickly, efficiently, and effectively, in order to minimize the disruptive effects on all parties engaged. By presenting ready combat units, the Order also reduces the degree to which a culture must squander resources on developing indigenous combat units, which do not otherwise contribute to that culture. Consequently, the Order believes that it does a service to society at large in fielding mercenary units.

The Order also found mercenary operations to be a useful alternative to war games and field training exercises. Of course, such operations also help provide economic support and assist in procurement of intel, equipment, and materiel. Since making the decision to begin mercenary operations, the Order has done brisk business and now exports units throughout the galaxy. Order units are available to virtually any reliable employer, if the contract will present a useful development opportunity for the Order's members. Most employers, of course, are more concerned about getting trained, reliable mercenaries than whether those mercenaries will learn anything.

By the nature of their faith, priests of the Order put no master ahead of the Order. When hired as a mercenary, the priest is earning money while training for combat, which will serve to strengthen the Order. The fulfillment of their contractual obligations is therefore a spiritual act. To fight for another without payment is to serve another master, which weakens the Order and imperils the souls of the faithful. Thus, a stance of strict neutrality is also a spiritual act. Consequently, an Order mercenary unit is entirely and completely loyal to its contracted employer, even to the point of facing other Order units in the field (although never opposing the Order itself), because to break a contract is an act of sin and heresy. Once a contract is no longer in force, that unit is independent of and bears no further obligation or loyalty to that employer, although most Order hiring contracts will require nondisclosure of sensitive information.

The Order is not particularly interested in money and so is unswayed by the offer of a lucrative payment when other conditions make a contract unsuitable. In point of fact, the Order has far more money than it's ever likely to need. Money, to the Order, is simply a necessary resource that allows it to pursue its primary mission: train and build and develop the potential of every individual member. These priests will be fighting a legion of enemies in the afterlife, and so every one of them must become as effective as possible as soon as possible.

Consequently, every priest of the Order is trained, retrained, crosstrained, and retrained some more, then given a rigorous battery of assessment tests to determine the priest's capabilities, skills, strengths, weaknesses, and developmental issues, which are used to develop the next round of training, retraining, and crosstraining. The accumulated assessment data is also collated into the Order's larger database, which is used to develop projections of every possible combination of individuals in every possible combination of units in every possible situation. As a result, the Order has exhaustive amounts of data on individual and unit performance, which allows the Order to develop every individual assignment for the maximum learning potential for its troops. The Order's assessment and placement methodologies have grown incredibly sophisticated and are constantly revised, redeveloped, and improved. The Order's training and assessment branches are in fact its greatest expense.

As a side note, the Order's predictive database has proven disturbingly effective in projecting the outcomes of a wide variety of military conflicts, presuming that accurate data was available. These projections are used to guide the acceptance of mercenary contracts, in an effort to maximize unit benefit and minimize casualties. The Order also uses these projections to develop investment strategies, which allow it to maintain its financial independence and best serve its members. Outsiders are not privy to this database of information under any circumstances.

The Order also maintains a significant staff for the treatment and maintenance of the priests' emotional and psychological health. The Order regards this as simply another aspect of protecting and developing its members. Of course, the Order cannot afford to tolerate defections, so the "re-education" of individuals is occasionally necessary, although this is regarded as an extreme measure and not to be used unless absolutely necessary.

Spiritual Matters

The ethos of the Order is exemplified by its name. In the ancient history of its culture, blood was originally believed to be the seat of higher thought and to have a mystical connection to the spirit or soul. "Bone," then, is a contrasting reference to the physical structure of the body. Placing "blood" before "bone" elevates one over the other while acknowledging that both elements are necessary and interdependent. The Order of Blood & Bone is thus meant to be a union and intertwining of mind with body and of spirit with substance, while placing intelligence over force, spirit over flesh, quality over quantity, and purpose over structure.

This might seem an odd philosophical stance for a group of warrior priests, but the Order's history is the key to understanding its present. The Order of Blood & Bone was originally formed as a protective quasi-military guard on its native planet of Tovallunar (pronounced "toe-VAHL-yoo-nahr"). This, briefly stated, is the creation myth of the planet's dominant religious faith, the Devotion of the First Issue of Tovallunar:

Tovallunar opened his eyes and beheld a mist of vapor and dust that pressed close about him. He moved through the mist, seeking such others as he could but finding none. The vapor and dust collected across his brow and upon his skin as he searched. At last he halted to consider and so wiped a hand across his brow. Motes of dust and droplets of water were flung from his outstretched hand, growing and collecting more vapor and dust as they traveled through the mist. The mist disappeared as the vapor condensed and the dust was absorbed into countless brilliant points that spun and glowed across the sky.

Overwhelmed in astonishment and wonder at the glittering universe around him, Tovallunar felt he must contemplate this creation at length. He knelt and closed his eyes and remained still as his mind filled with thoughts. These thoughts grew in strength and number as he contemplated and so he remained still to allow an order to emerge. From this contemplation emerged Esaras, the First Issue, as his very uppermost thoughts burst forth and took form. Esaras then drew forth the further Issue, who brought forth a series of other creatures and creations, and across the surface of Tovallunar they spread, bringing the flora and fauna to every corner of their world.

Although here stated as male, several holy texts have Tovallunar as being of indeterminate gender or possibly as having transcended gender in the process of transforming into the world itself. The Issue of Tovallunar includes approximately 40 divine figures, but all others are subordinate to Esaras (pronounced "ess-ARR-ess" which translates loosely as "the first"), more formally known as the First Issue.

During a period of significant global unrest, the First Priest of the Devotion feared for the security and independence of the clergy. Citing the emergence of secret texts, the First Priest introduced the Gray Man as a previously unknown member of the Issue who emerged much later than his brethren. Supposedly, the Gray Man emerged late from the mind of Tovallunar as a protective and stabilizing force during a time of internecine squabbling amongst the divine Issue. The Gray Man, it was said, was there to protect the faith and the faithful, from others as well as from themselves. On the basis of these texts, the First Priest created the Order of Blood & Bone to carry out the work of the Gray Man and protect the priests of the Devotion.

Several centuries later, a schism split the Devotion and several claimed the title of First Priest. Torn between competing factions, the Order abruptly declared itself to be independent and dedicated only to the protection of the faith and the faithful, rather than to the preeminence of any particular orthodoxy. The Order has steadfastly maintained this independence and neutrality into the present day, even in the face of a reconciled Devotion and repeated calls for

obedience by the First Priest.

In the doomsday myths of the Devotion of the First Issue, the ordinary faithful are promised a utopian afterlife, but an evil legion of threatening demons and monsters stand on the threshold of utopia. This Dire Legion will be battled by the armies of life, which will be led by the First Issue himself and spearheaded by an array of mythical creatures in his service. The main soldiers of this army are the priests and the faithful of the Devotion of the First Issue, who must lead an exemplary life in this world to earn the privilege of fighting in the next. The quality of their souls, it is believed, will lend them strength to overcome and to achieve paradise. The weak will be impaled upon the battle spikes of the Dire Legion and carried with them into hell.

The holy texts present this more or less as a *fait accompli*. However, the Order does not believe that the struggle will be so simple or so easily won. Nor does the Order believe that mere faith will provide the strength to win the Great Battle for paradise. Led by the Gray Man, the priests of the Order will form an elite cadre of souls which must make the difference between salvation and damnation for the rest of the faithful. With the eternal fate of millions of souls in the balance, the Order must train its priests to be the best soldiers in this life so they can be the best soldiers in the next. Only then may salvation be achieved, for themselves and for the faithful of the Devotion.

A member of the Order is identifiable by three particular markings. The first is a black ornament worn at the throat, which usually takes the form of a pendant on a short chain, although a black collar is acceptable. The second is a silver earpiece on the left ear, usually a silver hoop that encircles the pinna, although chrome may be used instead. An earring or piercing of some kind is an acceptable variation. The third is a blue sleeve on the right arm, although the arm itself may be painted blue instead.

The first and second markings designate a priest of the Devotion of the First Issue and are commonly found among the clergy on Tovallunar. These signify that the priest can only hear and speak with the pure voice of the divine. The silver purifies that which passes through, while the black absorbs the impurities of that which is sent forth. The third marking is unique to the Order and signifies service to the Gray Man, whose right arm has been stained in battle with the blue ichor of demons. Rumor (and disinformation) is that no Order member is seen without these markings. However, a member may dispense with any or all of these markings if necessary for the performance of duties. Additionally, a member may eschew the blue sleeve if not on combat duty, although almost none will do this.

Priests have significant discretion in their personal behavior. They are directed to follow local rules where possible and reasonable, but otherwise they are free to indulge themselves so long as the reputation or operations of the Order are not damaged. Any personal costs incurred must be paid from that individual's personal funds. The Order is willing to step in and settle matters where necessary to protect the Order and its other members, but the offending individual is usually sent back to Tovallunar for treatment and might not be allowed off-planet in later assignments.

Working Against The Order

When facing a mercenary unit of Order priests, do not confuse being holy with being nice. Their rules of engagement and conduct are mostly set by their employer, except for elements of self-preservation and general prohibitions on rape and mutilation. Order units will kill, raze, and destroy as necessary within the terms of their contract.

Do not presume on friendship with individual members of the Order. Even if you have worked with an Order priest in a previous conflict, that priest may be currently contracted to the opposite side of any present conflict. Further, any information you have may be deliberately false, as part of the Order's ongoing disinformation campaign to protect itself. The Order has designated specific misrepresentations to be spread by those priests who are proficient in deception, with transparently false misrepresentations to be spread by those who are less effective.

Be careful of physician-trained members of the Order, which are not limited by any Hippocratic Oath. An Order medic has a set of skills which are to be used in service of the Order. This skill set allows them to heal friendly troops and to more effectively damage enemy troops. Medical training is often a supplement to interrogations skills and vice versa, so that the medic can most quickly and effectively extract the necessary information with the minimal lasting damage to the subject(s) (presuming the situation does not indicate that disposal of the subject would be more

appropriate in the scope of the conflict).

Do not assume that support personnel are less dangerous. All Order personnel are repeatedly rotated through virtually all roles within the Order, from combat to command to support services to training to assessment. A medic may be crosstrained in aviation tech, close combat, and navigation. A sniper might be reassigned as a small spacecraft combat pilot, theologian, or postmaster.

Rank is a fluid and temporary thing in the Order, regarded as simply another means to develop the potential of its members. Most of the Order's priests are given command opportunities at regular intervals, with their performance simply more data for assessment. Every ranking officer knows he or she will be sent back for retraining and probably reassigned to facilitate stronger growth development in other areas. Off-planet command is usually reserved for more experienced personnel, but the central command does like to throw in a surprise now and then. Consequently, the hostility typically found between enlisted personnel and officers simply doesn't exist in the Order's units.

Employers who willfully breach contracts will initially face legal action by the Order. The Order has little interest in litigation, but considers it useful to make a public issue of seeking redress. The employer in breach will typically settle quickly after a series of assassinations, which serves to reinforce the Order's reputation, which in turn serves to reduce future collection costs. If the employer is beyond legal action or refuses adequate redress, the Order will impose the Rule of Doubled Retribution. Under this rule, the Order will detail a number of covert operations units to inflict a specific monetary amount of damage to the recalcitrant employer. This amount is double the amount of redress owed to the Order, plus double the cost of the covert ops itself, plus double the cost of the Order's standard commission for a contract of this nature. The damage might be inflicted on infrastructure, personnel, materiel, administrative structure, or data systems.

Adventure Seeds

The Order of Blood & Bone is suitable for any interplanetary science fiction campaign. The Order can be used as a plot device for adventures, as a background element to connect adventures or characters, or as springboard material for new characters. With a bit of adjustment, the Order can also be scaled down to an obscure priest cult operating strictly on Earth, making the Order suitable for use in cyberpunk or near-future espionage/military campaigns.

- **"Hey There, I'm Designation 7-55/12-362-29-5K, But You Can Call Me Otis."** The heroes are hired or assigned to work with an Order pair of "broken thumbs." Any PC preconceptions or stereotypes about faith, priests, mercenaries or doctors will provide ample fodder to a GM. After a brief period of working together, the adventurers meet the pair in a later adventure without realizing that the pair is currently contracted to their opposition. Again, PC preconceptions will provide ample fodder to a GM.
- **Collections!** The heroes work for a client who has defaulted on an Order contract. The client is now faced with a bill and a friendly note requesting prompt payment. Obviously, the client has no intention of paying, so the matter is assigned to the PCs for resolution. Legal action will soon be the least of their worries.
- **"May the Force be . . . Holy Crud!"** In a *Star Wars* universe, Force-sensitives will be stunned by the planet Tovallunar's resonance with the Force. Funny how myths often contain a particle of truth: in the Order's creation myth, Tovallunar is both the divine creator and the home planet. Meanwhile, the Empire is concerned that an unaligned military group like the Order might be co-opted by the Rebels, while the Rebellion suspects that the Order is an Imperial tool. So in their effort to maintain neutrality, the Order keeps a low profile and zealously guards the location of its homeworld.
- **Sheep in Wolves' Clothing.** The heroes are hired to impersonate an Order unit. Aside from their actual combat duties, the PCs might be directed to engage in conduct that will discredit the Order. They might also face people with a score to settle against the Order. A genuine Order unit may be righteously angry at the PCs' charade, or perhaps just amused and indifferent. Of course, it's possible that the Order itself has covertly hired the PCs as decoys (which might explain why that genuine Order unit was laughing so hard . . .).
- **You're in the Order Now . . .** A starting PC might be a member of the Order, with the attendant priestly requirements and obligations to the Order. The drawback is that the PC has to be under contract to somebody the entire time (even if only another PC), or else the Order might consider reassignment. The benefit is that the hero

will be better trained and better supplied, with the occasional active assistance of other Order units. Additionally, with a PC member of the Order, the flip side of the above scenarios is now possible.

Alternate Agencies

for *Spycraft*

by Olivier Legrand

In a recent Campaign in a Box article, Chad Underkoffler introduced us to the high-action, thrill-packed world of [Spy Games](#) and its game-themed agencies: CHESS, POKER, WHIST, CRAPS and Rule 8. The purpose of the present article is to translate this setting information in *Spycraft* game terms.

In the world of Spy Games, agency allegiance replaces standard *Spycraft* department training. Like department training, this allegiance grants some special talents and benefits. It also affects a character's choice of class as well as her starting experience level.

CHESS Ops

Extra cash & tech: +5 budget points as part of their personal budget; CHESS agents also receive +2 budget points to each mission budget, plus an extra point at levels 2, 4, 6 and so on. They also get +1 gadget point at the start of each mission, plus an extra point at levels 4, 8, 12 and so on.

Elite training: 4 extra skill points at 1st level and +1 skill point at each additional level.

Bonus feat: any covert or gear feat.

Starting classes: Starting CHESS agents may qualify as Rooks (Fixers), Knights (Soldiers) or Bishops (Snoops). CHESS agents are the crème de la crème of the espionage community. They automatically start their career at 3rd level, to reflect their top qualifications and expert training (remember there are only 32 of them). CHESS agents may never qualify as Pointmen. This reflects their limited ability to improvise in the field, as well as the highly specialized nature of their training.

POKER Ops

Natural improviser: +1 to all Inspiration checks, plus an additional +1 at levels 4, 8, 12 and so on.

Deck: Each Poker agent receives a Deck which grants 100% safe communications.

Bonus feat: any style or chase feat.

Starting classes: POKER agents are extremely competent and start the game at 3rd level. Compared to their CHESS counterparts, they are more jack-of-all-trades than specialists: to reflect this, they must divide their 3 levels between their division class (Faceman for Hearts, Fixer for Diamonds, Snoop for Spades and Soldier for Clubs) and a secondary class (Pointman for everybody, except for Clubs who qualify as Soldiers/Wheelmen).

WHIST Ops

UN sanction: WHIST agents enjoy full international authority and jurisdiction, giving them considerable freedom of action on a worldwide scale.

Cadre: +1 skill bonus to all Bureaucracy and Diplomacy checks and an extra +1 at levels 4, 8, 12 and so on.

Bonus feat: any style feat.

Starting classes: WHIST agents may select any class and begin the game at 2nd level.

CRAPS Ops

Extra cash & tech: Same as CHESS agents.

Gearhead: +1 skill bonus to all Computer and Electronics checks and an extra +1 at levels 4, 8, 12 and so on.

Bonus feat: any gear or style feat.

Starting classes: CRAPS operatives may select any class and begin the game at 2nd level.

RULE 8 Ops

Informed: Rule 8 operatives are walking encyclopedias on worldwide politics, legal systems, governments etc. They get a +1 bonus (and an additional +1 at level 4, 8, 12 and so on) on Education checks pertaining to these topics.

Public support: Rule 8 operatives may often benefit from their organization's very favorable public image. When using this positive reputation to get help or gain support from *civilians* (i.e. people who do not belong to the Spy Games), they are granted a free action die on Charisma checks or Charisma-based skill checks.

Bonus feat: any basic skill feat. Most Rule 8 operatives have the Ordinary Past, Scholarly or World Traveler feat.

Starting classes: Rule 8 does not employ Soldiers or Wheelmen. Most Rule 8 operatives qualify as Pointmen or Snoops. They start the game at 1st level.

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WHIST Ops

UN sanction: WHIST agents enjoy full international authority and jurisdiction, giving them considerable freedom of action on a worldwide scale.

Cadre: +1 skill bonus to all Bureaucracy and Diplomacy checks and an extra +1 at levels 4, 8, 12 and so on.

Bonus feat: any style feat.

Starting classes: WHIST agents may select any class and begin the game at 2nd level.

CRAPS Ops

Extra cash & tech: Same as CHESS agents.

Gearhead: +1 skill bonus to all Computer and Electronics checks and an extra +1 at levels 4, 8, 12 and so on.

Bonus feat: any gear or style feat.

Starting classes: CRAPS operatives may select any class and begin the game at 2nd level.

RULE 8 Ops

Informed: Rule 8 operatives are walking encyclopedias on worldwide politics, legal systems, governments etc. They get a +1 bonus (and an additional +1 at level 4, 8, 12 and so on) on Education checks pertaining to these topics.

Public support: Rule 8 operatives may often benefit from their organization's very favorable public image. When using this positive reputation to get help or gain support from *civilians* (i.e. people who do not belong to the Spy Games), they are granted a free action die on Charisma checks or Charisma-based skill checks.

Bonus feat: any basic skill feat. Most Rule 8 operatives have the Ordinary Past, Scholarly or World Traveler feat.

Starting classes: Rule 8 does not employ Soldiers or Wheelmen. Most Rule 8 operatives qualify as Pointmen or Snoops. They start the game at 1st level.

Alternate Agencies

for *Spycraft*

by Olivier Legrand

In a recent Campaign in a Box article, Chad Underkoffler introduced us to the high-action, thrill-packed world of [Spy Games](#) and its game-themed agencies: CHESS, POKER, WHIST, CRAPS and Rule 8. The purpose of the present article is to translate this setting information in *Spycraft* game terms.

In the world of Spy Games, agency allegiance replaces standard *Spycraft* department training. Like department training, this allegiance grants some special talents and benefits. It also affects a character's choice of class as well as her starting experience level.

CHESS Ops

Extra cash & tech: +5 budget points as part of their personal budget; CHESS agents also receive +2 budget points to each mission budget, plus an extra point at levels 2, 4, 6 and so on. They also get +1 gadget point at the start of each mission, plus an extra point at levels 4, 8, 12 and so on.

Elite training: 4 extra skill points at 1st level and +1 skill point at each additional level.

Bonus feat: any covert or gear feat.

Starting classes: Starting CHESS agents may qualify as Rooks (Fixers), Knights (Soldiers) or Bishops (Snoops). CHESS agents are the crème de la crème of the espionage community. They automatically start their career at 3rd level, to reflect their top qualifications and expert training (remember there are only 32 of them). CHESS agents may never qualify as Pointmen. This reflects their limited ability to improvise in the field, as well as the highly specialized nature of their training.

POKER Ops

Natural improviser: +1 to all Inspiration checks, plus an additional +1 at levels 4, 8, 12 and so on.

Deck: Each Poker agent receives a Deck which grants 100% safe communications.

Bonus feat: any style or chase feat.

Starting classes: POKER agents are extremely competent and start the game at 3rd level. Compared to their CHESS counterparts, they are more jack-of-all-trades than specialists: to reflect this, they must divide their 3 levels between their division class (Faceman for Hearts, Fixer for Diamonds, Snoop for Spades and Soldier for Clubs) and a secondary class (Pointman for everybody, except for Clubs who qualify as Soldiers/Wheelmen).

WHIST Ops

UN sanction: WHIST agents enjoy full international authority and jurisdiction, giving them considerable freedom of action on a worldwide scale.

Cadre: +1 skill bonus to all Bureaucracy and Diplomacy checks and an extra +1 at levels 4, 8, 12 and so on.

Bonus feat: any style feat.

Starting classes: WHIST agents may select any class and begin the game at 2nd level.

CRAPS Ops

Extra cash & tech: Same as CHESS agents.

Gearhead: +1 skill bonus to all Computer and Electronics checks and an extra +1 at levels 4, 8, 12 and so on.

Bonus feat: any gear or style feat.

Starting classes: CRAPS operatives may select any class and begin the game at 2nd level.

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The Seven Deadly Magics

For *GURPS*

by David Morgan-Mar

At many times throughout human history, the practice of magic was considered evil. Profane. *Sinful*.

If magic is a sin, maybe sins are magic.

This is why the church rails against sin. It has nothing to do with your eternal soul. It's all about maintaining control, keeping the populace in the dark, suppressing the rediscovery and use of magic. Unfortunately for the church, there are always sinners, and thus always people who are able to use these powerful supernatural forces.

In fact, most people will experience the strange thrill of unexpected mystical power while in the throes of a particularly sinful experience or emotion. Perhaps fortunately, few ever understand what has happened, or make the connection between their own behavior and the events around them. Of those who do comprehend what has happened, many are repulsed by the moral implications and become cleaner-living, more pious people. Anyone who has been living an irreligious or amoral life and suddenly "finds" religion -- embracing the teachings of a church, becoming an active evangelist, and crusading against the sins we are committing -- has probably done so because he has glimpsed the true horror of the human condition and what will befall us if we descend into the depths of sin.

But some people see the truth and embrace it. These are the Sinners. They are the scum of the Earth. The dregs of society. The lowest of the low, the people who commit crimes against human nature and society for the sheer enjoyment they get out of it. The people everyone else would least want to hold any form of power. But this is exactly what gives them their power.

There are seven distinct types of magic -- each controlled by one of the Deadly Sins. Most Sinners are only aware of one Sin -- the first they stumbled across and gained an understanding of. Once they have this power, they usually don't need any other, so they don't find them.

Using the Sins in Games

Because the power of the Sins is derived from emotional states, personal convictions, or the equivalent of *GURPS* mental disadvantages, they can be difficult to quantify in game terms, either intrinsically or without being game-mechanically abusive. The crucial aspect is that the sin must be committed for its own sake, not for the power it brings. You can't just decide to be angry; you either are or you aren't. The sins cannot be controlled like that. The powers only manifest when a Sinner is sinning for his own personal depravity, and not consciously trying to make use of the power.

(In *In Nomine* terms, this would include a mortal spending all his Essence unconsciously, while in pursuit of sin. This also implies that any mundane can use these abilities, while those who can spend Essence consciously *cannot!* However, if an appropriate Demon Prince who is not deliberately shielding his power is nearby, the GM may rule that *any* Sin, committed with "pure" intentions or not, will gain these benefits -- and that the Word-leakage will inspire Sinning in the first place . . .)

Using Sins as powers available to PCs thus relies heavily on GM judgment of when they will manifest. In effect, they are a GM tool, not something the players have access to. In many games, the PCs are heroic types anyway, and should shun the use of such ethically dubious powers and possibly even be working actively against those who abuse them.

The Sins are better used to characterize NPCs. Villains can be given uncanny amounts of influence and supernatural

abilities through their sins. This can work in a secret magic setting, where the PCs are initially unaware that supernatural powers exist, or in a slightly more open campaign where some people know of the Sins and work to suppress them and defeat those who use them. These sorts of settings can fit the various moods of genres ranging from Victorian horror, through film noir, to cliffhanging 1930s adventure. They can also work in mystical modern day settings, from the gritty Shadow War of *GURPS Voodoo*, to TV-inspired settings like *The X-Files*, *Buffy*, and *Charmed*.

Special *GURPS Fourth Edition* note: Unless indicated, all *GURPS* game mechanics apply to Third Edition *and* Fourth Edition. Differences between editions are noted where necessary.

Wrath

But beware of the dark side. Anger, fear, aggression; the dark side of the Force are they. Easily they flow, quick to join you in a fight. If once you start down the dark path, forever will it dominate your destiny.

-- Yoda, *Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back*

Wrath is the easiest of the magical sins. In the heat of anger, people often perform feats of strength or skill they would have no chance of doing in a calmer frame of mind. Wrath is the magic of increasing one's own physical abilities.

The best athletes are usually the temperamental ones. They discovered early in their careers that getting mad when they started to lose meant they didn't lose so often. Bad line call? Throw a tantrum. Your opponent won't stand a chance.

But most wrath Sinners are members of the seamy underside of society, where emotions don't need to be controlled and anger flows freely. Petty hoods who learn how to tap their wrath quickly move up the criminal hierarchy, becoming mobsters and gang leaders. Once ensconced in a position of power and influence, the Sinner needs to tap his powers only rarely, to keep in line any subordinates or opponents who displease him. Don't aggravate the capo.

But some Sinners don't stop there. Their anger runs deeper and has more targets. The unstoppable psycho killer is no mere figment of horror movie imagination. These people harbor a deep hatred of humanity; their wrath bubbles to the surface easily and grants them access to strength and stamina beyond mortal ken.

Game Effects

The first level of wrath is equivalent to a minor altercation or a typical reaction to an annoying event. Examples include a shouting argument, minor road rage incident, giving someone the finger, or aggravation resulting in physical abuse of inanimate objects. Wrath of this intensity grants the angry individual a minor increase in either strength, stamina, or physical skill, as appropriate to the person's immediate goals and actions. For example, a tennis player throwing a tantrum would improve his tennis skill, a programmer trying to throw his computer across the room would gain strength, while a shopkeeper chasing a thief would benefit from stamina. In *GURPS*, this is a single point bonus to ST, HT, or a physical skill. (In Fourth Edition, this may instead take the form of a more specialized increase, such as to Lifting ST or Fatigue Points.)

The second level of wrath involves unrestrained desire to commit harm on another person. Everything from throwing a punch to spraying bullets counts, but only if done in the heat of anger -- a cold-blooded murder is worthless. This grants either a major increase to strength, stamina, or physical skill, or minor increases to all at once. In *GURPS* this is a single increase of 1d.

The third level of wrath involves unrelenting hatred and anger at multiple targets accompanied by extremely violent actions. This grants the Sinner major bonuses to strength, stamina, and all physical skills. In *GURPS* this should also include one or more levels of the Hard to Kill advantage.

Greed

They were once men -- great kings of men. Then Sauron the deceiver gave to them nine rings of power. Blinded by their greed, they took them without question.

-- Aragorn, *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*

Greed is all about possession of whatever society values. If you collect and hoard enough riches, you become powerful. Everyone knows it. The "rich and powerful" is one group with both these qualities, not two separate groups.

Greed is the power to mold society. It is influence on a mass scale. If you are greedy enough, you can control trends and dictate widespread patterns of behavior. The rich get richer. Well of course they do. Greed gives them the power to manipulate society to their whims. And what do they want most? More wealth.

Greed Sinners are often captains of industry. Accumulated wealth gives them the resources to set up businesses. The magic of greed makes them successful. Who decides what new fashions or music trends or new gadgets will be popular this year? Not the consumers. At the top of each successful corporate tree sits a Sinner, exerting his will on the world and making the public want more of his product.

Have you ever wondered why an inferior product can so totally dominate a market sector, despite the existence of superior alternatives? Notice those alternatives are often the products of less successful companies, or even non-profit organizations. In other words, there is no greed behind them -- they are powerless in the face of what really dictates our buying patterns.

Game Effects

The first level of greed is typically encountered in events such as finding a wallet and not turning it in, kids stealing cash from their parents, or minor tax evasion. This empowers the greedy person to plant a short term suggestion in the spending habits of people within direct communication range. This is a minor suggestion effect, which can only make people do things they might be inclined to do anyway, and which can be overcome with willpower. About the only people who benefit from this power are beggars, who sometimes have a lucky day in which they find some cash and then have people behave much more generously to them. In **GURPS** terms, this is a weaker form of the spell Mass Suggestion (p. M68), with suggestions going against safety or beliefs resisted automatically.

The second level of greed corresponds to theft of significant quantities of cash or valuables or major tax evasion. When planning or perpetrating the act, the Sinner may plant a longer term, stronger suggestion in people about what to do with their wealth. This can be communicated by long-distance targeted appeals such as phone calls, letters, or -- more and more importantly -- e-mails. This explains how Internet scammers can actually find people gullible enough to fleece. In **GURPS**, this is a full-blown Mass Suggestion with a duration of a day.

The third level of greed involves major breaches of trade law, safety regulations, or intellectual property rights with the goal of securing vast profits. This allows the Sinner to force an imperative on all people by any sort of proxy communication, including media advertising and word of mouth, as long as it involves spending their own money. In **GURPS**, this is a Lesser Geas (p. M68) with the restriction that it can only dictate monetary outlays.

Lust

Lust is to the other passions what the nervous fluid is to life; it supports them all, lends strength to them all . . . ambition, cruelty, avarice, revenge, are all founded on lust.

-- Marquis de Sade

Lust is the desire of sensual pleasure. Sexual satisfaction, visual arts, sublime music, exquisite perfumes. The lustful wants to fill his senses with hedonistic experiences, deriving his own personal enjoyment at the expense of all else. If he goes far enough, he will find his senses sharpened to make the most of pleasure obtained. At its greatest expression, the lustful gains access to extraordinary sensations.

Game Effects

Lust at the first level is characterized by the transient pleasure most people get from events intense in sensory input. The act of sex, listening intently to music, savoring a fine wine -- all these things act to magically enhance the sense involved with the experience. The tingling of the skin a lover feels is greater sensitivity to touch. Concentrating on enjoying music makes it easy to pick out instruments and nuances of the sound texture. Really appreciating a good wine stimulates the nose and palate more than knocking back a glass of house red. This is a minor increase in only the senses directly involved with the experience. In *GURPS*, this is a level of Acute Vision, Hearing, Taste and Smell, or an analogous improvement in touch. (Fourth Edition has an Acute Touch advantage as a type of Acute Sense.)

Second level lust occurs when the Sinner's every action is calculated to increase his own sensual pleasure. He may take a job and work well to finance pleasurable activities, but may not engage in purely intellectual pursuits or any act primarily designed to make anyone else happy. The ultimate motivation for everything must be hedonistic. At this level, the Sinner experiences all senses heightened to a moderate degree. In *GURPS Third Edition*, this is 3 levels of Alertness; in *Fourth Edition*, it is 3 levels of Perception.

Third level lust is achieved only by those who do everything for sheer pleasure, without planning, reasoning, or thinking about the consequences. When any options are present, they will always take the one that most appeals to their current desires. They have no compunctions against doing anything, either for moral, ethical, or legal reasons. Such people would not last long in society, but for the powers gained: vastly increased abilities in the normal senses, plus access to magical extrasensory perceptions such as clairvoyance and x-ray vision. In *GURPS*, this can be treated as a combination of Microscopic and Telescopic Vision, Parabolic Hearing, Discriminatory Smell and Taste, Sensitive Touch, and possibly additional senses such as Spectrum Vision (Hyperspectral Vision in Fourth Edition), Penetrating Vision, Sonar Vision (Scanning Sense), Subsonic Hearing, Ultrahearing, Faz Sense (Vibration Sense), Magnetic Sense (Detect Magnetic Fields), Enhanced Time Sense, and Sense of Perception (which has no Fourth Edition equivalent, but has components of Clairsentience).

Sloth

Sloth is of all the passions the most powerful.

-- Samuel Beckett

The slothful don't want to do anything. They would much rather other people do things for them. In an extreme state, the lazy person will find that other people *will* start doing things for him.

The power of sloth is the power of suggestion. "Can you grab me a beer on the way past the fridge?" is just the beginning. Most people exercise this power on a casual basis, without even knowing it. People aren't carrying out your whims because they are being polite or helpful -- they're at least partially *under your control*. But most lazy people eventually do get up and do some things for themselves. If only you *never got up*, your power would grow . . .

Game Effects

First level sloth is the sort of laziness most people go through now and then: not getting up to answer the door, couldn't be bothered cooking dinner. This grants the slothful person the power to suggest an action to one person. The suggestion must be communicated by normal means, most often verbally, and can be resisted by willpower. It can involve any action that achieves something the Sinner could do for himself, if only he were not too lazy. "Hi, can you deliver a pizza to . . ." Of *course* they can. In *GURPS*, this is a Suggestion (p. M68).

Sloth of the second level involves inordinate laziness, often to the point of neglecting physical fitness and personal hygiene. A Sinner at this level neglects work duties and cannot hold down a job, unless he uses his power. That power is the ability to make a single person follow any direct orders, so long as they are not physically harmful. In *GURPS*, this is Loyalty (p. M68).

The ultimate slothful Sinner doesn't do anything that he can comfortably have someone else do for him. The entirety of every day is spent in sedentary leisure pursuits, without interruption for any work or household chores. This grants the Sinner ultimate power over a single person, as directed. In **GURPS**, this is Charm (p. M68).

Gluttony

We only dislike the glutton when he becomes a gourmet -- that is, we only dislike him when he not only wants the best for himself, but knows what is best for other people.

-- G. K. Chesterton

Gluttony is overindulgence, not just of food, but of anything. Collectors and hoarders are gluttons in their own way. They consume things, usually the best selection from what is available. A glutton wants it all, he wants the best, and he wants it now.

Gluttony seems a self-destructive and scorn-worthy lifestyle. Strangely, however, conspicuous gluttons are often admired and even worshipped, and can have health and longevity in the public eye far beyond what one might expect if oneself were to behave in that way. Rock stars and the most outrageous Hollywood celebrities are classic gluttons.

Game Effects

At the first level, a glutton feels a desire to have *more* of something he already possesses, either in quantity or quality. This gives the Sinner the ability to discern quality like an experienced connoisseur, or to detect additional resources that will satisfy the craving. This allows the dining glutton to make the choicest selections from the all-you-can-eat buffet, or the collector to find the objet d'art he wants amidst the dusty recesses of an antique store. In **GURPS** terms, this is equivalent to a variant Measurement (p. M54) spell to determine value or quality, or a variant Seek spell targeted at the desired object.

Second level gluttony is the compulsion to *always* have more of a particular item. Chain smokers, diners who never stop snacking between (large) meals, collectors who buy every new release and comb eBay daily for out of print items for their collection. These people gain the power to keep doing what they do. The chain smoker strangely never succumbs to lung disease; the eater may be overweight, but is robustly healthy; the collector always seems to have just enough credit left to purchase his acquisition, and an empty niche at home to stuff it into. These are varied effects that must be put into game mechanics on a case-by-case basis (and are cumulative with the first level effects).

At the highest level, a glutton is obsessed with his object of desire to the exclusion of all else. Nothing matters more than the next hit of consumable or collectible. Anyone who acquires so much on a whim must be powerful, influential, and worthy of respect -- and so they are. People meeting the glutton are struck by his aura of conspicuous consumption and obvious high social standing. He attracts fans and gains positive reactions from the masses. In **GURPS**, this can be represented by levels of Status or Reputation, in addition to the effects of the first two levels of gluttony.

Pride

Riots? But Paris is the most beautiful city in the world. Why would my people feel anything but pride and contentment?

-- King Louis XIV, *The Man in the Iron Mask*

Pride is all about feeling superior to other people. If you pull it off with enough confidence and chutzpah, it will be true. This is the magic of pride.

We've all seen them. Those utterly self-confident people who look as though they belong anywhere. They bluff their way through the toughest situations with bravado and derring-do and, infuriatingly, it always seems to work for them. They never get their comeuppance. Of course not. They don't believe they deserve it.

This is the guy in the sleek convertible sports car, with a girl on each arm, dodging through the traffic faster than anyone. You want to punch his face in, but he flicks a smile at you and you let him into your lane. Then you fume at yourself, "What the heck was I thinking?" Whatever he wanted you to think.

The ultimate proud Sinner is convinced he is the greatest. All others are but lowly worms worthy of nothing but contempt. This is megalomania. Yes, this is how Hitler rose to power.

Game Effects

The lowest level of pride is that small smug feeling of being the best that comes to many people when they achieve something noteworthy. It appears at graduations, weddings, births, and other such events. The proud person becomes more charming and charismatic -- a subtle effect, but one that can be noticed. Even photos of the happy people turn out looking more attractive than normal. In *GURPS*, this corresponds to one temporary level of the Charisma advantage, or possibly Appearance.

Pride of the second level is the sort displayed by particularly conceited individuals who attend cool parties, disregard others' right of way on the road, and generally believe themselves to be the cream of society and the bee's knees. To many people, this serves to make them appear just how they see themselves. Such people are somehow charming, attractive, and persuasive, and can talk themselves into or out of most tricky situations with confidence. In *GURPS* terms, this is 3 levels of Charisma and +3 to Fast Talk skill.

Third level pride means the Sinner is totally self-centered and truly believes himself to be the coolest, most suave, sophisticated, and capable person in existence. In *GURPS* this grants 5 levels of Charisma, 1d-3 of Appearance, Voice, and +5 to Fast Talk skill.

Envy

It seems that envy is my sin.

-- John Doe, *Seven*

Envy is the most insidious sin. It eats the envious away from the inside, as they covet whatever they cannot have and resent those who have it. This negative energy projects outward and destroys lives around the Sinner.

Those in the company of envious people start to find their own fortunes fading. The envier gloats at each misfortune and this just seems to make things worse. Eventually it reaches a point where the envied person has fallen so low that he is not worth envying. Then he can slowly claw his way back -- until envy strikes again.

Game Effects

The first level is a brief burst of concentrated envy directed at a particular person. This is not the vague low-level envy of rich or powerful celebrities that many people feel sometimes -- it needs to be aimed at a specific individual physically present. Examples include the envy of seeing a friend's hot new car, or a co-worker's vacation photos. This projects mild bad luck on to the subject of the envy for an hour. In *GURPS* terms, this is a -1 penalty on all attribute checks, skill rolls, and reaction rolls made during the hour.

Second level envy is sustained and heartfelt. Every time the Sinner thinks of the person in question, he is riddled with envy, of his wealth, house, job, spouse, kids, car, everything. This produces ongoing bad luck until a major incident of some sort occurs -- the subject loses his job, or his spouse dies for example. In *GURPS*, this is essentially a Curse (p. M63) with a modified ending condition.

Envy of the third level is all-consuming. The Sinner can think of almost nothing but how much he wishes to be like the subject of his envy. In *GURPS*, this level of envy is an Obsession with becoming like the subject, and produces

the effect of a 3-point Curse that never ends until the envy stops.

Further Reading

[The School of Tobaccomancy](#) -- Another look at Pride magic.

* * *

*(Thanks to Devin Ganger for the initial idea that led to this article, and Beth McCoy for advice on **In Nomine** effects.)*

The Omniscient Eye

How Do I Make a Hidden Underground Base?

A favorite concept in adventure fiction -- especially superheroic fiction -- is the Secret Headquarters, often concealed on a "nonexistent" floor of a well-known building or underneath some very visible (and sometimes quite famous) structure, and accessed through a trick elevator or hidden staircase. Are there real-world examples of hidden HQ complexes like this (that have later been revealed)? How would you go about getting a massive multi-level superhero complex constructed under, say, your local shopping mall without hundreds of people finding out about it?

--Guy McLimore, Executive Editor of [MicroTactix Games](#)

Underground bases and dwellings have a long history. Some of the first major ones appear in the Cappadocia region of Turkey, where there are at least 36 underground "cities" dating back over 1,000 years. Some allow as many as 10,000 people to hide from the all too frequent invaders of the area for periods of up to 6 months. There are carved stone "doors" which can be rolled into place for security, and long (perhaps as much as several miles) tunnels connecting different areas, allowing for rear attacks and the gathering of supplies. Most have only been rediscovered in the last few decades. This area could provide a good model for pre-industrial revolution underground secret complexes (such as dwarves, gnomes etc. in fantasy games).

Most builders of modern underground bases have been governments, and their heyday came after World War II, with the threat of atomic bombs. One of the best known now is a structure built under the Greenbriars Resort in West Virginia as an emergency retreat for Congress, with facilities for some 1,400 people. Though it was constructed around 1958, it was not until a 1992 newspaper expose that it was officially given up for private use by the government. It includes its own power system, air filtration, blast doors, computers, medical facility and food supplies.

How could such a thing be built in secret and kept a secret for 30+ years under a major public resort? According to an interview with its last manager, Paul Bugas¹, the resort stated at the time that they were adding a guest wing and conference center, with an exhibit hall certified as a fallout center. They poured a lot of extra concrete, but apparently contractors are an uncurious lot (which matches my own experience with them). It is unclear whether private contractors or government engineers did the actual construction, but it shows the importance of having a cover story for what's being built. During its construction there were some rumors about a bomb shelter for Eisenhower, but then they faded. The government group running the construction project formed a cover company, Forsythe Associates, which supposedly provided A/V services to the hotel. The dozen on-site employees actually spent about 20% of their time fulfilling duties related to the cover story, and the rest managing the underground base. Security-cleared hotel employees even helped with routine chores. The employees lived in the area, and told people who asked about their management/electronics consulting firm. Paul states that there were never really any close calls security-wise until the Washington Post exposed them.

While this facility had the excuse of National Security to protect it, it shows that an ordinary company which owned such a resort could employ similar measures to build an underground base. And companies have; as recently as 1970, Standard Oil had a base 400 feet underground in New Jersey, later used for corporate record storage by Iron Mountain Atomic Storage.² AT&T was known to have at least three underground centers for emergency call management, with executive living quarters and computer systems, one of which is near Netcong, NJ.³ The same report stated that nine of the 12 Federal Reserve Banks (a government run system but with extensive connections to the private sector) have underground records facilities. There are known to be abandoned subway stations under New York City, and occasionally one is rediscovered.⁴

The Magic Kingdom complex at Walt Disney World in Florida is an interesting case; for those of you who have been

there, have you ever seen an employee off-duty? Eating at a food stand, using a bathroom, and so on? Probably not. What the visitors see is actually the top floor of a multilevel structure. If you enter from the back, you climb several flights of stairs to come in at "the ground level," as seen by a tourist. From any point in the Magic Kingdom, an employee can reach a door to this complex within a few hundred yards. They have their own lower level facilities to deliver food to the restaurants, take breaks during the day, and carry out the other invisible chores needed to run the place. In fact, the TV cameras you see yourself on while exiting Space Mountain have their views repeated down in a large employee cafeteria. (This has led to considerable amusement value when people thought they were alone, I'm told.) Yet how many visitors have ever noticed these access doors? Clever design makes them inconspicuous; the paths all lead away from them, they are around corners, they are unlabeled, and so on. At Disneyland in California, Club 33 is the only place in the Disney complex where liquor is served. Membership is required, and passwords were used before the development of swipe cards. It's an otherwise inaccessible complex of rooms on the second floor of the New Orleans square building. Clearly, it's possible to have a secret complex in an area which millions of people pass through every year.

Having secret floors in a building is even easier; if none of the guests coming into a hotel get assigned to floor 7, how often is anyone going to wander around there? Put a guy with coveralls working on some pipes by the elevator and block off the hall with orange cones, and you are ready to go. It's quite common in business hotels now for penthouse floors and such to be accessible only with room keys. For more concealment, build it into the design; a campus building near me has a spiral floor plan. This has the potential to allow a "double helix" type layout, in which the public accesses one spiral while another can track up to the top and occupy as much as half the building volume without ever being noticed. In the Town hotel that Lunacon was held at for years in Rye, New York, fondly known as the "Escher Hotel," you can walk from the third floor to the fifth without ever going up or down stairs. It may be built on a hill so it has different numbers of floors in different areas but it's hard to say. Like many hotels, the former GenCon hotel had no 13th floor, though this is potentially a bit of a giveaway that you have something to hide. In a modern hotel with multiple floors and windows which don't open, how can you tell from the inside if there are 10 or 11 floors beneath you? Why, then, give it a number at all? The easiest place to hide a floor is near the ground floor, where there is more space between floors for ballrooms, lobbys, and staff operations and there are often several floors without numbers anyway. Finally, there are unconfirmed reports that the White House has at least 17 levels beneath it, accessed by specific elevators.⁵

All this is fairly easy if you own the property up top, but what if you want to build under the Statue of Liberty? Physically it's quite possible, by drilling in from the side. There are regular legal disputes over "slant drilling," where an oil company drills from its property sideways a few miles to end up under someone else's property. If you are careful not to break any gas lines/water mains/phone conduits, there really isn't any way you could get caught. The most challenging part would be finding an outfit that is capable enough to build your base, but willing to take your word that it's okay to make a tunnel "half a mile that way" without checking on it. Good connections might be needed here, but that's not uncommon for rich, powerful Bruce Wayne or Lex Luthor types who are likely to build such bases. You might also be able to use some preexisting caverns; under the town of Brewster New York are warrens of mines dug in the 1800s, abandoned when the ore ran out or better deposits were found out west. Very few people know about them now, but New England is full of these old, poorly documented places.

So how can you build your Dream Base in a game? If you are in a hurry, your Wealthy Patron can merely buy an underground base, as there are numerous former missile silos for sale at this time.⁶ But if you want a specific site under a famous landmark, you will really have to build it yourself. The leading supplier of Tunnel Boring Machines (TBMs) is Robbins company. In business since 1951 in the United States, they claim to have bored over 2,100 miles of tunnels with their equipment, ranging from six feet to almost 38 feet in diameter. They provide consulting and project management services, so could handle both design and construction tasks. Atlas Copco, a Swedish company, has a Construction and Mining Technique division which "is a leading supplier to large infrastructure projects, including in particular, power plant and transportation link construction projects, as well as global mining companies." Interestingly, in the 1950s Sweden apparently had an underground industrial complex employing 3,000 people which was entered through what looked like an ordinary farmhouse; its walls swung open like garage doors on concealed hinges to admit trucks.⁷

Extractive industries like oil, power and mining companies are excellent covers for underground projects, as they often undertake large construction projects which are kept quiet for competitive reasons. "Military-Industrial Complex" companies like Bechtel undertake construction projects for both governments (the Hoover Dam, San Francisco's BART subways, and Iraq reconstruction) and private companies (aluminum smelters in Canada and the Chunnel between England and France). While they are the largest, their competitors Fluor and Halliburton could easily handle the demands of an ordinary project. Ironically, private companies are often more adept at keeping secrets than governments are, as the Coca-Cola formula has shown over the last century. Anyone wealthy enough to contemplate a serious underground Secret Headquarters probably has the contacts and credit rating to interest an infrastructure company like that.

For smaller-scale projects, talk to the miners in Coober Pedy, Australia. Many private homes are built underground there, for reasons of both temperature control and cost (most building materials have to be trucked 1,000 miles or so to the interior of the country). The miners are secretive, since their livelihoods depend on keeping their opal strikes hidden, and have a strong anti-establishment bent. Construction is remarkably fast; a 3-bedroom house with picture windows can be hollowed out and sealed in a few days.

The next key is to have some kind of legitimate cover project going on at the same time. Construct your own building nearby, or at least carrying out major expansions and renovations. This gives a reason to have lots of workmen hanging around and an excuse for ordering tons of supplies. Compartmentalize your operation, so that different outfits are in charge of different parts of the project, or even carry out different phases (company A tunnels and builds the walls, company B installs the Giant Laser after A has left) is also a traditional technique, dating back to the middle ages.

Finally, it's a good idea to have cover companies. With the popularity of Bahamas-based corporations for tax reduction, including some for Fortune 500 companies, off-shore entities hardly raise questions now, but It's worth pointing out that Forsythe Associates at the Greenbriars complex didn't even have to go to that extreme. The more boring the better. Several houses in my neighborhood are now registered in the names of Living Trusts, a completely legal device to avoid probate court which can be set up without even using a lawyer and which serves to disguise the true ownership of property.

Higher tech tunneling solutions also exist. Cutting equipment based on electron beams, ultrasonics, laser rock softening, plasma arcs and others have been proposed, though no large-scale machines seem to have been built. A particularly interesting approach is nuclear powered tunnelers, for which several patents exist.⁸ The nice feature of these is that as designed (as far as public records show none have been built) they generate no waste or muck to be disposed of. They use high pressure to cause cracking in the rocks around them, and melt the rock with the nuclear reactor, causing it to flow into the cracks. This provides a stabilized tunnel with its own liner, and allows indefinite tunneling without need for support equipment to remove pulverized rock. No piles of tailings to be removed and dumped means better concealment of the operation. This could be done with a large electrical source as well, though cables would be needed. And even better, since the patents have expired, no royalties need be paid!

To summarize, there are many examples of underground government bases which are still nominally secret but fairly well known⁹ such as Cheyenne Mountain in Colorado, which features prominently in the Niven/Pournelle book *Footfall*, Mount Weather in Virginia, and "Site R" or Raven Rock in southern Pennsylvania. Companies as innocuous as Disney have "secret facilities" as well. With some money and time there seem to be no real obstacles to setting up hidden bases with surprisingly little public curiosity. So go ahead, build them with impunity!

--Gregory Stauf

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Sages theorize that the Omniscient Eye might actually be composed of a panel of Experts chosen through mysterious and arcane means. Regardless, the Omniscient Eye is benevolent, and every other week it is willing to share its lore with all. Or, at least, with all with valid *Pyramid* subscriptions.

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Do you have a question for the Omniscient Eye? Feel free to send it to pyramidquestions@yahogroups.com, and the Omniscient Eye might answer it!

Pyramid Review

Now Playing RPG

Published by [Carnivore Games](#)

Written & Designed by Bradford Younie

Edited by Ralph Mack, Carol Pandolph, Joe Pandolph, & Derek "Malcus" Belanger

Art & Maps by Thomas Denmark, Ben Van Dyken, Anna M. Dobritt, Ralph Mack, & Bradford Younie

224-page b&w hardcover; \$35.00

If you're tired of waiting for game companies to pool enough money to score a license for your favorite TV show, Carnivore Games may have the answer. In *Now Playing*, you're offered the chance to turn any TV show into a roleplaying experience.

Using the [Fudge](#) engine as its system, the game tries to provide a workable method for translating the facets of television shows to the medium of the roleplaying game. Basing your campaign off *Fudge* means plenty of customization for the game you want to run, and that's the first half of this book. Characters are called actors, the equipment is from the props department, the GM is the Director, and so on.

The book includes a campaign setting, FPI. The Foundation for Paranormal Investigation is an organization founded by Colonel Buckingham, an eccentric former member of the British army whose bizarre experiences in the Middle East have tipped him off to otherworldly goings-on. He hosts a library and computer database that compile all the findings of his teams worldwide.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

There are two adventures for the FPI background to get things started. "The Big Dig" (also available as a .PDF at the website) subjects the team to the ravages of some unknown creature in the tunnel being built under the streets of Boston. The workers are being killed in gruesome fashion. The second story, "Haunted Holiday," sends players to see old friends at their Victorian house, but none of the former occupants -- living or dead -- want to give up their claim.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Sandwiched in the middle are the tips and tricks for turning television into a game. TV shows are examined by genre or format, and most of the popular settings are included. There are a number of not-so-obvious choices as well -- sitcoms and soap operas, for example -- but the book is nothing if not complete. Putting together a campaign is likened to the sections of shows and movies -- games are broken down into shows, seasons, "beats," etc.

The art is complementary, and while it does show a bit of bias toward popular genre television, it's quality material that spans several types of show. There are a few missteps, especially at the front of the book, but the condition improves as the reader progresses.

The book is an uneven mix of insight and oversight. The campaign setting is covered in spelling and grammar errors that don't seem to plague the rest of the book. The colonel depends on his teams to fund themselves for the most part, in spite of being rich enough to afford his own castle. In some instances you're given the impression that this setting isn't entirely about the supernatural -- that you're expected to disprove things as often as prove them -- but the material assumes weird things are real. Two of the NPCs in "The Big Dig" are named Bob, and one of the "could be used as a PC" NPCs is named Robert.

Some of the GM advice can amount to "props are good -- try using props" or something similarly unspecific. This could just be that several sections tell the reader a particular subject will be dealt with in greater detail in a later chapter, and by the time you get there it's hard to tell if you've been given enough coherent instruction in the tips offered. Collapsing the information into tighter groups could have helped here, but even then some subjects only get a slim paragraph -- good news in the rules section, not so good for eerie creature descriptions or advice on working with psychic abilities and superpowers.

Not that the book is bereft of good GM guidelines. Condensing action (like space battles) is a big help, and the dissection of the shows is what you're buying the book for. It has, and urges, enthusiasm for its subject and the job of referee like few other books do, and while using TV's take on drama doesn't necessarily spell innovation, the perspective is a fresh one. An entire season of *FPI* is written out, a few lines per episode, and this gives readers a good idea of the sort of forethought that can make a successful show.

The TV-to-RPG translation "system" is fairly thin; rather, it's no better or worse than the ease one finds for any transition involving the *Fudge* method. Anyone expecting it to be as literal as, say, a *GURPS*-to-*HERO* character conversion will find the hints here are much broader and more conceptual than anything else. The new lens *Now Playing* offers its readers is worth consideration, though it must be balanced against the search for the diamonds in the rough and the hardbound price tag.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Medieval Player's Manual (for d20 System)

Published by [Green Ronin Publishing](#)

Written by David Chart

Illustrated by Caleb Cleveland, Kevin Crossley, Richard Decker, Mike Vilardi, & Lisa Wood

128-page b&w softcover; \$22.95

After the excesses and exuberance of *Mindshadows*, the fourth title in Green Ronin's Mythic Vistas line is very restrained affair. The *Medieval Player's Manual* is a *d20 System* treatment of historical medievalism over Hollywood heroics. It is designed as a roleplaying game set in Western Europe during the age of Christianity and Crusade. More specifically, this is a Middle Ages set supplement supported by a campaign that takes place in England and Western France following the successful invasion by William the Bastard in 1066. It is penned by David Chart, the line editor for Atlas Games' *Ars Magica* RPG, and author of several *d20 System* supplements. Primarily for Atlas Games' Penumbra imprint, they include the recent *Love & War*, a *d20 System* treatment of knights and chivalry; the excellent treasure-free campaign [Splintered Peace](#); and *Black Monks of Glastonbury*, the *d20 System/Ars Magica Coriolis* crossover scenario. It is this prior experience that would suggest that Chart is the best man to have written this book.

The *Medieval Player's Manual* introduces a long list of changes to the *d20 System* as found in the *Player's Handbook*. The first of these is the strong role that religion plays in the setting, particularly Christianity. Every character is presumed to be Christian, and indeed, there are a plethora of in-game benefits to keeping to Christian ideals. Of course, player characters might be able to side-step this to some extent, since the Normans were great Churchmen rather than great Christians, but otherwise characters are expected to remain in a state of grace. The book includes an explanation of the Christian theology of the period, which should help in the playing many of the classes given in the supplement. This description thankfully works to inform rather than proselytise. It is possible to play a character of other faiths -- particularly of Islam and Judaism, but both lie outside the scope of this supplement.

The second major change is a reduction in the theatrics and feel of magic. In arcane terms, the Wizard class is gone, while the Sorcerer is really only acceptable with an unusual background, such as Merlin's half-demon heritage. In their stead are classes that use the new forms of mostly feat-based magic -- alchemy, astrology, astral charms, folk charms, and theurgy. The first of the new classes is the Cunning Man, who are wise peasants that pass on Folk Charms, prayers, or items that invoke simple aids or protections. Natural Magicians study both alchemy and astrology, the latter to make natal, political, and electoral forecasts besides those of the ordinary kind. While the Church frowns upon these types of magic, it regards theurgy -- the summoning and command of spirits as studied by the Theurge -- as being sinful. The Theurge can advance into one of two Prestige Classes: the evil Necromancer; and the potentially saintly Theophanist, who attempt to summon the ultimate spirit -- God Himself.

Several new religious characters are introduced that take precedence over the more militant Cleric class of traditional *Dungeons & Dragons*, which would face a singular problem in this setting: Fighting, particularly if aggressive in nature, is sinful. Members of the Priest class are ordained to serve the people in their parishes, and can only cast non-evil spells, and even then after performing an hour-long Mass. Clerics and Paladins are suited to the period, if not the setting. They are difficult to play given the Church's stance on fighting *and* that they are more likely to be serving in Crusades which were first preached in this period. Both the Crusader and the Paladin-like Templar Prestige Class also support this somewhat off-stage aspect of the setting.

The three Holy classes make use of another "form" of divine magic, but which is regarded as not being magic. Charisms are gifts from God, and can thus be used by Jewish and Muslim characters as well as Christians. They are lost if a character commits a sin, and are divided into five categories -- Prophecy, both of the future and the present; Healing; enhancement of the Body; the Teaching of others; and the punishment of God's enemies through Vengeance. It will be rare that any of the three Charism-using classes will go on adventures, the Saint seeing such activity as selfish, the Hermit Prestige Class (which also makes use of Folk Charms) being too solitary, and Mystic Prestige Class tending toward contemplation rather than action.

Previous classes have covered the spiritual aspect of the Church, while the Canonist core class and the Prelate Prestige Class deals with its temporal power. Again these are not adventuring classes, dealing more in Church law and politics. Both of these classes gain a series of skill foci and contacts, with the Prelate, representing high-ranking members of the Church, such as bishops and abbots, gaining contacts across Western Christendom. Two final classes cover the scholarship and arts of the period. The Scholar gains the benefit of memory, can study alchemy and astrology, and is supported with guidelines on philosophy, debate, and the writing of books. Finally the Artist class is devoted to the creation of great works.

If all this sounds like one long list of new Core and Prestige Classes, there is certainly truth in such a description. However, each is nicely supported with short sections that detail aspects of medieval life and culture. These include a look at the items and places of magic -- specifically those of England; at the nature and importance of religious relics; at angels and demons (here the author referring to other books from both Atlas Games and Green Ronin Publishing for more information); at Church politics; and at the art and philosophy of the time. They culminate in the background and campaign given for England and Normandy during the various reigns of William the Conqueror's descendants. While the chapter on medieval culture will not be unfamiliar to most gamers, it is nevertheless useful and does complement the campaign itself. This spans roughly 150 years, from the coronation of William Rufus in 1087 to the coronation of Henry, the first of the Plantagenet kings, in 1154. Besides detailing the history, the personalities (including statistics for some of them), it also asks a series of "What Ifs?" that enable a GM to involve the player characters in events of the time. The inclusion of the "Kin of the Conqueror" campaign at least makes up for the all-too short Campaign Guidance, which runs to little more than two pages.

Physically, the *Medieval Player's Manual* is not quite up to the usual standards of other Green Ronin titles. This shows in the artwork, which fails to entice, unlike other Mythic Vita titles. Another editorial pass might have helped; for example, who knew that Dorchester, the county seat of Dorset, was actually located in the county of Oxfordshire? (Certainly not me, and I grew up in Dorset . . .)

Another problem for the *Medieval Player's Manual* is that it comes across as too dry and too academic in tone. This does not make it any less interesting, and indeed, the interest and knowledge of the author is very evident in the writing and in the design of the supplement's numerous new classes. But to many a *d20 System* gamer, the world presented by the *Medieval Player's Manual* is going to be very challenging to play -- if not out and out unplayable. This is because what Chart has done is remove the "pseudo" from the pseudo-medievalism of *Dungeons & Dragons*, and thus make it more of a culture-based game. In that, the world presented in the *Medieval Player's Manual* is likely to appeal to the *Ars Magica* fan, for whom the author is used to writing, and *not* the average *d20 System* gamer. Ultimately, this may make *Medieval Player's Manual* just not Mythic enough to peak their interest.

--Matthew Pook

The Top Ten Reasons to Switch to *GURPS, Fourth Edition*

by Sean Punch

Are you wondering why you should start using *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition*? Curious about what -- if anything -- it will do for your game? Then you might find this feature list useful!

10. "Blended from only the finest ingredients!"

When you buy Fourth Edition, you're getting a state-of-the-art game with close to two decades of development behind it. The designers -- with over 40 years of combined *GURPS* design experience -- selected only the very best rules and guidelines from the *hundreds* of *GURPS* offerings released between 1986 and 2004. The result? A product that preserves the *GURPS* gaming experience you've come to know and love while giving you a bold new game for the 21st century. In other words, when you pick up Fourth Edition, you're getting the best of all possible worlds!

9. "High in flavor, low in carbs!"

If you're thinking, "Why is Fourth Edition a two-volume set when Third Edition filled a single volume? Everyone knows that super-sized portions aren't healthy," you'll be relieved to learn that the two volumes of Fourth Edition replace *three* books: *Basic Set, Third Edition Revised*, *Compendium I*, and *Compendium II*. You get three times the content in twice the serving size -- a 50% improvement! And calorie-counters will be happy to hear that this represents a reduction from 640 to 576 pages. How did we do it? We cut the fat -- redundant and conflicting rules, rules that nobody used, rules that nobody *liked* -- and added meaty gaming goodness.

8. "Exceptional production values!"

Sometimes, you *should* judge a book by its cover . . . and Fourth Edition is a high-quality hardcover. This means it can stand up to more punishment. (And while Fourth Edition might be svelte, it's no lightweight. It hurts more when you whack unruly players with it, nicely demonstrating the new ST = HP rule!) The beauty isn't just skin-deep, either. Each glossy page is in *full color*! Since each chapter has its own color theme -- with colored bleeds that you can see even when the book is closed -- you'll be able to find important rules quickly. We think you'll like the new, full-color art, too.

7. "Intelligent design!"

Don't assume that Fourth Edition's completeness and many options make it hard to use. It has brains as well as looks. We carefully divided player and GM information between the two books. We alphabetized lists of advantages, disadvantages, and skills for easy reference, and added intuitive icons that make it easy to pick out special cases at a glance. (We didn't categorize traits according to *our* preferences, which might not be yours.) We collected important modifiers in boxes and appendices . . . which means no more scavenger hunts through the text. We numbered pages and chapters consecutively across volumes, gave each volume a comprehensive index *and* table of contents, and carefully cross-referenced everything. Fourth Edition is a good read, sure, but it's also a functional reference work that will serve you well in play.

6. "Addresses known issues!"

We closed numerous Third Edition character-design loopholes. Notably, because IQ and DX play a key role in skills, they cost more than ST and HT. Longtime players will be relieved to hear that we've curbed Eidetic Memory abuse,

too. We also fixed playability problems; for instance, there are no longer unrealistic skill penalties to fire high-tech weapons using low-tech skills, cumbersome armor doesn't make it *easier* for swashbucklers to evade blows, and falling damage is now consistent with the damage from falling objects. Finally, we adopted an unambiguous grammar -- no more "Do they mean HT or HP?" -- and explicitly spelled out our rounding conventions. In short, we listened to your bug reports!

5. "Exceeds Third Edition benchmarks for common design tasks!"

The advanced Fourth Edition architecture accelerates character design. Smoother and fewer point-cost progressions reduce table lookups, while the elimination of half-points simplifies bookkeeping. Arbitrary limits -- age restrictions on skill points, reduced attributes counting as disadvantages only *some* of the time, etc. -- are gone. Suggested power levels and disadvantage limits are now clearly *suggestions*. And fewer overlapping traits mean you won't find yourself wondering, "Which skill do I use?" The performance enhancements extend to character development, too: no more doubled attribute costs in play, many more details on how to acquire advantages and skills in play, and concrete advice on sticky issues like mind transfer and buying implants with cash.

4. "Exceeds Third Edition benchmarks for common execution tasks, too!"

Fourth Edition doesn't slow down once the game begins! Many Third Edition rules that broke the flow of the game got simpler or went away. For instance, you'll no longer have to work out modified skill with a ranged weapon, compare it to Snap Shot, and *possibly* apply another modifier. You'll no longer have to add PD -- or wonder about broken probabilities, like a PD roll of 6 and Dodge roll of 10 stacking to give a defense roll of 16. You'll roll dice only *once* when you fire an automatic weapon. And you'll run into far fewer special cases: we reduced on the order of 100 special damage rules to eight damage types, changed close combat to make it work just like other combat, and so on. As an added bonus, we included a quick guide to assessing difficulty modifiers for success rolls.

3. "Easily reconfigured!"

Fourth Edition works right off the shelf -- but those who like to customize won't be disappointed! Fourth Edition explains how to create new advantages, disadvantages, techniques, and templates . . . suggests alternative magic systems and psi powers . . . provides cinematic options such as "wildcard" skills, spending points to influence success rolls, and using extra effort in combat . . . includes a whole chapter of combat rules for unusual situations . . . and much, much more. All of this content is clearly optional, and you never *have* to use it, but it's there for when you need it.

2. "New and innovative core technologies!"

Fourth Edition is more than just Third Edition refined. It includes many completely new rules. Players can vary Hit Points, Move, Speed, Will, and other "secondary characteristics" more freely -- or buy Talents that give aptitude in a narrow specialty *instead* of buying up attributes. The new Affliction and Innate Attack advantages make it possible to simulate any super-powered attack from fiction. Cultural Familiarity and all-new language rules make moving from society to society a real adventure. The GM can shift skill rolls to different attributes -- for instance, to give DX a role in surgery or IQ a role in sports. Heroes can attack deceptively to take out cannon fodder *quickly* . . . or zigzag to avoid gunfire . . . or save their friends by jumping in front of an attack. And the list goes on!

1. "Compatible with a wide variety of common genres!"

Fourth Edition is truly generic and universal. Lessons learned from previous editions of *GURPS* allowed us to build in support for heroes of any size, from any era, at any power level. The *Basic Set* lets you create PCs that are animals, supers, aliens, or even robots or vehicles. It supports magic and psi. It addresses the problems of mixed "tech levels" from the points of view of characters, equipment, and entire societies. And it explicitly supports high-powered, cinematic, and cross-world gaming, providing advice and optional rules for all three. In short, it lets you run *any* kind

of game!

Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



I Shall Leave You As You Left Me -- Buried Alive

GenCONNNNNNNNN!!!

As prophesied [last installment](#), I did, indeed, get to make it to GenCon Indy this past week. And, never being one to turn down a seemingly simple column idea, I thought I would offer my thoughts on this, my first GenCon ever.

It was by far the best GenCon I've ever been to.

"Yeah, but how was it, really?" you ask.

Well, truth be told I didn't get to see as much of it as I might have liked. But first, I offer a bit of background. See, I've never been able to afford GenCon in the past; I did the math, and I estimated that a trip from Tallahassee to GenCon (or Origins, or GAMA, or . . .) would have cost me about \$1,000, since round-trip flights out of my former fair city are generally in the \$300-400 range, and I need to supply my own rubber band for the propeller. Add in the cost of meals and a hotel room (the cost of which, in convention cities, are usually measured in units known as the Kidney: "How many random citizens would I need to steal kidneys from in order to afford this room?"), and it was comfortably out of my reach. Oh, sure, if I *really* wanted to go, I could cut corners in some ways -- stay in the same room as a dozen other folks, generate my own food by photosynthesis, etc. -- but for the most part it was still a wildly expensive proposition.

Fortunately, as of a week and a half ago I am the new evil minion of West End Games, where I'll be doing pretty much the same types of office stuff I was doing at my former Day Job, only with games instead of yo-yos and distributors instead of 10-year-old kids. (And I'm refraining mightily from making any obvious jokes here . . .)

Mind you, this new position will not affect my continuation as Benevolent Dictator for Life of *Pyramid*, about which I have frequently used the phrase "pried from my cold, dead hands." Fortunately, both companies have been quite swell in working for a seeming competitor. (More on that idea in a moment.)

Anyway, all of this is preamble to the idea that I've always said I will probably never make it to GenCon (or Origins, or GAMA . . .) unless it was on someone else's dime. Well, "someone else's dime" has finally materialized. Thank you, West End Games. However, the upshot of this dime is that I spent most of the convention at the West End Games booth.

Rather than offer a day-by-day breakdown of how the con was for me, then (since much of such a report would be drearily similar: "Day One: Sold product. Explained why we didn't have slipcase set. Teased about upcoming *Torg* plans. Told people that we were unlikely to get the *Star Wars* license again any time soon. Cried."), I thought I'd go into classic Random Thought Table tradition and offer a couple of . . . well, random thoughts.

People have faces. By far the most rewarding aspect of the GenCon experience was placing faces to a *lot* of names: industry professionals, co-workers, online friends, and others. Consider that some of these folks I've known for almost half a decade . . . and I've never *met* them. Folks like Kenneth Hite, whose tenure at *Pyramid* predates mine by several years; Bob Portnell, infrequent *Pyramid* contributor and the brain behind the MicroTactix Games' *Simply Roleplaying* line, and also someone I consider to be a good online friend; Ann Dupuis, of Grey Ghost Games, who will need to give up her title as "Nicest Person I've Never Met" because I have now met her (and she's just as nice as I expected); Adam Jury, former online Pyramidian and now an über-talented lackey at Guardians of Order; Jan Hendriks, long-time MIB who made a classy chocolaty gift of an off-hand comment in the PyraMOO; and many others.

In fact, it was a delight to go up to a number of folks and say, "Hi; I've run about a dozen of your articles, so it's nice to meet you finally . . ."

And this doesn't count most of the Steve Jackson Games' staff, where I've now about quadrupled the number of

employees I've met, such as Andrew Hackard, who has been my Managing Editor for longer than the Kennedy administration.

In all, the biggest delight of the convention was definitely getting to meet everyone for the first time. But, sadly, that's a stunt I can only pull once for most folks . . . meaning I need to find other reasons to long for GenCon. This leads me to my second random thought.

I miss hype. Maybe I had an inflated view of what I thought GenCon was "supposed" to be like, but I kept expecting some more . . . excitement, somehow. Admittedly there's only so much excitement I can be exposed to while shackled at one booth, but even so, there seemed to be little to get people talking.

Probably the biggest GenCon publicity stunt I can recall is when FASA announced before the con that the dragon Dunkelzahn was running for President . . . and at the con it was revealed that he had been assassinated. It was great, because it was so unexpected, especially since the FASA folks had gone to so much trouble to pump up his candidacy. And, being an impressionable gamer trapped a jillion miles away from the Midwest, word of that stunt filled my imagination. Clearly, things would happen at GenCon that I would remember forever.

Well, no, not really. It's about five days later now, and, despite arguably two of the biggest non-*Dungeons & Dragons* releases in the past decade (the new *World of Darkness/Vampire: The Requiem* and *GURPS, Fourth Edition*), there just didn't seem to be much drama.

Okay; there was one curious incident where some vampire hunters had a confrontation with some vampires outside our booth. Harsh words were spoken, climaxes were antied, and both groups went their separate ways. This might have been some kind of story behind the *Vampire: The Requiem*, but I'm equally inclined to think it was just an Indiana custom I was unaware of.

Now, I suppose that, in the post-Information Age era, the notion of a publicity stunt may be passé nowadays. After all, by the time of the convention, most people already *know* what new things are coming out, what they're going to buy, and so on. The convention serves not so much to inform people of new products (although there was a lot of that going on) but rather to reaffirm those who have quite probably already made up their minds to buy.

But even so, it's still a bit sad when there was as much gaming drama at GenCon -- the ultimate gamerly destination -- as there was at my previous Atlanta-based Dragon*Con . . . which is to say, not much.

Anyway, when I met Ken Hite, he mentioned that I'd get at least two columns out of attending GenCon. I chuckled at the prospect at the time, because then (as now) I didn't really think I had much to say. But looking at my word count, I see that I've gone over my norm, and I still have more to say. Clearly I need to learn to trust Ken Hite. Ken Hite is all-knowing and wise. HAIL HITE! As a result, I'll probably rattle off a few more GenCon musings next week.

Until then, just remember there are no strangers at *Pyramid* . . . only friends I haven't met face to face yet.

* * *

And since I've mentioned the [Pyramid chats](#) a couple of times already, I should note that Friday, August 27th (a.k.a. "today," as far as the newsstand-fresh copy of this mag is concerned), there will be a chat with several of the folks at Steve Jackson Games at 7 P.M. Central Time.

Yes, Andrew Hackard, Sean Punch, and Steve Jackson will be on hand to get your thoughts on *GURPS, Fourth Edition*. Stop by to let them know the good, bad, and ugly of the culmination of their multi-year project. And you may also want to share your thoughts on the snazzy new [public forums](#) as well.

--Steven Marsh

Alternate Agencies

for *Spycraft*

by Olivier Legrand

In a recent Campaign in a Box article, Chad Underkoffler introduced us to the high-action, thrill-packed world of [Spy Games](#) and its game-themed agencies: CHESS, POKER, WHIST, CRAPS and Rule 8. The purpose of the present article is to translate this setting information in *Spycraft* game terms.

In the world of Spy Games, agency allegiance replaces standard *Spycraft* department training. Like department training, this allegiance grants some special talents and benefits. It also affects a character's choice of class as well as her starting experience level.

CHESS Ops

Extra cash & tech: +5 budget points as part of their personal budget; CHESS agents also receive +2 budget points to each mission budget, plus an extra point at levels 2, 4, 6 and so on. They also get +1 gadget point at the start of each mission, plus an extra point at levels 4, 8, 12 and so on.

Elite training: 4 extra skill points at 1st level and +1 skill point at each additional level.

Bonus feat: any covert or gear feat.

Starting classes: Starting CHESS agents may qualify as Rooks (Fixers), Knights (Soldiers) or Bishops (Snoops). CHESS agents are the crème de la crème of the espionage community. They automatically start their career at 3rd level, to reflect their top qualifications and expert training (remember there are only 32 of them). CHESS agents may never qualify as Pointmen. This reflects their limited ability to improvise in the field, as well as the highly specialized nature of their training.

POKER Ops

Natural improviser: +1 to all Inspiration checks, plus an additional +1 at levels 4, 8, 12 and so on.

Deck: Each Poker agent receives a Deck which grants 100% safe communications.

Bonus feat: any style or chase feat.

Starting classes: POKER agents are extremely competent and start the game at 3rd level. Compared to their CHESS counterparts, they are more jack-of-all-trades than specialists: to reflect this, they must divide their 3 levels between their division class (Faceman for Hearts, Fixer for Diamonds, Snoop for Spades and Soldier for Clubs) and a secondary class (Pointman for everybody, except for Clubs who qualify as Soldiers/Wheelmen).

WHIST Ops

UN sanction: WHIST agents enjoy full international authority and jurisdiction, giving them considerable freedom of action on a worldwide scale.

Cadre: +1 skill bonus to all Bureaucracy and Diplomacy checks and an extra +1 at levels 4, 8, 12 and so on.

Bonus feat: any style feat.

Starting classes: WHIST agents may select any class and begin the game at 2nd level.

CRAPS Ops

Extra cash & tech: Same as CHESS agents.

Gearhead: +1 skill bonus to all Computer and Electronics checks and an extra +1 at levels 4, 8, 12 and so on.

Bonus feat: any gear or style feat.

Starting classes: CRAPS operatives may select any class and begin the game at 2nd level.

RULE 8 Ops

Informed: Rule 8 operatives are walking encyclopedias on worldwide politics, legal systems, governments etc. They get a +1 bonus (and an additional +1 at level 4, 8, 12 and so on) on Education checks pertaining to these topics.

Public support: Rule 8 operatives may often benefit from their organization's very favorable public image. When using this positive reputation to get help or gain support from *civilians* (i.e. people who do not belong to the Spy Games), they are granted a free action die on Charisma checks or Charisma-based skill checks.

Bonus feat: any basic skill feat. Most Rule 8 operatives have the Ordinary Past, Scholarly or World Traveler feat.

Starting classes: Rule 8 does not employ Soldiers or Wheelmen. Most Rule 8 operatives qualify as Pointmen or Snoops. They start the game at 1st level.

Iron Ref: Spy

Caja de la Muerte

by Wil Upchurch

Introduction

Welcome to *Caja de la Muerte*, where the Mexican tourist town of Cancun awaits you! This adventure can be played as a solo adventure or for a group. It is possible for one agent to navigate his way through the adventure using equal parts subterfuge, charm, and brawn. A team of agents can also combine their talents to figure out how to stop Don Caligulari. Good social skills and stealth will be major factors in the agents' success; their investigation can be made easier with some clever computer work by accessing dossiers on all the major NPCs.

Synopsis

The characters (on their own or through their employer) are alerted that mercenaries from all over the world have been invited to bid on a contract for the Mexican crime lord Don Caligulari. The nature of the contract is unknown, so the characters must track the mercs to a meeting at Caligulari's beachfront property.

Once there, they will find that Don Caligulari wants to retrieve an ancient Mayan artifact from a ruined temple 70 miles from Cancun. The temple is apparently riddled with traps left behind by the Mayan priests Caligulari does not want to send his men and gain notoriety as a thief of Mexico's national treasures. There is another reason Caligulari does not want to risk his men, however. He fears that the box is cursed, and wants to see what happens to those who touch it.

Background

Don Caligulari made millions in government bribes as the Mexican Secretary of Defense during the late 70s and early 80s. As the PRI, Mexico's ruling party, began to falter, Caligulari abandoned his post. He formed a criminal cartel along with several powerful generals. They brought experienced soldiers who had fought the drug cartels in southern Mexico and were ready for an upgrade.

Caligulari is now one of the foremost criminal masterminds in Latin America His operation has reached the point where he can turn his attention to other things—notably the collection of Mayan artifacts. His research has led him to the ruins of Toxcogogl, the most heavily used sacrificial site in the Mayan empire.

The ashes of the most powerful sacrifices were stored in a stone coffer known as *El Caja de la Muerte*, the Box of the Dead. Don Caligulari believes that this box contains the makings of a powerful chemical weapon, and he is willing to pay a large sum to anyone that can retrieve it from its resting place.

Scene 1: Gazebo Nowhere

Don Caligulari owns a portion of the beach on Cancun Island. Most of the time he leaves the beach open for tourist use, but sometimes he uses it to privately conduct business and entertain guests . He has built a pier that leads to a covered gazebo rising just above the surface of the shimmering Caribbean water.

The gazebo is equipped with a well-stocked bar and kitchen, and the Don's servants are on call 24 hours a day to provide the finest food and drink It has retractable walls that can create private rooms in which to dine, talk business,

or engage in other nighttime diversions. Alternatively, the entire gazebo can be opened and rearranged to create a "party barge" that can accommodate up to 75 guests comfortably.

The characters have been informed that a collection of elite mercenaries and thieves will be meeting at Caligulari's barge two evenings from now. The party is invitation only, but an undercover agent could infiltrate the party since not all of those in attendance will know each other.

Should the characters inquire about this possibility, there are two ways it can play out:

- A. The agency the characters work for has taken one of the invitees into custody. One of the characters will go in as that person.
- B. The characters will have to hunt down one of the lesser-known mercenaries, put him out of commission somehow, and steal his invitation.

A character that attempts to infiltrate the party will have to put on a good act. The other attendees are the best in their field. They haven't gotten to be where they are by misreading people or falling into traps. Characters who research their assumed identities should have an easier time bluffing those in attendance. They will have more background knowledge on the people they are impersonating, and may be able to use the correct jargon to insert themselves more convincingly into the mercenary world.

Alternatively, the characters might decide to keep surveillance on the party rather than sending in an undercover agent. Actually planting surveillance devices on the gazebo before the party is next to impossible due to security. Guards have been posted at the pier entrance and on the gazebo itself. The famous clarity of the water prevents underwater approaches even at night thanks to bright floodlights that surround the pier. The best surveillance option is to use telescopic lenses, parabolic microphones, and other gear to listen in on the party and take pictures of the attendees for identification and tracking purposes.

There are five servants aboard the ship: a dark-skinned bartender named Juan; the cook, who is always muttering obscenities in Spanish and looking annoyed as he brings out new dishes; and a set of male dwarf triplets who carry drink trays. The latter are dressed in traditional Spanish dancing garb and speak only in hushed, squeaky tones.

Once the attendees have mingled a bit and had their refreshments served, a large flatscreen television descends from above the bar to show their host, Don Caligulari. He smiles, a plain white backdrop behind him, and says the following.

Greetings. I trust that everything has been to your liking so far. If not, Juan, Jesus, and Uno, Dos, and Tres, will be happy to see to your needs. You did not come here to mingle, however, but to hear a business proposition.

The ruins of Toxcogogl, a sacred Mayan temple, hold an artifact that I should very much like to have in my possession. It is held in the lower parts of the temple, which were closed off many years ago due to...a series of unfortunate deaths. It is said that the temple is haunted, and that the artifact is guarded by Mayan deathtraps, whose engineering is still unsurpassed. That is why I have brought you here.

El Caja de la Muerte, the Box of the Dead, is a ceremonial coffer that holds the ashes of a thousand sacrificed enemies of the Mayan priests. It is a priceless link to Mexico's past. I have arranged for my own men to guard the ruins the night after tomorrow—an opportunity I do not wish to waste. If you are interested, please write your bid on the stationary that Uno, Dos, and Tres are now passing around and drop it into the fishbowl on your way out. I shall contact the winning bidder in the morning. Buenos noches.

The television flickers off, and the three dwarfs hand out small pencils and square pieces of heavy paper. They do not speak or answer questions; once they are done, they disappear into a back room, along with Juan and Jesus. The assembled guests are free to talk and mingle for as long as they like. Each drops a bid in the fishbowl on his way out, as should any characters present if they wish to avoid suspicion.

There are 5 guests in attendance, as well as several personal bodyguards (each attendee was allowed up to 2

bodyguards; those that have them are noted below).

Thuy Van: Thuy is one of the world's most accomplished thieves. She is also known as a champion Vo Binh Dinh practitioner. She is personable, but always seems to be sizing up whoever she is speaking to. Her English is limited; she appreciates anyone who can speak to her in Vietnamese. Thuy is probably the most qualified for this particular job (and she knows it), but her price will be high. Her bodyguard, an Asian man with an eyepatch and ever-taut muscles, sits nearby at all times.

Tomas the Scorpion: Tomas is a Mexican gunslinger with a reputation for daring stuntwork and reckless behavior. He is also widely considered to be clinically insane. It is uncertain whether Caligulari called him here as a polite gesture, or thought that the Scorpion would be the only candidate crazy enough to take the job. Two silent Mexican men in leather outfits accompany him and keep watch.

Haven le Kink: This woman looks like a cross between Jessica Rabbit and Lara Croft: part bombshell, part adventurer. In reality, she is an MI6 (or CIA if the characters happen to be European) operative sent to monitor the situation as well. She is talkative and can be seductive if she suspects any of the men are susceptible to that tactic.

Major 'Deutsch' Schaeffler: A giant of a man, this boisterous ex-Marine officer now heads up an international strikeforce, used by governments who need to leave an impression without leaving a paper trail. He seems just as likely to blow the ruined pyramid away as retrieve the box in one piece, and chomps a pungent cigar during the entire affair. He is accompanied by an African-American man with an impressive physique and presence.

Interlude: Cancun Nights

Cancun nightlife never stops, seven nights a week. Street performers spit fire, juggle hoops, and strum Spanish guitars. Modern clubs pump techno beats for the sun-baked tourists. Resort hotels offer variety shows and other entertainment to go with their cheap margaritas and questionable buffets. Whatever one's taste in after-hours entertainment, it can be found somewhere on the island.

For the mercenaries here on business, there is nothing to do but wait. Each is spending the night living it up in their own way. The characters are likely going to want to stake out or interact with one or more of them, and roleplaying should be encouraged. Locations and what each one knows are summarized below, as well as any background information that can be found in international criminal databases or agency records.

Thuy Van: Thuy never stops working. The characters can trace her to the Omni Cancun Hotel & Villas, where she is attempting to lift some jewels from the hotel safe. Her reaction to the characters depends on whether they encounter her before, during, or after the heist.

Thuy is intent on getting this job, mostly for the unique challenge it presents. She knows nothing of local history or legends surrounding the place. She does know that if a bleeding-edge security system can't stop her, then no "Mayan tricks" will either.

Tomas the Scorpion: The Scorpion would not normally be interested, except that he needs the money to pay off the government bounty on his head (if he can get them the money, they will take him off their most wanted list...for now). He and his friends can be found performing at a private party for one of Ireland's wealthiest businessmen.

Haven le Kink: Haven is also gathering information, so at some point in the night she should find them rather than the other way around! She tries to wait until they are in a resort or a quiet bar with tables, at which point she walks up with a bottle of Herradura "Selection Suprema" tequila ("My favorite," she says, "and it's under \$200 a bottle here to boot.") and enough shot glasses for the group. As she sits, she orders salt and lime from a passing waiter and a platter of huitlacoche, a fungus paste favored by the Mayans and still eaten today.

Haven clearly knows her stuff, and she will subtly question them for as long as they'll let her. She is also the only one who knows that Caligulari believes he will find a potential weapon of mass destruction in the ruin.

Major 'Deutsch' Schaeffler: Deutsch and his associate, Dillon, can be found in an expensive cabaret located just off the beach, away from the main resort strip. The two aren't interested in buddying up with anyone, and will meet persistent attempts to gather information by busting a couple of locals' heads into tables and walking out, cigars tossed to the side as they stride out the door.

Scene 2: The Ruins of Toxcogogl

This scene can turn out a number of ways, but if the characters discover the possible presence of a chemical weapon, they should want to get it before the others get a chance. The ruins are located 70 miles west of Cancun. It will require quite a bit of cash or other persuasion to find someone willing to drive or fly them there in the middle of the night.

If they go to the pyramid early, (although this will be made much more difficult during the day as Caligulari's men will be prowling around), they should be able to sneak in and try to get the box before the others. Fortunately, the mission is mysterious enough that none of the others had the same thought.

The closed off portions of the pyramid catacombs do indeed have some traps in them, but they can be easily bypassed by most characters. Now is a good time to showcase a character's abilities or special equipment by providing challenges tailor-made to their strengths. The ruins are a great chance to reward their decisive action with a relatively simple victory.

If you and your players want a climactic battle scene, you can have Caligulari and some of his men waiting when they come out. If the characters are particularly skillful or well equipped, you could pit them against one or more of the other mercenaries. Deutsch and Dillon could give them a fast and furious vehicular chase through the jungle, complete with machine guns, rockets, grenades, or other ordnance, while Thuy might follow them and attempt to pick them off one by one.

If the characters meet at the appropriate time, they find that all of the mercenaries have been summoned. Let one or two of the mercenaries go in before the player characters, each either coming out defeated or not coming out at all. It will then be their turn to give it a try.

Regardless of how or when they retrieve the Caja de la Muerte, the characters will have to contend with its awful smell. They will notice the sharp odor of the thing when they enter the catacombs, but the source will not be evident until they enter its chamber. The box smells as if the dead flesh of the victims within had rotted inside for 1,000 years. They might be able to bluff their way through an ambush using the stench, especially if they realize that fear of the box's contents is what prompted Don Caligulari to hire mercenaries in the first place.

Aftermath

The characters retrieve the box and take it back to the agency. Hopefully they'll have devised a clever one-liner for when the stewardess asks them, "What's that smell?"

Iron Ref: Horror

Still of the Night

by Mike Demetro

Setting

The characters go to Mexico to party from June 21st to 25th at the annual Fiesta Grande in the village of Los Fantasmas. They may have gone at the invitation of friends but it works even better as a vacation where everyone is strange to them.

Secret Plot

The Mexican abbot in the village is descended from Spanish settlers with Moorish ancestors who carried the secret of creating hot weather and droughts, breeding ghouls, and summoning demons. Arab fire wizards of an ancient and evil cult shared the secret with his ancestors.

The ghouls and demons, which the abbot calls his "ghuls" and "efreeti," have a very Thousand and One Arabian Nights feel and conform to a Middle Eastern and Islamic standard of evil spirits rather than a European and Christian one. In the original Arabic, a "ghul" or a "gul," is a protean desert demon that feeds on corpses and waylays travelers and an "efreet" is an evil flame genie. These are not generic animated corpses and scaly, green, horned fiends.

The dozen brothers at the monastery with him are the abbot's coven in a satanic faction. They secretly work the evil magical rituals as a coven of 13 Devil worshippers. The coven will conduct the ritual throughout the Fiesta Grande and it will culminate as "the darkness swallows the moon" (i.e. when the new moon begins and there appears to be no moon in the sky).

Heeding the two-dozen laws associated with focussing it strengthens magic. A few laws are significant but none is more so for possession than the "Law of Identification" wherein it is possible for a person or place to literally become another by maximizing associations between the two. The abbot can use his magic to transform the village into a miniature Hell, the villagers into ghouls, and his monks into demons from Hell by making them all as similar as possible to the evil into which they are to be transformed.

Magical designer tequila (as well as wine and beer) are to be used to transform the digestion of those who drink it so they hunger for rotting flesh and can digest nothing else. To the extent everyone drinks alcohol at the Fiesta Grande (and also during the day since it is very hot and there is nothing else to drink) they will transform into corpse-eating dog-like half-people and then into ghouls.

Once the temperature is literally "as hot as Hell" and everyone in the village is transformed into ghouls, the abbot fulfills the necessary prerequisites for turning the 12 members of his coven into demons. When the abbot has created "Hell on Earth" he can make a pact with Satan and sell his soul to become an Archduke Devil and cause the Apocalypse on June 25th ("Anti-Christmas - the Devil's Birthday").

A Race Against Time

There is a heat wave and it is 75 degrees Fahrenheit the night before the Fiesta Grande. At dawn the first day after it is 80 degrees and the temperature rises 3 degrees every hour until the sun goes down 12 hours later and the temperature drops from 116 to 75 again. On the second day after the temperature starts at 120, on the third day after it starts at 160. On the fourth day after it starts hot enough to boil water and goes up from there. Every day the heat rises again in the

same way. Everyone (except the abbot) that is not transforming into ghouls and demons will sweat the first day, stew the second, and die by the time the new moon begins if nobody stops the abbot.

Notes

This horror adventure can be used with any system and is intended as a generic horror scenario for such games as *GURPS Horror* or *Scared Stiff: The B-Movie Horror RPG*. The characters should be given many avenues to investigate and many ways to waste their days so the monks are only investigated as the scenario climaxes. Players will ignore too obvious clues and mildly suspicious NPCs and investigate the least likely suspects due to metagaming. They may also metagame and make breaking into the monastery a priority merely because they know they are involved in a mystery and the monastery must play a major part. The clues are arranged in a format of what is obvious, what can be discovered easily, what can be discovered if characters keep a sharp eye out, and what can be learned by those in the right place at the right time (or asking the right people). Clues are also arranged by the day they occur or are best discovered but can be presented out of order as necessary. The red herrings of ghosts in the graveyard and a demon-fighting relic in the monastery may shift player focus and have the characters more eager to befriend the villagers and monks. The consequences are dire if they fail but success should not be easy.

Names

Male (Monks)

Abbot Augusto and Brothers David, Francisco, Gualterio, Hugo, Ignacio, Moises, Nicolas, Pedro, Samuel, Tomas, Urbano, and Zacarias.

Male (Villagers)

Alfonso, Angelo, Antonio, Archibaldo, Carlos, Eduardo, Esteban, Eugenio, Federico, Felipe, Fernando, Geofredo, Gregorio, Henrique, Hernando, Jaime, Joao, Joaquin, Jorge, Jose, Juan, Lucas, Guillermo, Lourenco, Luiz, Manuel, Maximiliano, Miguel, Pablo, Pancho, Pepe, Quintin, Raimundo, Reinaldo, Ricardo, Rodrigo, or Vicente.

Female

Adela, Adelina, Adelita, Amparo, Ana, Anita, Beatriz, Carlota, Carmen, Catalina, Conchita, Concepcion, Consuelo, Dolores, Elena, Emilia, Francisca, Francisca, Graca, Graciela, Helena, Ines, Isabel, Jazmin, Joana, Juana, Juanita, Leonor, Luisa, Lupe, Lupita, Luz, Malka, Manuela, Margarida, Maria, Marta, Mercedes, Montserrat, Nieves, Ofelia, Olivia, Pilar, Rosa, Rosario, or Teresa.

The Night of the 21st

Obvious Information

Los Fantasmas is a very old village abutting a small monastery and a hill cemetery. There is an abbot, 12 monks and about one hundred villagers. Los Fantasmas has a taco commercial quaintness of tradition and a spaghetti western sense of architecture and landscape. All of the buildings are so small anyone falling off them wouldn't have much further to fall than a dewdrop shrugged off by a blade of grass. The Fiesta Grande starts at sundown on the 21st of June and lasts 3.5 days for an entire phase of the waning crescent moon and ends with the start of the new moon.

The village's only inn and tavern, where the players are staying, is called "El Corazon Negro" (the black heart).

Easy to Discover Information

- The villagers are friendly and gregarious and currently in a very festive mood.
- There is a sign on the well saying "do not drink the water."
- Like many monasteries, the one at Los Fantasmos makes wine and have a stamped "Los Fantasmas" crest on the label of each bottle.
- There are strange noises coming from the cemetery.

Moderately Easy to Discover Information

- All of the beer and tequila (and wine, beer, and tequila is all there is to drink aside from well water right now) also bears the label and crest of the monastery.
- The monks make all of the beverages here and all are excellent. The villagers will be insulted and very surly if the characters do not eat, and especially drink a lot with them and enjoy the party.
- The villagers fear demons.
- The monks are rumoured to be the keepers of a secret relic that slays demons and evil spirits.

Hard to Discover Information

- If the players ask one of the more prominent villagers why the well is off-limits they will learn that recent rains have polluted the underground river with runoff from the corpses in the cemetery.
- As will be discovered if the characters look specifically for sabotage, but expressly missed otherwise, someone has rendered their transportation inoperable and the damage could take at least a few days to repair.

The 22nd

Obvious Information

It is sweltering (80 degrees at sunrise) and gets more so with each hour that passes. As is normal for the desert the temperature drops dramatically at sundown but it is still 75 degrees at night.

Easy to Discover Information

- The temperature does not peak at noon but gets hotter with each hour from dawn until dusk.
- Those who drank the most, especially the designer tequila, have a sharp notable odour on their breath. It is almost a sickly sweet smell and is not the stink of booze.
- Some villagers are drinking the well water despite warnings.
- The innkeeper is an odd little man and some of the villagers seem to dislike him.

Moderately Easy to Discover Information

- It is those that drank the most alcohol that are starting to drink the well water.
- All of those that dislike the innkeeper are older, God-fearing women.
- The innkeeper dislikes the monks and rants against God and religion.

Hard to Discover Information

- The well water does have a necrotic scent.
- The women that dislike the innkeeper do so because of his rants against religion and because of his carousing.
- The innkeeper carouses and hates God because his wife died and he is trying to compensate and venting rage that his wife was taken from him.

The 23rd

Obvious Information

It is hotter than yesterday (120 degrees at sunrise) and again gets worse. As is normal for the desert the temperature drops dramatically at sundown but it is still 75 degrees at night.

Easy to Discover Information

- The monks do not wear crosses. If asked they say it is because they are only allowed their robes.

Moderately Easy to Discover Information

- A man is sitting and kissing a girl in an old-fashioned dress all day in the hot sun.
- The villagers are behaving strangely.
- Many villagers are milling around the foot of the hill leading to the cemetery.
- Villagers are not saying out of the sun.
- Many villagers are guzzling down the well water now.

Hard to Discover Information

- The man kissing the girl is the innkeeper and the girl his dead wife in her tattered funeral dress. He is not kissing her but licking her rotted flesh and nibbling on dried bones. The innkeeper snuffles around if approached and attacks if disturbed.
- Some of the graves have had people digging at them with their hands.

The 24th

Obvious Information

- It is getting hot enough to kill a man quickly (160 degrees at sunrise) and again gets worse. As is normal for the desert the temperature drops dramatically at sundown but it is still 75 degrees at night.
- The villagers are all ghouls and must be dodged or fought.

Easy to Discover Information

- The monastery is a tolerable temperature.
- The monastery is a defensible refuge.

Moderately Easy to Discover Information

- The monks have barred the monastery doors and do not answer if called.

Hard to Discover Information

- The monastery has a secret cellar that is very cool. It is furnished like a centre of devil worship.
- At sundown the 12 brothers transform into three identical-looking four-headed demons that the abbot will lead in the last ceremony to cause the apocalypse.

Conclusion

If the abbot can be killed before sunrise on the 25th of June, everyone will return to normal and the apocalypse will be averted. The monastery should be hard to get to due to ghouls and the abbot hard to finish due to spells, servant demons and more ghouls, but is a normal enough man otherwise.

Iron Ref: Supers

Ourobouros: A Supers Adventure in Techno

by Chris Aylott

Cue Soundtrack

If you can, click on <http://www.dancerecords.com/playmix.php?id=81>. Listen to the mix for one minute, then let it play in the background as you read on.

Cue Intro

Danny was already in the groove when he bit the worm. "Drume EP" was playing, the tequila was sizzling in chest, then the camera of his self-image pulled away in one of those shots where the background falls back and the guy in the middle gets closer and closer. DJ 3000 still blasted through the room, but he heard a new tune in his head and he had to dance.

He knocked over the table as he sprang to his feet, glasses rolling into the crowd, liquor on the floor, and he was outside on the street, dancing into the face of the bouncer, more shattering glass plate this time TVs sparking on the street everyone moving in time as his consciousness faded to white . . .

The Scene

Teagarden, a hip club in a brownstone neighborhood gone rundown gone bohemian. The word is that three dot.commers cashed out their options and bought the place a few years back. Maybe true, maybe not, Neal the manager isn't saying and if the owners hang out then they blend into the crowd. Easy to do that, Teagarden is a place where people wear lots of makeup and leave their real names at home.

'Cept this night. Danny Carville's name is going to make tomorrow's paper -- he's the skinny white kid who juked off the dance floor with half of the club in tow, out to the street where they worked up a first-class riot. Ordinary kids, nothing special under the greasepaint, but that doesn't stop them doing damage. Jumping through store windows. Smashing car windows. Alarms and blood everywhere and kids shambling through the street like living living dead.

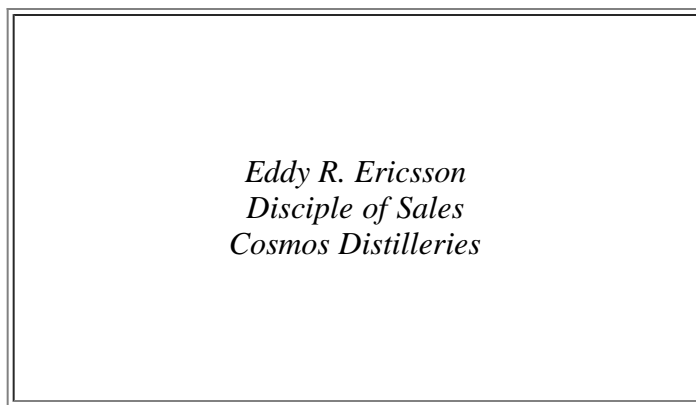
Heroes on the scene, heroes called in, the problem is the same: get the crowd under control with a minimum of harm. There's a smell of ozone in the air; sharp noses can trace it to Danny Boy. Knock him down and the rest of the mob follows suit, but then they get up again, dance a few sizzling steps, and lie back down.

Back at the club. Neal's as puzzled as anyone else, and what he has to hide has nothing to do with Danny Carville. He won't talk about the owners; can't talk about it, can't think about it, mind peepers may find there's a block there that leads to another story. Neal's seen Danny and his friends around for weeks, nothing special about them. No mutant powers, no dark origin, just some kids with IDs that pass muster.

Checking out Danny's scattered table sheds a little more light. There's a bottle among the glasses, a tequila bottle. Ourobouros, "Live in Legend, Eat the Worm". Teagarden doesn't serve Ourobouros, nobody does. New brand, unknown, cipher. The few drops left in the bottle taste like electricity.

Danny Boy and his friends thought the bottle came from the bar, thought they had scored special treatment. They remember the guy who brought it to them, big guy, black muscle t-shirt, white snake tattoo looped around his bald head. He told them it was compliments of the house, testing out the appeal of a new brand, says it's going national real

soon. They even have his business card.



Ourobouros

Winding Coil

Cosmos Distilleries is new. Cosmos Distilleries is already a name. Cosmos Distilleries was the only big liquor company IPO in the last 25 years. Cosmos makes M-Go Malt Liquor and Star Bright Beer. Their numbers are nothing with the Bud and Miller Lite set, but they're chewing up the young bar scene with a vengeance.

According to CosmosParty.com, you can visit their world headquarters right here in town, tours every evening at 5. They call it the happiest hour on Earth.



No matter when you visit, expect to be met by Plant Supervisor Rucker E. Eddison. Big guy, black muscle t-shirt, white snake tattoo. He says there's no relation. He's friendly if you call ahead, friendly if you don't. How friendly depends on how much right you have to be there at the moment.

Rucker smells of ozone.

Rucker defers questions, just the supervisor. You want the big answers, you need the big boss, company President Eric E. Ruckerson. Three guesses what he looks like, and the first two are identical. Rucker's just here to give you the tour, tell you about the great things Cosmos is doing. He'll encourage you to invest if you look like you have money. Threaten Rucker if you like, even kill him. He'll call the police if he can, suffer if he doesn't. He's no hero.

No matter what happens, Rucker only feigns surprise. Watch his eyes, it's as if he's already played this scene.

Ourobouros is a secret, but it's the kind of secret Cosmos is ready to talk about. The drink is a mezcal, close to a tequila, not quite a tequila, made from a rare cousin of the blue agave plant, carefully harvested, steamed and crushed in three pressing mills to extract the juice. Combine with yeasts and ferment like a tequila, age for precisely seven years and seven days. The results are electric.

Take the tour, with Rucker or without. The distillery is legit, all the features you'd expect. Loading docks. Stone ovens. Pressing mills. Fiber wash, distillery tank, aging room, tasting room. Everything ready, every tool and supply in its place. Nobody there, no work happening. Empty.

Rucker says they have all the help they need.

Invited guests end their tour in the tasting room, where they can sample Ourobouros for themselves. There, they are dared to eat the worm at the bottom of the bottle. Eat the worm, they are told, and you'll get to meet the company president. Rucker has a worm for everyone, but he'll show them to the president if only one person eats it.

Uninvited guests find the rooms rearranging, pathways changing, shifting geography. Eventually they walk into a long metal tunnel; halfway through the world realigns and they tumble to the bottom of the large distilling vat. A port opens, fermented agave juice pours in, the steel vat begins to heat up.

At this stage of distilling, the alcohol in the agave juice is separated from the sediment by being boiled into steam. The boiling temperature is 200 degrees Fahrenheit.

Scales Falling From Eyes

Out of the vat, escaped or defeated, or out of the tasting room with worms on the breath. The company president will see you now.

Ruckerson, Ericsson, Eddison, all there. All the same being, coils of a worm rippling through time. Inhumanity made comprehensible through illusion. The ozone is the stench of the worm.

The worm seeks to grow, to wrap its coils around the entire world. It hides in the bottles, waits to be eaten, grabs the mind of those that consume it, reaches out and takes hold of others nearby. In time it can force the others to consume the worm, absorb them, grow. In time it could take over the world.

But there isn't enough time. The flesh of ordinary mortals is too weak; it cannot spread fast enough. Each mortal consumer's mind can only control a few around it, half a dance club, a rioting street. The worm needs minds that control cities. Minds beyond mortal. Super-minds.

Your minds. You will consume the worm, and the worm will consume you.

Ericsson falls apart, becomes worms that fly through the air. They lodge in clothing, hair, they crawl towards mouths and ears. Ruckerson and Eddison move with perfect coordination and inhuman strength, battering, distracting, immobilizing. They are silent, no need to talk now. The perfect communication of the self is just moments away.

As the worms crawl in, they take control. Friend turns against friend in a puppet's betrayal. The worm is endless, the worm is patient, the worm has an endless supply of coils, and your numbers are diminishing.

Perhaps it has a weakness you can exploit. Perhaps it is vulnerable to fire, and you can make the distillery rage with flame. Perhaps magic can snip its coils out of time. Or perhaps it has no vulnerabilities at all.

The End Of The Tail

Failure today ruins the worm's plan for years to come. Ourobouros must be created under precise conditions; the mezcal loosens the mind and prepares it for possession by the worm. Destroy the distillery and this door is shut for now.

But the worm has many agents. Some are identical to Ruckerson, Ericsson, Eddison, but many are not. They seek ways to dominate, influence, bring humanity closer to the worm.

The worm has marked you now. It knows that you are here, that you have power that it wants and defiance that it hates.

Someday, the worm **will** turn in your direction once more.

Icosohedron Adventures

Social Combat

by Owen K.C. Stephens

The *d20 System* has fairly involved rules for such things as combat, crafting items both mundane and magic, and even animal training. The rules for social interactions between characters, however, are a combination of simple and inadequate. Of course this is due to the focus of the core *d20 System* rules -- fighting things and gaining power. Issues such as seduction, bribery, and debate simply aren't considered important enough to get their own chapter of rules. For those groups who want to be able to use dice to figure out such attempts, a few optional rules are presented below.

These rules are specifically designed for groups that want a more game mechanical way of handling social interactions. Such rules aren't needed (or even welcomed) by many groups, who handle all social interaction through roleplaying coupled with GM and player fiat. However, these rules need not replace roleplaying. It's perfectly reasonable to roleplay a situation to determine what kind of modifiers are appropriate to the die rolls, then use game mechanics to determine the outcome. Also, they can be useful to groups uncomfortable with or uninterested in talking out long social interactions, as well as those who want some way to simulate characters who are better at such things than the players. A player need not be a master swordsman to play one, why should he be forced to depend on his own social skills rather than the imagined ones of his character.

Also, these rules are not designed to be used for magic effects. A charm spell, love potion, or supernatural aura of fear created by ghosts, demons, and dragons are different. They are cases where an outside influence is forcing the character to act a certain way, and the player should not be allowed to "decide" to ignore such effects anymore than he can "decide" not to be carried off by a roc. Among other things, having different rules helps draw a distinction between a convincing speaker and someone with the power of mesmerism.

Social Combat

In the *d20 System*, social interaction mechanics are handled through skills. The relevant skills are Bluff, Diplomacy, Intimidate, and Sense Motive. While some other skills are used in social settings (Gather Information, Perform), the goals of those skills is different from the kind of opposed interaction that concerns this article (and are pretty self-explanatory).

In broad terms, Bluff is used whenever you want to convince someone of something that isn't true, Diplomacy is used to change their attitude about you, Intimidate is to get them to act in a way they'd normally rather not, and Sense Motive is used to determine someone's motives. These skills are often used in opposition to one another in opposed checks.

These definitions are somewhat limiting in their usefulness. For example, it's all fine and well to use Diplomacy for an attempted seduction, but what does that *mean*? If a swashbuckler is trying to seduce a barmaid, is getting a good enough roll to move her attitude to "helpful" automatically mean she's going to give in to an amorous advance? Sure, some barmaids just aren't going to go for roguish charm (though the helpful ones may choose to find the advances amusing rather than unwelcome pressure).

Social Interaction

The social interaction rules allow for a quick and easy game mechanical determination of an initiator's ability to instill a new desire or opinion into a target character. The social skills are used for the same kinds of influence attempts, but are resolved as single opposed check. The penalties for the check are determined by the GM, based on how far from

the target's current desires the initiator is trying to move him.

Any check is opposed by a modified level check -- $1d20 + \text{target's level or hit dice} + \text{target's Wis modifier} + \text{any bonuses against fear, special bonuses vs enchantment, charm or mind-affecting attacks, or modifiers to the target's Will}$ save other than ability score modifiers and base class bonus. In the case of a Bluff check, the target must make a Sense Motive check to realize the effort is a bluff -- a successful level check simply indicates the target has resisted the attempt to get him to act in a particular way.

	Check	
Shift is:	Penalty	Examples
Negligible	+0	Buying a different brand of soda. Taking a picture of initiator.
Minor	-10	Giving initiator lengthy directions. Introducing initiator to a friend of target.
Moderate	-20	Ignoring a minor law violation. Skipping a meal, running an errand.
Major	-30	Allowing the initiator to live in target's house. Sex.
Extreme	-40	Sacrificing the target's life to save the initiator's. Committing a crime to benefit initiator.

One further modifier is applied -- the target's attitude toward the initiator. In the case of an NPC, this can be determined with normal diplomacy and Cha check rules. For PCs, their attitude should only be determined by a skill check if using the Pilot Method of social resolution. Otherwise, allow the player to decide on his own motivation.

Lowest Attitude	Modifier
Hostile	-20
Unfriendly	-10
Indifferent	+0
Friendly	+5
Helpful	+10

The different social skills are used for different influence attempts, as defined below. A GM may decide to use some of the optional rules to make the method of social interaction relevant (essentially tactical social combat rules), but this is likely too complicated for most campaigns.

Bluff

Deceive	No change to rules.
Seduction	If successful, target switches to unfriendly as soon as the seduction is clearly a ruse.

Diplomacy

Appeal	No change in rules.
Bribery	If value offered is equal to target's level \times 100 gp, gain +2 to roll <i>or</i> reduce penalties for 1-round Diplomacy check from -10 to -4. Lawful characters may automatically treat shift as extreme.
Debate	Base time increases to 10 minutes plus 1 minute per point of target's Int. Target may oppose with Int- or Wis- based level check
Seduction	Initiator must genuinely desire nothing more than romantic liaison. -10 to check. Result of Friendly or better results in target being amused, result of Helpful or better represents capitulation at least temporarily.

Intimidate

Blackmail	Gain +2 to check, but a failed check takes target directly to hostile. Intimidation lasts as long as blackmail is possible.
Threaten	No change to rules.
Torture	Intimidation check takes 1-4 hours. Target may resist with either Wis of Con based level check.

Resolution

Okay, so we have rules to determine whether a social interaction has induced a new desire into a character. Now what? Just because a character has some urge to change his opinion or do something he wouldn't have previously considered doesn't mean he's definitely going to. For one thing, these rules can't take into account *all* the social pressures on the character. While a cunning rogue might be able to bring out the inner greed of a priest while trying to con him, can he really overcome years of training to be thrifty? Does the newfound greed overpower the priest's other desires, including that to please his deity?

It's perfectly possible to have conflicting desires, and the success of an effort to change a character's attitude does not automatically indicate an abandonment of all previous attitudes. A game should only use one of the following resolution methods, but they are all compatible with the social interaction rules defined above. They all have different strong and weak points, and different results on the feel of a campaign.

Absolute Player Control

This is the default method for many gaming groups. Essentially, the player is told what the result of the game mechanical test is, and is then left to have his character do whatever he wants. If a PC on guard fails to resist a seduction check, it's up to the player whether he actually leaves his post or not. This method assumes that only the player can decide how his character would actually react to conflicting desires, and gives him full leeway to accept the new desires, or ignore them totally.

It might seem pointless to have a game mechanic with no "enforcement" clause, but some groups find such things useful. It can be hard to decide how successful something like blackmail, intimidation, debate or seduction should be, and using mechanical rules gives players guidelines. A player who *wants* to explore his own character's weaknesses may well be perfectly happy to follow the dictates of the social interaction check, but a player who feels his character's personality would absolutely preclude some particular course of action is never forced to accept the dice say otherwise.

The Experience Penalty Method

This is a variation on the absolute player control method, combined with some of the carrot/stick method's philosophy. Essentially, the game mechanics are used to determine the success of a social interaction, and the result is revealed to the player effected. Then, the player is allowed to make any decision he wishes about how the character actually responds. If he can convince the GM the response is in keeping with the character, he gains full experience points. If the GM feels it's out of character, a slight exp penalty is levied (25% for a single encounter, or 10% for a whole evening's play are standard).

This is a very loose system, but it's not the same as no rules at all. Players specifically know when the GM *expects* their characters to bow to social pressure, and are aware that failing to do so can have consequences. The GM is left with the option of not levying such penalties if he feels the player is truly roleplaying well, rather than taking advantage of the rule, but players know they break from the listed result at their own risk. The risk is not great (an experience point penalty is annoying, but doesn't kill the character), but is enough to encourage the player to comply with game results unless the impact on how they view their character is really unacceptable.

The Carrot/Stick Method

The carrot/stick method is designed to work on the same principle as the shaken condition. Shaken is a lesser form of fear, which doesn't dictate the character's actions (unlike panicked), but does place a game mechanical penalty in place to represent the fear emotion. Thus in the carrot/stick method, when a character loses a social interaction check the player must either acquiesce to the new attitude or desire, or suffer a penalty to all d20 checks and damage rolls. This represents the character's strong distraction, as he struggles to resist unwelcome feelings.

The penalty is equal to -1, with an additional -1 for every 10 the target missed the opposed level check by. The penalty

lasts for as long as it would have taken to give in to the new desire. If that's more than 24 hours, the character is allowed to make a new check against the original initiator's result every 24 hours with a cumulative +1 bonus each day, and overcomes the penalty permanently when he meets the check. These penalties do not stack (you can only be so distracted), though a character already suffering a -2 penalty who fails an opposed social interaction by 34 would now be at -3, the worse of the two checks.

That's the stick end of the system. The carrot end is a bonus given whenever the character gives in to a social interaction, and it causes trouble (as determined by the GM). Each time this happens, the target character is given a drama point. A drama point can be spent to reroll and one d20 roll once ever. Thus characters who regularly fail social checks and suffer the consequences are rewarded for going with the flow of the game. (A GM can replace the drama point with some other benefit appropriate to his campaign, such as a 5% exp bonus for the session.)

The Pilot Method

The Pilot Method assumes that players are like pilots, and their characters are like vehicles. As the pilot you have a fair amount of control over your vehicle, but it does do things you don't want it to. When everything is going smoothly and there are no complications, players get to decide what their characters attempt and desire. When conditions change, the vehicle (character) may go off in another direction regardless of what the pilot wants.

Using this resolution, the rules can dictate what a character decides or desires, regardless of what the player wants. If a player loses an opposed Diplomacy or Bluff check against an NPC trying to seduce him, the character is seduced. If a Diplomacy check dictates a PC's attitude is shifted to "friendly," the character is required to be friendly, and if the player doesn't play that way the GM can overrule him.

This style is loved by some people, and hated by others. (I often find it's loved by GMs and hated by players, but I'm sure that's not universal.) It really draws a firm line between the mind of the player and the mind of the character; a player may *think* his character would never bow to blackmail, but under this system he can't actually know it.

The pilot method is only fair if the GM is sure to include appropriate conditional modifiers even above and beyond those listed (or at the very least be lenient when defining the magnitude of the shift the check is trying to bring about). For example, a chaste priest should certainly gain some bonus when resisting a seduction attempt. Also, getting someone to do something they don't want to is really pretty difficult.

Also, this system is only fair if the player has some game mechanical options to make his character more resistant to social pressure. Perhaps a new feat is created (Stubborn) that gives a bonus to all checks to resist social interaction checks. Of each player may be allowed to list a class of activity which is always classified as an extreme shift and against which he is always treated as being hostile.

Beyond that, in the pilot method the player's opinion is overruled. In adventure fiction good people are often doing stupid or immoral things when they run into a moral weakness or a truly cunning deceiver, and these rules allow such results to take place. A GM should be aware, however, that many players hate this so much they refuse to play in such games. At the very least, it is imperative the GM warn all players that this rule is in effect and how he plans to enforce it.

Dancey Resigns GAMA Board Seat Amid Uproar

The honeymoon is over.

After a contentious election at the GAMA general meeting at Origins which saw a near-complete turnover of the board of directors, the GAMA board was rocked just weeks later when newly elected Treasurer Ryan Dancey told the board he had accessed the private email communications of the previous board for a five-month period prior to the election. Dancey offered his resignation to the board, which was accepted . . . eventually. In the month since that initial revelation, the shockwaves continue to reverberate, with continued shakeups in the GAMA staff and a change in GAMA Retail Division representatives to the board.

A bad situation has been made worse by the strong emotions generated by the GAMA board election, an animosity that has guaranteed that every motive has been suspect, every statement doubted, and absolutely no benefit of the doubt has been given by either side.

The group swept into office in June called themselves the "Firm, Fair, and Friendly" ticket, and presented themselves as a slate of candidates. Dancey, one of the founders of Organized Play and a long-time publishing executive (and game designer, and marketer) with Wizards of the Coast and, before that, Alderac Entertainment, was the point man in the effort, regularly challenging GAMA policies and direction in various Internet forums and in person at major industry gatherings. He started the fixgama.org website, and found people who agreed to run with him, including some industry heavyweights like Don Perrin, Martin Stever, and Will Niebling.

Shortly after the election, Dancey told his fellow board members that the "private" GAMA board mailing list was not secure -- and he knew this because he had been downloading the messages sent between members of the old board since January. Dancey offered his resignation at the time, but the board initially declined. According to GAMA spokesman John Phythyon, GAMA's lawyer told the board that what Dancey had done was illegal but not a felony, and the board then decided to ask Dancey to stay on -- and be in charge of making sure that the mailing list would be secure in the future.

The vote to ask Dancey to stay was 6-1 -- the lone dissenter was Retail Division chairman Steve Nicewarner. Nicewarner resigned shortly thereafter, revealing the whole story to the industry. His statement referred to "multiple cases of ethical misconduct," and at least two instances of acts that GAMA's own attorney advised the board were illegal. "In each case, the GAMA Board declined to take effective action to proscribe and punish the unethical behavior -- in effect condoning the unethical activities," Nicewarner said in his statement. "I can no longer serve on a Board of Directors with that kind of ethical flexibility." (Neither Nicewarner or anyone from GAMA would answer questions about the alleged other cases of misconduct.)

The reaction of the professional gaming community was immediate and strong. With feelings already rubbed raw by a nasty election, battle lines were drawn and accusations flew. There were many calls for the entire board's resignation, and several folks on the various message boards and mailing lists that make up the new village square of the gaming industry started talking about a criminal investigation. It didn't take long for the board to realize that Dancey was a lightning rod they couldn't afford to keep around. He offered his resignation a second time, and this time, the board accepted it.

But Dancey wasn't the only one to have trouble making a resignation stick. The board of the Retail Division voted to not accept Steve Nicewarner's resignation, and asked him to reconsider. He agreed, and the board reelected him to the chair of the GRD. But that didn't settle the matter, as the GAMA board took no action on Nicewarner's request to be reinstated to the board as the GRD "en banc" representative.

One of the main promises of the FFF slate was that all members of the board -- including the Retail and Wholesale division representatives -- would be part of an "en banc" board, a board that made all decisions as one large group, not leaving most of the decisions (and the power) to a smaller executive committee of just the top officers. When Nicewarner realized the board did not want him back, he went back to the GRD board and a compromise was reached.

Nicewarner continues as GRD Chairman, but Gabriel Vega has been named "Retail Division Director at Large." As such, he will represent the Retail Division in the "en banc" GAMA board.

With that settled, things looked like they were going to settle down . . . until Dancey made his first public statement since his resignation. Issued the Monday of Gen Con week, Dancey said his actions were necessary, because of the "extreme sense that immediate, irreparable harm was likely to be caused to GAMA, and that without a way to anticipate and counter those actions, the whole cause could and would have been lost." Dancey did issue an apology in a GAMA statement announcing his resignation, but there was no such apology in his 1,896-word statement of Aug. 16. It was, instead, a recap of all his charges against the old board, and the defense that no matter what people might have thought about what he did, what the old board was doing was much, much worse.

The statement did little to change the minds of anyone who had already picked a side, but it did spur another round of outrage, including the charge that Dancey deliberately waited until two days before everyone was to leave for Gen Con to reduce the number and vehemence of replies. If that was his goal, it didn't work.

In the days after Gen Con, things seem to be settling down . . . but that's been said before. Mark MacKinnon of Guardians of Order, elected to an at-large board seat as part of the FFF slate, has been named Treasurer. Mike Stackpole has been chosen to fill MacKinnon's at-large seat. And the rest of the board members still have their jobs. Phythyon said in a statement: "The board does not feel that mass resignations would be good for GAMA. It would leave the Association destabilized and in search of leadership. The best thing right now is for us to move forward. Mr. Dancey's actions were wrong. He has resigned and apologized. We need to move past this unfortunate incident and focus on doing the things we were elected to do."

John Phythyon announced his resignation as Public and Member Relations Director of GAMA two days after Gen Con.

--*Scott D. Haring*

In Charge, Without a Clue

First, let me just say that if you're a computer user and you ever find yourself with an urgent need to do a Google search for "recover deleted partitions," you're in for a loooooooooooooooooong few days.

The bad news is that, indeed, I found myself in the need of making such a search-engine request. The reasons behind this are a tad complicated, but let's just say that I was less than impressed by my new hard drive's bundled software (the directions for which I followed explicitly), and that a certain hard-drive-manufacturing company is most definitely *not* getting a Christmas card from me this year.

The good news is that, mercifully, I was able to restore pretty much all of my data. A few programs aren't working quite right, and I might have lost a few random files here and there, but the bulk of the 200 gigs that was wiped out -- including my e-mail for the past eight years and the bulk of my professional writing -- has, indeed, been brought back to this side of the white light. However, as a tip for all you aspiring would-be data-crashers, I note that recovering data correctly can take a loooooooooooooooooong time -- about 15 minutes a gig, if my math is right. Budget your time accordingly.

Anyway, the upshot is that I lost about two days of my computing life, watching a process bar examine each file and go, "Hmm . . . now where did I see the rest of *this* file? Ohp! Here it is! Hmm . . . now I know I've seen this file before. Waitamminute! Here it is! . . ." So, in addition to throwing certain aspects of my freelance life off-kilter, I haven't been able to do the smidge of research I wanted to do for the second part of my GenCon column (the first part of which ran [last week](#)). And I know I'm in the middle of a series about taking away PCs' "toys." And I think Peter Dell'Orto has requested a column over on the [discussion boards](#), which I might fulfill if I can think of anything intelligent to say on his topic.

In the meantime, however, I continue trying to adjust to this strange, foreign land I find myself in, which the natives call "Pennsylvania." As a Florida resident for over 20 years, I found myself a bit concerned when it got rather chilly a few nights ago, so the next day I asked a group of folks who've lived here a while if it dips below 50° much. The tenor of their laughter has filled me with some concern.

I also continue trying to adjust to my new job, which entails . . . well, I'm honestly not sure. I think I'm supposed to be getting distributors to buy my company's products, and give them the information they need to make informed decisions. I think I'm also supposed to talk with the rest of the company to acquire and cull that information into usable morsels. Oh, and I'm supposed to do most of the other things necessary to keep the office going. But really, in practically every conceivable way, I am completely winging it . . . and, on some level, that terrifies me.

My typical call to distributors have consisted of something akin to:

ME: Hello! Are you familiar with our company's fine products?

DISTRIBUTOR: Er, sort of . . .

ME: Great! Great! Can you fill me in on what you know?

DISTRIBUTOR: Uh, no . . . but we *are* interested in your terms, product list, and product availability for the next three months.

ME: You and me, both, my friend . . . you and me both.

* * *

I'm reminded of an episode of *The Simpsons*, where Homer is hired by a Bond-esque mastermind (named Hank Scorpio) as the manager of the mastermind's henchmen and technicians.

HOMER [TO STAFF, WHICH IS TYPING QUICKLY]: Are you guys working?

MAN 1: Yes, sir, Mr. Simpson.

HOMER: Could you, um . . . work any harder than this?

MAN 2: Sure thing, boss. [THEY TYPE FASTER]

* * *

To tie it into gaming, I note that it's *really* fun to thrust characters (and their controlling players) into positions where they are in charge but have little training to go on outside of their instinct. Probably the purest example of this is from my *Star Trek* campaign, where -- due to a sequence of incidents and player decisions -- the doctor ended up [in charge of the ship](#). The panicked look on the player's face was no doubt equally mirrored on her character.

Usually thrusting the players into an unfamiliar environment is the province of [prison](#)-type adventures, where they are in a position of helplessness or [powerlessness](#). But it can work equally well from the other direction, where their powers -- and responsibilities -- are suddenly greatly increased. For example, in an *Aberrant* campaign I gave the heroes control of a [city block](#) in Chicago's Loop, which immediately changed the tone and direction of the campaign, since none of the PC concepts was particularly skilled or knowledgeable in what such ownership entails.

In general, these circumstances are most challenging and interesting if the heroes don't have a lot of time to mull over their possibilities, and the players can't -- or don't want to -- immediately relinquish control to someone more qualified.

Some other possibilities include:

- Suddenly gaining control of a corporation, which is just about to undergo a hostile takeover attempt
- Coming into possession of a magic item, entity, or force that will temporarily give substantial powers, *if* the hero can figure out how to use it. Oh, and he knows it will disappear in 24 hours.
- Being made the leader of a village, town, or other social event, because the citizens believe the hero will be best suited to deal with the threat. (This is an especially classic trope if the person chosen is a slacker, loner, or otherwise decidedly *not* considered suited for leadership.)

Finding yourself in an unexpected situation where you need to adapt quickly is exhilarating, and it's also one of the most primal fears around. Most people experience it in the form of the "I just remembered that I signed up for a class that I haven't been to in six weeks, and where are my pants?" dream. Me? I've been having this recurring dream that I'm in charge of a publishing company's releases, and I don't have a clue what I'm doing.

But at least most of the time I'm wearing pants.

* * *

Speaking of being in a new place and sorting things out computer-wise, this is a general announcement that no one should be using my former marsh@nettally.com e-mail address. This address will go dead shortly. Instead, I will encourage -- as I always have -- folks to use my [pyramid@sjgames.com](#) address for *Pyramid*-related correspondence. (Mind you, I've always advocated using that address, but many of you haven't heeded my request.)

Thank you for your cooperation.

--*Steven Marsh*

Pyramid Review

Call of Cthulhu Collectible Card Game

Published by [Fantasy Flight Games](#)

Designed by Eric M. Lang, Christian T. Petersen, Kevin Wilson, & Darrell Hardy

Art & Graphics by Darrell Hardy & Scott Nicely

Edited by Christian T. Petersen, Pat Harrigan, Greg Benage, & Kevin Wilson

Arkham Edition Starter (Mythos or Investigators): full color, 60 cards, \$9.99; boosters, 11 cards, \$2.99; requires several tokens (not included)

You may recall an unsuccessful attempt at a collectible card game based on H.P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos from 1997 called, simply, *Mythos*. The prolific folks at Fantasy Flight Games are responsible for the new iteration, *Call of Cthulhu Collectible Card Game*, a far more cogent entry into the unpredictable collectibles market.

The object of the game is to be the first player to succeed at three story cards. Each player starts with a deck. The first releases are the Investigators and Mythos decks, slanted slightly toward heroic humans and the monsters respectively. Individual cards come from one of seven different factions, though (like Miskatonic University, the Syndicate, Hastur, and Cthulhu), so even with the game's first release there's plenty to build your deck strategy around.

You have three domain cards, under which you place resources. Any card can become a resource, but it stays that way the whole game. Exhausting a domain with, say, four resources stuffed under it allows you to bring out a game card costing four or fewer. The resource icons on the edge of the cards peek out from under the domain card atop it; one of the resource icons under that domain must match the card being played. With only three domains to start, you must balance your reserves to activate characters (people, cultists, monsters), their support (old books, haunted locations, cars), and events (spells, actions, weird holidays) to succeed at story cards.

Each starter contains a 10-card deck of story cards (only one story deck is needed), and three of these are on the table between the players at any one time. By committing units to one or more of these, the active player may score success tokens. The other player plays opposing characters on the other side in response. A series of struggles run down the side of each card, each represented by a symbol.

Your cards may have some, none, or all of these icons listed in their margin or their text. If you have the most symbols, you beat your opponent in that struggle; you gain a bonus, or your opponent suffers a penalty. In the terror struggle, for example, having the most tentacle icons means one of your opponent's units goes mad and leaves the story. Then you move to the combat struggle and compare icon totals again, where units may be killed. When the struggles are resolved, your surviving allies tally their skill numbers, and if this value beats your enemy's, you place success tokens on that card.

Five success tokens win you the story. The winner of a story may activate its effect. Each story can stir things up in the game by adding new domain cards, eliminating or introducing characters, or disposing of other success tokens. Care must be taken in their use, because the story text affects all players equally. When you win your third story card, you

win the game. Alternately a player loses if he exhausts his deck. The game doesn't come with success tokens, so you'll need coins or something to represent successes on stories and which domains have been exhausted (better than trying to tilt all those nicely stacked cards). You don't even need different token types for each player.

The game is a graphic improvement as well. Most of the visuals have a blurred, watery quality suitable (or should that be *preferable*?) for depicting dark, elder things. A few selections are brighter or clearer, akin to a painted cover for a graphic novel, but they're all fairly creepy. A starter deck has 60 cards, including the 10-card universal story deck. Presumably, the tournament-standard 50-card deck includes the story cards and not the domain cards, but this is not spelled out. (The rules do offer www.cthulhuccg.com as the place to go for updates and clarifications.)

Game play can be a pleasantly frustrating experience. A game takes just under an hour (more if you're new to it), but there are enough of the little details that can, if you overlook them, derail what has thus far been a well-crafted, successful game for you. Equipping and supporting characters properly can make or break a struggle, and while the designers' choices of which icons and stats to give to which cards is the source of endless debate, who will win a struggle or story is never a foregone conclusion. A player's ability and awareness make a real difference.

A far cry better than its predecessor, the *Call of Cthulhu Collectible Card Game* has a level of strategy that draws players in deep. Given that the fate of the world rests in their hands, asking them to consider their next move that carefully is the least we can expect.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Dan Brereton's Nocturnals: A Midnight Companion (for Mutants & Masterminds)

Published by [Green Ronin Publishing](#)

Written by Dan Brereton & Chris Pramas

Cover by Dan Brereton & Alex Ross

Illustrated by Bret Blevins, Ronnie del Carmen, John Dunivant, Kieron Dwyer, Tom Fowler, David Hartman, John Heebink, Casey Jones, Ted Naifeh, Phil Noto, Ward Shipman, Jay Stephens, & Bruce Timm

Cartography by Rob Lazzaretti

162-page full-color hardcover; \$29.95

Imagine if Tim Burton directed *L.A. Confidential* and set it in Ray Bradbury's Greentown, Illinois transplanted to just South of Innsmouth. This would give you some idea of the feel and tone of *Dan Brereton's Nocturnals: A Midnight Companion*, a new supplement for the premier *d20 System* superhero RPG, [Mutants & Masterminds](#). It is based upon the comic book series *Dan Brereton's Nocturnals* which is celebrating its 10th anniversary and is best described as pulp or monster noir. Like last year's [Chi-Chian the Roleplaying Game](#), this book is as much a source book for the comic book series as it is a roleplaying supplement. It also acts as a showcase for Dan Brereton's artwork, and that of a number of other illustrators who have worked on the comic. Plus it comes with a never before seen *Nocturnals* strip.

The very first thing that strikes you upon cracking open the pages of *A Midnight Companion* is the art itself. It might be an acquired taste, but the dark, perhaps muddy hues quickly grow upon you. Yet not only do we see the artwork of creator Dan Brereton, but also many other artists get their turn in the spotlight, some having their own showcase two-page spread. In fact, the only white pages within the book are used for these showcase spreads. Elsewhere, the rest of the book's pages are done in a variety of pastel shades that amount to *A Midnight Companion's* only pretense to graphic design. But then, the artwork takes the place of that.

So what is *Dan Brereton's Nocturnals* about? Beginning with *Black Planet*, and going on with *Unhallowed Eve*, *The Gunwitch: Outskirts of Doom*, and *Dark Power*, it tells the story of the scientist Nicodemus (or Doc Horror) and his daughter, Evening (or Eve Horror). Originally from a world of perpetual darkness, the Black Planet, the pair was driven from their home by a demonic infestation known as the Crim. Piercing the dimensions using the Doc's teleportation device, they find a home in the sleepy and secluded Californian coastal town of Pacific City. However, the town has a dark side that comes out at night. Initially, this is of the criminal persuasion, but becomes calmer after the Doc sides with Don Lupo Zampa and helps him clean up the opposition. In this endeavor, Doc Horror has an advantage -- a dislike of operating under a yellow sun. Soon, the Doc learns that there are plenty of supernatural dangers lurking around Pacific City.

Quickly, the Doc and Eve -- who is able to converse with the spirit world -- gather a new family around them. First is the Gunwitch -- a resurrected mute 19th-century gunslinger, now part cybernetically enhanced scarecrow and trickshooter. Polychrome is a beautiful wraith, a spirit of supernatural light rather than traditional ectoplasm. Starfish is

a humanoid amphibian, with gills and fins, somehow related to an ancient but extinct race that predates humanity. Firelion is a pyrokinetic super soldier who follows the code of bushido.

Their most immediate foe hails from nearby, the Narn K Laboratories, which specializes in engineering human-animal hybrids, and in manufacturing a range of super soldiers. Some of their creations have gained enough free will to escape from the facility known as the Monster Shop; for example, the Raccoon has worked his way up to become Don Lupo's first lieutenant. But there are supernatural threats as well, the Grimwood Cemetery having been important to many of Pacific City's secret centuries over the last two centuries; the Old Swamp is home to a witch known as Keera the Bat Queen, who commands a band of faeries and pumpkin-headed goblins; neighboring towns are home to various vampire clans; and tunnels lead to secrets deep under the Earth. The Crim have designs upon the Earth, as does the remnants of an ancient race found under the town.

Every member of Doc Horror's family is detailed in *A Midnight Companion*, as is their underground base, the Tomb, and the town of Pacific City itself. Both are also nicely mapped. The same goes for Doc Horror's friends, allies, enemies, and other threats, which are also fully statted up for the *Mutants & Masterminds* system. The enemies are joined by the "Murder," a group of spectral killers led by the villain, Rictus, who are introduced for the first time in the book's new strip, "Spectres."

So what of the game mechanics in *A Midnight Companion*? Of course, it uses the light-and-fast OGL version of the *d20 System* used in *Mutants & Masterminds*. To begin with, the Power Level is greatly reduced for this setting, from the Four Color PL10 of *Mutants & Masterminds* to a grittier PL6. Further, many abilities, such as Cosmic Power, Space Flight, and Time Travel, are regarded as off-limits, while others, particularly Sorcery, are slightly reduced in power. The setting is also more skill orientated; for each Power Point spent, a character receives two skill levels instead of the normal one. Characters in this setting are more likely to defend themselves with handguns, melee weapons, or fists. To that end, a list of real-world firearms is given, all built using *Mutants & Masterminds*' gadget rules. These are backed up with several new feats, many of which are gun related.

All of Doc Horror's family are fully playable in this setting, along with another 10 ready-to-play characters created for this supplement that have not appeared in the comic book. Some of these are not too dissimilar to Doc Horror and his family, but either group of characters should serve as inspiration for players wanting characters of their own. The creation process is eased, especially for fans of the comic book new to roleplaying, with a fully explained example. It could have been further supplemented with suggestions and creation packages for other races, occupations, and histories, but inspiration for these could be found in a variety of sources, such as books, comics movies, and a plethora of gaming sourcebooks.

Some of these sources, specifically the movies and books, are discussed in more detail for the GM, but for the fan they also work as a set of essays on the genres that gave inspiration for *Nocturnals*. In addition, they are solid starting points from which a GM can write adventures for the setting. They are rounded off with a list of these sources. And what the characters are doing is exploring the secrets of Pacific City and combating the dangers that threaten the stability of the town . . . thus feeling similiar to the [Angel Roleplaying Game](#).

As a guide to the dark, gritty world of *Dan Brereton's Nocturnals*, *A Midnight Companion* should satisfy any fan of the comic book. It showcases the artwork, explores and explains the setting, and gives them a whole new comic strip to enjoy. For the gamer new to the comic book, they get all this -- with the new strip helping them get a feel for the setting -- plus a guide to exploring the setting themselves. The rules are fairly light, but enough that they could be used as indicators for rules systems other than *Mutants & Masterminds*. But what is given in terms of game support does not feel enough; there should have been something more than just the character stats and character creation guide. An adventure would have rectified this imbalance and been an invaluable tool to the GM, whether experienced or not.

Ultimately, the precedence that the source material takes over the gaming material lessens its value as a gaming supplement. While *Dan Brereton's Nocturnals: A Midnight Companion* does a great job as a guide to the comic book, it leaves a lot of work for the GM to do. Which is a shame, as the pulp or monster noir of *Dan Brereton's Nocturnals* has a lot of gaming potential.

--Matthew Pook

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Iron Ref 3: The Iron Ref Strikes Back

Three competitors. Three minds of the roleplaying world, each representing a different gaming genre, have accepted the Iron Ref challenge.

Three secret ingredients. Selected by a special guest, three ingredients -- plot elements, story pieces, or other oddities -- are selected for the challengers to incorporate into their concoctions.

2,500 words. Each competitor has twenty-five hundred words -- and no more -- to devise a generic scenario in their genre incorporating all three secret ingredients.

24 hours. And they have one day to work their magic.

However, this competition has been even *more* grueling for our competitors! We ran an Iron Ref competition in August, and the other will take place the first week of October. One winner will be chosen each week; 50% of the rating will be based on *your* ratings, and 50% will be based on a 1-5 rating of a group of three celebrity judges whose identities have not been revealed yet.

The winner for each of the three events will face off against each other, with the results of that cosmos-shaking climax scheduled to run the first week of November.

Who shall emerge, victorious, as the Iron Ref?

* * *

Our challengers, and their respective genres, are:

Wil Upchurch, a self-described "14th-Level Freelancer," has written, designed, edited, and created layouts for a myriad of fine gaming products. He has escaped former KGB operatives to represent the **Spy** genre.

Mike Demetro, owner of [The Guildhall Press](#) and creator of *Scared Stiff: The B-Movie Horror RPG*, has tackled unspeakable evils to represent the **Horror** genre.

Chris Aylott, the hometown hero of *Pyramid* with [More Questions Than Answers](#), will be representing the **Supers** genre.

* * *

The secret ingredients were purchased from a short, volcano-scented merchant whose prices were in base-9, by **Kenneth Hite**, the mastermind behind [Suppressed Transmission](#), and designer of so much quality gaming material that a full bibliography is beyond the capacity of a single passing of human lungs.

Stop reading if you don't want to know the secret ingredients!

This competition's secret ingredients are:

- Designer tequila
- Three identical-looking people
- A sharp, notable odor (not of the tequila)

Fiddly Bits

The third Iron Ref competition was held from 2:15 A.M. Wednesday, July 21, Eastern Time until 2:15 AM Thursday, July 22, Eastern Time. We had planned to go midnight to midnight, as we did in our first competition, but e-mail problems conspired against our great competition. Nevertheless, our challengers compensated mightily for this inconvenience, and all was right with the event.

This is the second part of our third Iron Ref competition. Our first one was [February 2, 2001](#), and the second was [August 3, 2001](#).

The first part of this competition was [August 6, 2004](#).

Without further adieu, then, here are the results of this competition:

Spy: [Caja de la Muerte](#), by *Wil Upchurch*

Horror: [Still of the Night](#), by *Mike Demetro*

Supers: [Ourobouros: A Supers Adventure in Techno](#), by *Chris Aylott*

More Questions Than Answers

Support Challenge Your Local Retailer

by Chris Aylott

At the risk of starting a running gag, I'm postponing the time management column for at least another month. Make of that what you will. In the meantime, I'm taking on one of the most frightening challenges in gamer punditdom.

Little Peter Dell'Orto has written in to ask, "Why doesn't -- or can't -- my FLGS offer me a discount?" And you know what? That's a very good question.

The Conventional Wisdom

It is generally accepted among full-price-loving retailers that game stores don't thrive when they offer discount prices. The reasoning goes like this:

When a game retailer buys a product, he pays a manufacturer and/or distributor about 60% of its list price. He then sells the product for whatever he wants. If he sells it for list price, he collects about 40% of the money to pay his own bills. If he sells it for less, that discount comes out of his 40% and not the manufacturer and/or distributor's 60%.

This means a little discount takes a big chunk out of the retailer's share of the money. If the retailer offers a 20% discount on a game, he needs to sell twice as many copies to make the same money he would have made at full price. (40 - 20 = 20) Since most 20% discounts don't double sales, giving a 20% discount usually means the retailer makes less money.

All this is basic stuff, the kind of thing they teach right after the secret handshake at meetings of the Mystic Game Retailers of the Sea. The businesses that ignore this conventional wisdom usually collapse in a sea of red ink and angry customers (anybody remember dragonscroll.com?); such collapses are always met with knowing nods by the sages of full price retail. "Our point is proved," they say. "Another one bites the dust."

There are just two problems with the conventional wisdom. The smaller problem is that the most powerful retailers in the world are built on a discount model, and that some of those retailers carry games. The bigger problem is that the conventional wisdom is all about what's good for the retailer. It says nothing about what's good for the customer.

It's Your Business, I Just Shop Here

I could probably bang out a quick hymn to the idea that every local business is sacred, every full-price retailer is great, that if a game shop is wasted, you can make up the rest yourself. But when I'm out buying stuff for my family or the store, the health of my fellow local businessman is the last thing on my mind.

Truth is, I'm cheap. I shop at Wal-Mart and Staples and DeepDiscountDVD. One reason that I steer most of my purchases to My Favorite Distributor is that he gives me .5 percent more off the MSRP than My Second Favorite Distributor does. I don't take shopping lists to grocery stores; when I buy food I build my menu for the week based on what's on sale.

Most successful retailers are cheap. Sam Walton drove an old pickup truck for years and squeezed every dime he could out of Wal-Mart's operations. He's not alone; you should see the lengths some friendly local game retailers go to when they want to save a penny a minute on phone service. We may be generous, we may value other aspects of a business relationship, but we like to pay less because when we pay less we have more money.

So where do we retailers get off telling you customers to pay full price? Why should you shun the lower prices we seek out all the time? We tell you to support us so we stay in business, but should you care if we do?

Twenty years ago, the health of your local retailer might have been important. If Tom's Game Shoppe closed, Dick and Harry's Dungeon o' Games might spring up three months later, but you'd be new-game-challenged in the interim. You could get your games from a mail order company, but the process was slow and product information was scanty. When it came to providing easy access to games and a community for gamers, local game stores had a lock on their market.

That's not true today. Gamers from all over the world can hang out together (you're doing it right now). The game manufacturers that don't suck put samples and information about their products on easy-to-find websites, mailing lists, or bulletin boards. There are dozens of reputable retailers to order from online, and some RPG products can be had as quickly as your computer can download them.

Today Tom's Game Shoppe can close up shoppe and never disturb your flow of games, information, and gamer war stories. The death of a local game store may never have been a tragedy, but now it's not even an inconvenience.

Sadly, Most Customers Don't Buy Theories

In theory, the local game store still provides benefits to the local game population. It's a focal point for the face-to-face community. It recruits shiny new gamers. It provides that holy of holies, a place to play.

In practice, few game customers benefit from these benefits. When the community turns up at the public focal point, it often includes a bunch of creeps with nowhere else to go. Most established gamers would rather play with their friends than meet shiny new gamers, and if you're old enough to order from an online store with your credit card, you probably have a place of your own to play in. The traditional game store virtues have little relevance to the people most likely to shop at a discounter.

Then there are the products themselves. In theory, game stores are full of unique and unusual products. In practice, we sell books, boxes, and foil-wrapped packs, each of which is functionally identical to the books, boxes, and foil-wrapped packs of the same title offered in other stores. *Eberron* is different from *Vampire: The Requiem*, and very few people choose between them based on price. But once you decide to buy *Eberron*, the copy you may buy at Full Price Games is identical to the copy you may buy from Discount Games.

Hobby games are unique products, but their delivery systems are commodities and when you're selling a commodity price is a big factor in making the sale. If what's important about a game is the experience you get from it and the way it is presented, why pay more for the same experience and presentation?

The Pursuit of Happiness

There's an axiom in marketing: "People only buy two things: good feelings or a solution to an important problem." The line between these two things is fuzzy -- if you buy a book because you're bored, are you solving the problem or just making yourself feel better? -- but the distinction between practical solutions and just enjoying your purchase is useful.

Most RPG purchases fall into the good feelings category. There may be practical applications -- "I need an adventure for my game tonight!" -- but hobbies aren't about putting food on the table or keeping the car on the road. It's a cinch that we're buying these games to enjoy them, but in addition to the game we're also buying the services of the person who sold it to us.

What makes you feel good about the experience of shopping in your favorite store? Is it the prices? Is it the way the store looks? The way you're treated by the staff? Does the selection or presentation of the merchandise at the store play a part? Is there something else that makes the experience special to you?

Note that all these questions apply just as well to online stores and discounters as they do to bricks-and-mortar or full-price stores. They apply to any store, not just game stores, and if the game store you shop at isn't your favorite store, what does that say to you? What does your favorite store have that your game store lacks? (It could just be that you like what they sell better.)

Shouldn't we feel as good about the stores we shop at as we do about the games we buy? If we don't enjoy those stores, if we're not satisfied by them, then is there any reason we shouldn't shop somewhere else that makes us happier?

(And while I'm wondering, what does it say about us that we spend so much time comparing notes on stores or games we claim to hate?)

Make Me Happy

One thing I've noticed about my fellow retailers is that we spend a lot of time talking about what would make us happy. We don't talk much about what it would take to make our customers happy; sometimes it seems like the customers are supposed to be serving us and not the other way around. Human nature, I suppose, but I wonder if we're missing something there.

Many game store customers are happy just coming in the door. They like the games, they like the people selling them, they like being in a place that accepts and encourages their hobby. Game retailers love customers like these; it's easy to be nice to them. These customers are the bedrock of any successful game business.

However, it's hard to build a great game business on just the easy-to-please customers. If anything, they represent a subtle trap, a security that creates complacency. If many of our customers are thrilled just to walk in our door, there's less incentive to make sure that what they see inside is the best it could be. It's the difficult customers that push retailers to improve their stores, and I wonder if game retailers spend too much time drawing praise from the easy customers and dismissing the criticisms of the difficult customers.

If we game retailers pushed ourselves a little harder, maybe we could make our businesses more efficient. That would let us compete better with discounters. If we feared losing our more outspoken customers a little more, maybe we'd work harder on finding products and services that please them. If more of our customers told us that the old standbys of "product, playing space, and new gamers" weren't good enough any more, maybe we'd find new reasons for them to shop at our stores.

If you're not 100% thrilled with your usual retailer, maybe it's time for you to give him a kick in the pants. Maybe it's time to tell him to step up his performance, and to be willing to shop elsewhere if he doesn't.

The Price of Happiness

There are people for whom price is everything, and there are people who couldn't care less about price. Neither approach is wrong, and there are shops that cater to each group. Those people don't worry much about their purchasing decisions, because they already know what they want.

The rest of us have to think a little harder. Price is important to most of us, but we want more out of our shopping than just price. (If we didn't, we'd just shop at the cheapest place and not worry about it.) We need to look within a little, to figure out what makes the shopping experience good for us and how much we're willing to pay for it.

Everybody has his own balance point of price and service and ambiance and entertainment. Maybe it's time for us to understand that there is no wrong preference among these, and that it's okay to demand lots of value for your money.

The *Eberron* campaign setting sells for \$27.17 new on Amazon.com. If you buy it at your local retailer at the \$39.95 suggested retail price, you're paying \$12.78 more for the same object. Shouldn't you be getting something for that money? If you aren't getting anything for that money, why not shop somewhere else?

What do you want your full-price retailer to do to earn his 12 dollars and 78 cents?

Object Of My Obsession

for *GURPS Third Edition*

by Eric Funk

"And he piled up one the whale's white hump the sum of all the rage felt by his whole race. If his chest had been a cannon, he would have shot his heart upon it."

-- *Moby Dick*

A man may spend his life and fortune hunting a whale or building a time machine. Heroes pine and train to save a kidnapped princess. A youth in a jersey spends most of his free cash on hockey cards. A woman makes many long-distance phone calls and hires detective after detective to look for her long-lost brother. A child seeks to be a professional athlete, and joins every extra-curricular sports team in the area. Independent of skill, their determination, coupled with the amount of energy spent trying to fulfill their dream, describes these people as having an *obsession*.

In *GURPS* terms, an Obsession is a goal toward which the character will spend most, if not all, of their free resources, time, money, Contacts, and/or Favors. In the above examples, the youth should be carrying cards, reading books about them, joining clubs, and watching the news and games to know the value of the cards. The woman should spend hours getting to know people in the area (citizens and law enforcement personnel), and convincing other detectives to pick up the case where the last left off.

"The last! I knew you were the last!"

-- King Haggard, *The Last Unicorn*

GURPS has already sub-classified several specific Obsessions: Fanaticism - obsessing about the progress of an organization, and Megalomania, defined as Fanatic (Self) (see p. B34). In addition to the former two, if an obsession is seen by the local public as unrealistic and not within the "common logic" of the world such as "Restore magic to the world," then it might be better reflected in the additional purchase of a Delusion ("Believes that magic exists"), even if it were technically possible, but not believable. On the other hand, a realistic goal that adversely affects others ("Must paint *every* tie pink") may be better handled as an Odious Personal Habit ("Paints every tie pink."). An Odious Personal Habit alone is right for the former example, unless the character spends all their free time hunting non-pink ties and coloring them, perhaps planting paint bombs in factories. It may also qualify as such if the character dresses/presents themselves in an anti-social manner. One example may be someone with the Obsession "Wants to be like _____," and dresses the part, trying to emulate the life of Elvis, Shakespeare, a 17th century aristocrat, or a particular punk rock star whilst working for a Wall Street Broker (see p. CI93 for details). It may also be possible to model it as a Vow. A Reputation may also be appropriate after a time. A Higher Purpose (see p. CI26) might be considered another form of an Obsession, possibly better described as a Code of Honor/Sense of Duty with a skill bonus when pursuing it (which is why this is an advantage).

Now that the Obsession has been narrowed down to concepts that are realistic, but don't directly annoy other people, what is left?

Life Goals

Life goals are mainly internal, long term, and can work well within most campaign structures, as well as provide plot hooks for the GM. A common goal of young, idealistic characters is "To become the world's best _____." This can be rationalized in training, even considering the main adventure as "training" for the goal. A clever GM can then find ways of putting tension on the character. Perhaps they must choose whether to go to a karate tournament, or tail a criminal through a sewer. Alternately, the choice may be between slaying a dragon that killed their parents, or saving a helpless group of pilgrims from a *similar*, but unrelated fate. Another way to exploit this disadvantage is to attach it to

a limited time offer, pressuring the character to either rush or sidetrack the current adventure to start while a window of opportunity presents itself -- this may be a good way to keep the players satisfied that they stopped the villain, yet have something to look forward to. Last, but not least, revealing an NPC (or a PC) that has the same Obsession as the PC should be done with care, because the storybooks and movies teach that they will either help each other, perhaps just until the last moment, or become fierce rivals.

"If you choose the quick and easy path . . . you will become an agent of Evil."

-- Yoda, *Star Wars*

Achieving Goals

Once the aspiring youth has achieved his or her dream of being the "Become the best student in the Dojo," a logical step may be to move on to "Become the best martial arts student in the city." Instead, if the player decides the character likes leading and molding beginning students, on a part-time basis, the Obsession may be traded for Duty, Sense of Duty, and/or Dependents. GMs must be careful, as Obsessions that align directly with the campaign may not be any limitation. For example, if Andrel the warrior has the Obsession (Kill Jorneth the Necromancer), it should not be worth even the normal -5 points if the whole team is heading to kill the necromancer, especially if the wizard reciprocates by trying to kill *them*. If, however, the party is to be ordered to take the villain alive (or must because of a dead-man's switch), or they are instead hunting Lennir the Mad, who is a more powerful, more evil wizard from the next province over, the warrior should be torn between the Obsession and Sense of Duty to his friends and country. If the party's goals and the character's Obsession differ in objectives from time to time, it should be difficult to convince the character that they should use their resources on "peripheral" goals. Intertwining a -15 point Obsession with a 15 point Destiny (see p. CI35) can lead to long-term changes in the campaign world!

When characters are created, the GM usually gives them a cursory examination (to make sure that an undead fireball-sword wielding evil dwarf paladin doesn't sneak into 1924 New York), and asks what the character does in their free time. This helps the GM and player decide what the character can do if suddenly the GM decides that the characters have three weeks to play out (while one builds a one shot dimensional portal from popsicle sticks using an ancient Egyptian tomb they just found). Most characters will have a hobby, but only a few have the drive and sense of purpose that makes an Obsession. In conclusion, declaring a character's life goals can be a powerful tool for the GM and player, whether they are intense enough to qualify for an Obsession, or just worth a Quirk.

Below are listed a few sample Obsessions:

Obsessions worth -5 Points

- Join a local club that doesn't want you, whose standards of society/achievement you don't meet. In *GURPS* terms, this may be a Reputation, Status, and/or Wealth. If it is personal, then add a negative Reputation.
- Travel to a place pretty far away (one to two weeks away or more) to which there has been some obstacle, be it passport, money, or responsibilities.
- "Get ____ to notice/go out with me (without using trickery), but who doesn't like me already." This may also be represented as an Enemy, Reputation, or Dependent.
- Speak/fight against an evil empire. This may qualify as a Delusion if the public does not recognize the empire as a threat, and an Enemy when the group takes notice of the individual's actions.
- Become the best ____ in a city/small region and keep the title, *or* become the best ____ in a country/planet for just an instant.

Obsessions worth -10 Points

- Join a national exclusive club, whose membership is reserved for great achievers, be they athletes, politicians, or thinkers.
- Travel to a place very far away (one to two months away or more by mundane means). A modern version may be a goal to be the first to reach the summit of Mount Everest, the geographical South Pole, or the bottom of the

Marineris Trench.

- "Get ____ to marry me (without using trickery), even though the person hates me."
- Actively oppose an evil empire.
- Become the best ____ in a country/planet and keep the title, *or* become the best ____ in the whole game world for just an instant.

Obsessions worth -15 Points

- Join the Illuminati's Inner Circle
- Travel to a place incredibly far away (1-2 years' travel one way or more by mundane means). A modern version may be another planetary body, such as the Moon or Mars.
- "Get ____ to truly love me (without using trickery)," but they want to kill me.
- Personally topple an evil empire.
- Become the best ____ in the whole game world and keep the title.

Pyramid Links

- "[Variations of a Theme](#)" by Brian Rogers
- "[Time Enough for Love](#)" by Brian Rogers
- "[The Wrong Equation](#)" by Michele Armellini

Famous Last Words

"I'll get you, my pretty! And your little dog, too!"

-- Wicked Witch of the West, *The Wizard of Oz*

The Magnificent Seven: The Voyages of Sinbad

"One might say of anyway the Stories of the Voyages of Sindbad that, on the contrary, they were romances into which had intruded elements of trade and navigation. It remains to be seen to what extent we may part the gaudy curtains of its fictions and discern the lineaments of its facts. Where, indeed, did Sindbad sail?"

-- Avram Davidson, "Where Did Sindbad Sail?"

It hath reached me, O auspicious Subscriber, that Sinbad (or more pedantically, Sindbad, or more pedantically still, es-Sindibad) the Sailor may be seen to explore the veriest reaches of what we indite herein as [India Ultraterrestria](#), and that further, Sinbad whom Allah loveth, loveth to run his mouth off about such explorations and thus pique the curiosity of Transmitters e'en as far as Chicago-on-the-Lake. And so therefore we shall attend to the matter of Sinbad, and the nature of his sailing, and what it might portend if we, too, cast off the ropes of logic and fact for the sun-drenched islands of ele-Phantasy. Sail on!

"Consider, therefore, O Landsman,' continued Sindbad the Seaman, 'what sufferings I have undergone and what perils and hardships I have suffered before coming to my present state.'"

-- Richard Burton (trans.), *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*, "The Tale of the Seventh Voyage of Sindbad the Seaman"

In its canonical form (such as it is) the Tale of Sinbad the Sailor is a nested narrative of seven Voyages from Baghdad out into the Outermost East. On his First Voyage, Sinbad makes landfall on an island that turns out to be "a great fish," and winds up adrift when the whale submerges. He washes up on the shores of King Mihrjan's land, meets another great fish, and sees the island of al-Dajjal, the Antichrist, before catching a ride back home. On his Second Voyage, Sinbad falls asleep on the island of the [Roc](#); tying himself to the bird's leg, he winds up carried to the jewel valley of the [griffins](#) (mere "eagles" in this telling) and then to the island of the karkadann (a very rhino-like [unicorn](#), or vice versa), where he uses his jewels to join a caravan back to Basra and home. On his Third Voyage, hairy ape-satyrs steal Sinbad's boat and leave his crew to the tender mercies of a cannibal giant; he blinds the giant, defeats a sea serpent, and rides home on a passing ship. On his Fourth Voyage, a shipwreck strands Sinbad in the country of the Ghuls; fleeing them, he winds up in the primitive country of Calanak. Introducing the saddle and other innovations, Sinbad becomes a great man and marries a local girl, but when she dies is buried with her according to the local custom. He escapes from the grave and hitchhikes home on a passing ship. On his Fifth Voyage, Sinbad's crew break a Roc's egg and kill its chick, so the Roc destroys his ship, leaving Sinbad stranded on the island of the Old Man of the Sea, whose "slender and pliant legs" grip him until Sinbad can get the Old Man drunk and kill him. After a brief stop-off at the [City of the Apes](#), Sinbad returns home. On his Sixth Voyage, Sinbad suffers shipwreck in a dangerous strait; marooned with no food, he nearly dies but decides to float down a stream under the mountain. The stream deposits him in the kindly land of Sarandib, whose king sends him back to Baghdad with a message for Harun al-Rashid. On Sinbad's Seventh Voyage, his ship runs aground on a reef in a sea of monsters. Sinbad makes a raft of sandalwood and sails down a river to a city ruled by a friendly Sheikh, who makes Sinbad his vizier. The city's menfolk turn out to be [birds](#) (or demons, or demon-birds), and after a brief detour into the mountains, Sinbad returns home for good rather than dwell with them.

"Let's follow Sindbad on his voyages. Their locale is the Indian Ocean and, more particularly, the large islands of the East Indies . . . The destination of these voyages was clear to the listeners, for not only was Arabian sea trade Indian trade almost by definition, but even the hero's name contained the Arabic word for India, Sind."

-- L. Sprague de Camp and Willy Ley, *Lands Beyond*

Identifying the various islands and cities of Sinbad's itinerary is made both easier and harder by his habit of lifting place names and descriptions straight out of the classics of Arabic geography: al-Kazwini, Idrisi, and Ibn al-Wardi, among others. There is general agreement that Sarandib is Sri Lanka, for example, and that the kingdom of Mihrjan is probably Borneo. The island of the Roc is likely [Madagascar](#), as we've [seen](#), but eventually the identifications get trickier. The hairy apes may be baboons on Socotra or orangutans on Sumatra; the Old Man of the Sea might be an orangutan or an East African grandee. The cannibal Ghuls are possibly the cannibal Andamanese or Burmese, and so

forth. The island of the Antichrist, the City of the Birds, and the Valley of the Diamonds might be anywhere in India Ultraterrestria; many of Sinbad's locations recur in [Mandeville's](#) journeys with entirely different place-names assigned. Even Sinbad's adventures are often not easily pegged down. The giant whom Sinbad blinds is clearly Polyphemus from the *Odyssey*, his subterranean river comes from the 12th-century tale of Duke Ernst of Swabia, and the submerging Whale-Island from the First Voyage is taken wholesale from the *Navigatio* of [St. Brendan](#).

*"And, indeed, many men well acquainted with their histories opine that the stories above mentioned and other trifles were strung together by men who commended themselves to the Kings by relating them, and who found favour with their contemporaries by committing them to memory and by reciting them . . . Such is the book entitled **Hazar Afsanah** or **The Thousand Tales** . . . Such also is the **Tale of Farzah**, and **Simas**, containing details concerning the Kings and Wazirs of Hind: the **Book of al-Sindibad** and others of a similar stamp."*

-- Ali Abu al-Hasan al-Masudi, *Muruj al-Dahab wa Ma'adin al-Jauhar*

So where does Sinbad come from in the first place? Who assembled all those travelers' tales and antique geographies and spun Seven Voyages from the foam and flotsam of medieval legend? Nobody has the faintest idea, except that they have much in common with the unknown bards who assembled the *Thousand Nights and a Night*, better known in the West as the *Arabian Nights*. The *Nights* themselves are dismissively referred to as early as 944 A.D. by the traveler and encyclopedist al-Masudi, along with "the Book of al-Sindibad." However, as we shall see in a little bit, this is probably not our Sailor. Pretty much all the stories in the *Nights* are complete by the thirteenth or fourteenth century, but no "canonical" form has been established even now. In his "Terminal Essay," Burton makes a sound case that the main body of the stories was composed before 1400, noting the absence of syphilis, hard liquor, coffee, cannon (for the most part) and other Renaissance innovations from the tales.

Although Sinbad's Voyages now appear firmly ensconced within the *Arabian Nights*, the tales of Sinbad the Sailor may have been an entirely separate story cycle, added to the *Nights* as late as the 18th century! Antoine Galland, the first European translator of these tales, translated *Sinbad* in the 1690s and only later discovered the existence of a larger "Scheherezade Cycle," which he translated in 1704 in the same style as his earlier *Sinbad*. Galland was thus the first person known to have combined the two cycles in a single set of stories, and even his sources were later versions. The oldest known manuscript of the *Arabian Nights*, interestingly enough the very one used by Galland for his 1704 translation (the fourth volume of which, by the way, is missing from the Bibliotheque Nationale), cannot have been copied before 1426, when the ashraf (a gold coin mentioned in the Hunchback's Tale of the Jewish Doctor) was first minted by the Mamelukes.

This is right around the time when Sinbad's old stomping grounds are getting churned up by the "treasure fleets" of the great Ming admiral Zheng He (or Cheng Ho, to his 19th-century friends). Zheng He sailed at least as far as Zanzibar and Java and he may have discovered the Cape of Good Hope and Australia, although the ossifying Ming bureaucracy buried his final reports and charts without taking any action on them. One can stumble upon Web sites insisting that Sinbad was "really" Zheng He based on the fact that Zheng He (a Muslim born Ma He) was named the "Three Jewel Eunuch" (*sanbao dai jien*) by the Emperor. (Zheng He is worshiped under the name Sanbao in Chinese communities in Malacca and Java today.) Their itineraries are strongly similar, and some myths about Sanbao (such as friendly whales plugging holes in his boats) sound like fugitive or vagrant *Nights* tales, but the dates *probably* don't work. However, it is tempting to believe that the "Sailor Cycle" got its final form during the confusion and prosperity of the late 15th century, and the memory of the Muslim admiral Sanbao's treasure ships helped cement the name "Sinbad" onto the stories.

"Know, O Porter that thy name is even as mine, for I am Sindbad the Seaman; and now, O Porter, I wouldst have thee let me hear the couplets thou recitedst at the gate anon."

-- Richard Burton (trans.), *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*, "The Tale of Sindbad the Seaman and Sindbad the Landsman"

Sinbad himself seems kind of anxious about his name. In Burton's telling, when he hears a porter, also named Sinbad, bemoaning his fate, he invites Sinbad the Porter in for a recitation of Sinbad the Sailor's stories, fixing them in the mind of his namesake and bringing his doppelganger firmly into the fold. And verily, Sinbad had a reason to worry about name drift. Because if you'd asked any literate, genteel person in the 14th-century Muslim world about "Sinbad,"

he would most likely have told you the improving tale of Sinbad the Counsellor, and the Seven Wise Sages who warn of "the craft and malice of women." This *Sinbad-Nameh*, the *Book of Sinbad*, contains seven (usually) story pairs in which the Seven Sages and an evil queen trade tales to prove or disprove the treason of a young prince, ordered by his tutor Sinbad to keep silent for seven days. (As opposed to the Sailor, who is almost comically prolix and talkative, even on desert islands.) This is almost certainly the "Book of al-Sindibad" referred to by al-Masudi above; it comes from India (from whence perhaps the "Sindi" in "Sindibad," although Burton at least gives some credence to a derivation from "Siddhapati," the "Lord of the Sages") and may date back to the 5th century B.C. It spread to the West in the 11th or 12th century, where it was known as the "Seven Sages of Rome." Most interestingly for our purposes, though, it helps focus the one commonality between the two cycles -- the insistence on seven trials or crises, told as stories.

"It came to pass, when Enoch had told his sons, that the angels took him on their wings and bore him up on to the first heaven and placed him on the clouds. 'And there I looked, and again I looked higher, and saw the ether, and they placed me on the first heaven and showed me a very great Sea . . .'"

-- 2 Enoch 3:1

And this, of course, brings us to the seven stages of magical initiation, such as the seven degrees of the Mithraic mysteries. Many scholars believe these seven degrees mark seven trials or seven revelations, mirroring a journey up past the seven planetary spheres to Heaven. This concept goes back at least as far as the progress of [Enoch](#) through the seven heavens or (less happily) the journey of the Sumerian goddess Inanna through the seven gates of Hell. Could Sinbad's Seven Voyages mark an [initatory path](#), a sacred geography through the elemental monsoons and currents of India Ultraterrestria?

Sinbad's voyages eerily match the [Sufi](#) "arc of ascent" through the seven *latifah* of the experiential macrocosm. His First Voyage passes Saturn (the al-Dajjal, or exiled king) and encounters Nature in the form of the Whale-Island, his Second passes the Moon (symbolized by the jewels and the unicorn) and Forms when Sinbad disguises himself as a carcass to escape the Valley of the Diamonds, his Third passes Mars (the violent giant) and literally blinds Perception. On his Fourth Voyage, Sinbad rules (Jupiter-fashion) over Calanak when his Imagination allows him to re-invent the saddle, his Fifth passes the Sun (the Roc in its anger) and reveals a World Beyond Form in the protean Old Man of the Sea, he serves as a Mercurian messenger on his Sixth Voyage (where perhaps his near-death and symbolic resurrection confirm his Divine Nature), and marries a princess in Venusian fashion on his Seventh, when his calling on Allah both defeats the demon-birds and invokes Divine Essence.

"The high ground of traditional realism, brothers, is where I stand! Give me familiar substantial stuff: rocs and rhinoceri, ifrits and genies and flying carpets such as we all drank with our mother's milk and shall drink -- Inshallah! -- till our final swallow. Let no outlander imagine that such crazed fabrications as machines that mark the hour or roll themselves down the road will ever take the place of our homely Islamic realism."

-- Ibn al-Rashid, in *The Last Voyage of Somebody the Sailor*, by John Barth

Perhaps it is not pure coincidence that Antoine Galland was, like Sinbad, "buried alive" during his travels in the East. Galland got caught in an earthquake in Smyrna in 1688 and emerged miraculously unharmed before returning to France to translate the apparently emerged-from-nowhere Sinbad Cycle. Perhaps it's not just a coincidence, then, that the Baron Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall was one of the key scholars who cemented the Sinbad Cycle into the *Arabian Nights* and that he provided the cycle with a possibly spurious antiquity by confusing the Sailor with the "Seven Wise Sages" Sindibad. For Baron Hammer (as Burton delightfully calls him) was also a crucial figure in Templarist occult Freemasonry, the author of "The Mystery of the Revelation of [Baphomet](#)." And according to a footnote in Burton, the Baron also "escaped drowning by the blessing of the Nights." Burton himself was wise in the arts of the East, and translated the Nights according to his own style, giving Sinbad nights 537-566 for his own. Surely a linguist and occultist such as Burton would be aware that those numbers kabbalistically run from "Atziluth" (the sphere of Godhead) down to "Tzal-Maweth," the Shadow of Death. Curiouser and curiouser.

Burton separates the two Sinbads (Sailor and Counselor) by the Tale of the City of Brass, a fractal city of the djinn itself mirrored in [Irem](#). On the other side of the Sailor's tales, he places the Tale of the [Queen of Serpents](#), almost as if to demarcate Sinbad Country and guard the rest of the Nights from Sinbad's influence. But it's hopeless; Sinbad is too

wily, too omnipresent for such measures. He took a tidal wave at the flood, sailing into our history during a great reality quake in 1688. He is the great merchant of the cantosphere, bumming a ride with Odysseus, taking point for Mandeville, even "coincidentally" partnering with Chinese admirals and keeping a temple to "Sanbao" going in the quotidian Malacca where he found monsters and rubies. He trades in mindshares, taking perception and belief and arbitraging them between the Sheikh of the Birds and the lucky lords of Serendip. Sail on! Sail on!

Cooperation: The Wacky Gamer's Game!

This is the second part of my GenCon column, wherein I promised to describe another fascinating aspect of the convention to you -- one which led to a personal revelation about both the convention and the gaming industry itself.

Namely, that -- for the most part -- everyone in the gaming industry is *really* nice toward each other.

I had this revelation as myself and West End Games editor extraordinaire Nikki Vrtis were at the [Green Ronin](#) booth, talking with Nicole Lindroos (a remarkably nice person) and Steve Kenson (another remarkably nice person). And it hit me: I was complimenting Green Ronin's products and creators (because I'm a fan), while quasi-representing one game company and editing a magazine for *another* game company. Oh, and I'd just had my first cover-credit book released at that con, from another game company.

While I can't claim to have made any true friends at the convention, I suspect that's mostly owing to a lack of time and my remarkable shyness. But I know other people in the biz, and, with a few notable exceptions (the recent clash over [GAMA](#), for example), companies are not only personally friendly toward one another, they are *professionally* friendly toward one another.

I really cannot stress how remarkable I find this. In all the other fields I've worked in, getting competing companies to work together professionally would be akin to Darth Vader and Yoda playing hopscotch. Heck, getting folks from competing businesses to be civil to one another while in the same room would be an accomplishment, should such an odd circumstance happen at all. In most other fields I've had experience with, attitudes have ranged from extreme indifference to active dislike and distrust.

But putting aside general inter-company goodwill, I realized that there was an astonishing number of cross-company projects and gestures:

- Steve Jackson Games' various dealings with other companies and professionals (such as Pinnacle, Eden Studios, Marc Miller)
- Hero Games' and Guardians of Order's crossover adventure *Reality Storm: When Worlds Collide*
- The *Swords Into Plowshares* charity project
- And many others I'm too lazy to research.

And so, while trying to puzzle out my thoughts on this phenomenon, I thought -- in the spirit of inter-company cooperation -- I would ask several of my industry compatriots their thoughts on the matter. It was at this point I realized the first lesson I would glean from this:

Don't e-mail busy fellow professionals a mere 24 hours before you're expecting to use their quotes in a column.

While many would consider this idea to be a no-brainer, that ignores the fact I have no brain, despite what the diploma given to me by the Wizard may say.

Anyway, several professionals *did* get back in touch with me, despite my efforts to keep them from doing such.

One thing most of the professionals I contacted pointed out was that we're all united in our love of games. Again, this is a no-brainer, but goes a long way toward explaining a general level of connection between game companies. As [Matt Forbeck](#), the über-prolific freelancer behind *The Redhurst Academy of Magic* and a jillion other books, put it, "We can talk with each other and connect in a way that's just not possible with 99.9%+ of the population." Peter Wacks, President of [Social Games](#) (creators of the *Cyberpunk CCG*, itself the child of a cross-company union), commented, "It's hard to hate someone who shares your driving passion."

But that fact alone doesn't explain it; for example, I've been involved with the yo-yo biz (as long-time readers know), and despite a shared passion there, there's certainly no mass love between competitors at either the retailer or

manufacturing level. And, in the Friendly Local Comic & Game Shop biz, there's certainly no love between competitors that I've found (although I admit my experiences are not all-encompassing, and may be unique).

Some of the folks I asked also mentioned that the general comradery had something to do with the relatively small market share. Patrick Sweeney, founder of [Firefly Games](#) and current President of the [Game Publisher's Association \(GPA\)](#), commented that there's "an 'all in the same boat' feeling -- while some companies may be much larger and more successful than others, in terms of the overall market there are the top two or three companies . . . and everyone else. So it's natural for 'everyone else' to feel a bond of some sort." Peter Wacks commented similarly, saying, "In a niche industry like ours, it pays out more to have friends than enemies. Would you rather work with the other 200 companies fighting for that same 10% market share the big boys have left for you, or would you rather work with them to increase that market?" Peter also goes on to comment, "Personally, I have always believed that cooperative business models are stronger than isolationist models. Sometimes this cooperation results in merger/acquisitions (Microsoft/Intel) and sometimes it results in cooperation and mutual assistance (Disney/Coca-cola/United Artist Theatres)."

Patrick, as current leader of a trade organization devoted to "collectively promote our companies, industry, and hobby," is obviously a big proponent of cooperation, whether it's formal programs such as co-op advertising or informal Internet newsgroup gatherings to help with layout or shipping questions. Quoth he, "In a global sense, if I help you produce a better game, then your better sales help keep retailers and distributors in better shape, which enables them to buy more of my product, too. And if it turns out you're the next White Wolf or WizKids, bringing all kinds of people into the hobby, well, score for everyone! . . . [N]o one plays just one game forever. By making new customers, or keeping existing gamers happy, you are providing future customers for me."

I confess that Patrick does a *really* good job selling the cooperative model. It makes sense, and I kind of wish I had it in mind beforehand. But, as someone who was naturally inclined to gush over *Mutants & Masterminds* with the Green Ronin folks, that wasn't what was going through my mind at the time. I think Matt Forbeck put it best when he said, "As a full-time game designer, there are probably less than a few dozen others fortunate enough to have my kind of job. These are my brothers and sisters, not my foes. We create our games for each other as well as for the public at large. We have a common cause, to entertain through games, and that's a bond that takes the edge off of things like hard-core capitalism."

Peter Wacks also mentions hero worship as an idea: "We all had the games we loved as a kid or teen, or even adult. There is some degree of just plain 'wow!' when you find yourself a peer of all these people whose life works inspired you." This immediately brought to mind one of the earliest e-mails I wrote to Steve Jackson, shortly after being given the gig to edit *Pyramid*, where I embarrassingly gushed, "It's like being asked to play racquetball by Winston Churchill." (Fortunately, neither he nor I ever brought up that quote again . . . so no one need ever know.)

Speaking of Steve Jackson (President of . . . oh, [Some Company or Other](#)), Steve replied to my request for quotable material in much the same way as the others did: "Most of the companies in the industry get along pretty well because at bottom most of us are still gaming geeks. This means that if the subject is games, we have something to talk about and we enjoy each others' work."

But then he mentioned something that I hadn't considered: "Unfortunately, it also means that we argue about everything the way we would argue about a fuzzy set of game rules . . . which explains GAMA."

This, in turn, sparked my own revelation on the subject. Getting together to argue about a set of rules is something that gamers do. But, to step back, getting together in the first place is something that gamers do.

Brothers and sisters. Compatriots. Heroes. Gaming geeks. *Gamers*.

At its core, when you peel away everything else, gaming is about gathering, having fun, cooperating, and creating a mutually enjoyable experience *together*. This is something absent in most of my other hobby-related occupations: yo-yoing, reading comics and books, and so on. While it's possible to gather and talk about these hobbies, the act of doing the hobby in question is a solitary experience. Not so with gaming; at its core, I suspect that gamers game because they like to be together with friends, working together for . . . well, fun. So it seems logical, to me, that those on the

business side would be naturally inclined to react favorably toward each other. Friendliness and cooperation is at the core of being a gamer, thus it stands to reason that it should be at the core of being a game creator.

So, to all my fellow gaming professionals, thank you for making GenCon -- and the profession itself -- a wonderful and possibly unique experience. I'm honored to be working so close to you, and I'm appreciative that you don't call security when I prattle on about how much I enjoyed your latest offerings.

And there's a standing challenge for a six-way *Castle of Magic* game involving any of you all.

--*Steven Marsh*

Pyramid Review

Early American Chrononauts

Published by [Looney Labs](#)

Designed by Andrew Looney

Art by Alison "Looney" Frane

Produced by Kristin Looney

Contributions by Bill Andel, Jeff Looney, Meg Naab, Joe Fourhman, Chris Kice, & Carol Townsend

136 full-color cards, rules sheet; \$20

What do you do if you're a time traveler and altering the last 140 years isn't getting you the results you want? You go back another, oh, hundred years or so, and see where -- or when -- that gets you. You've become *Early American Chrononauts*.

The original [Chrononauts](#) from Looney Labs took players back as far as the assassination of President Lincoln; *Early American Chrononauts* starts with 1770's Townshend Duties and ends with 1916's adoption of the Star-Spangled Banner.

Functionally, the games are all but identical. The timeline is laid out in four rows of eight cards each, and you attempt to alter history by using inverters to flip lynchpins (key points in history), which have a ripple effect on other years. Patching these rippled paradoxes with your own version of events lets your character go back to his custom-built future. You can also win by snatching thematically related artifacts from the timestream, or by fixing historical paradoxes sufficient that you can retire.

There are a few differences, mostly fiddly technical bits you won't really notice without a side-by-side comparison, or cards whose effects or text are somewhat altered (instead of a card that lets you switch your mission card for a new one or an opponent's, the new set lets everyone switch out for a new mission). The one real, sweeping observation: You're down a number of chrononauts cards to account for half a dozen new gadgets. As far as putting them into play (or taking them out), gadgets are like artifacts, except they do things instead of just sitting in front of you. You may gain an alternate ID or mission, get protection from some cards, or get extra actions or plays.

Although the games don't stand out much one against the other, they do offer players a new option: Übernauts. With both sets, players can combine the two timestreams into a single massive timeline (there will be some overlap in the middle). With an eight-by-eight history laid out, players must now satisfy all three victory conditions to win. The game takes only a little longer than a regular game, but it's a nice change of pace that demands more involvement (experienced players can finish a regular game in fairly short order). Once you've succeeded with your mission or ID, you turn it face up. It seems at that point you no longer have to worry about someone reversing those segments of your victory. "Seems," because the Übernauts rules are printed on one of the cards -- more precisely, one card face (the other side tells you how all the inverters work in a combined game). The website is supposed to have further clarifications, but the rules found there seem little better than what comes in the box.

The rules sheet is one place where *Early American Chrononauts* truly outdoes the original. The old booklet, with its small, hard-to-turn pages, tiny print, and iffy presentation has given way to a single folded sheet that conveys much of the same information in a streamlined format. The illustrations are bigger, and no rule is further away than a flip of the page. It has dispensed with a few things (like rules for Artifaxx -- which are still available at the website -- the Q&A, and the reminders), and a lot that was textual is now made clear visually.

And the graphic style has been carried over to this new set. The cards are still rich with data, thanks to the elegantly informative layout. Everything the time traveler needs to know is available at a glance. Mixing the cards for a game of Übernauts poses no problem: Each *Early American Chrononauts* card has an unobtrusive, stylized star in the corner to indicate it comes from the new set.

In plain terms, if you have the original *Chrononauts* set, you do not "need" the new one. The games are the same, so you only need the sequel if you want to play Übernauts. Outside that possibility (not that it's something to be dismissed), *Early American Chrononauts* also presents a new playing field. Players used to the old one, who have learned all its tricks and know the IDs and missions inside and out, now have unfamiliar territory to trudge through -- not a trivial concern. For new folks, it boils down to a question of which time period you'd rather use as your introduction to the world of *Chrononauts*. For old hands, if you're okay with the options presented in the original, skip it. You'll find history is just doomed to repeat itself.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Beer Money

Published by [Atlas Games](#)

Written by Charles Wiedman with Michelle Nephew & John Nephew

Photography by Andrew & Anna Yates

110-card deck, 9 by 10-inch double-sided rule sheet; \$19.95

Time to move on. Get out. Recess is over. And so is school. Nobody wants what your Momma put in your pocket to pay for your lunch. Somebody still wants to kick your butt though. And afterwards, if there is money enough in your wallet to buy them one more pint, they get double the reward.

This is the premise for *Beer Money*, the "grown-up" sequel to one of the most disturbing little card games ever published, *Lunch Money*. That game had as its theme, the merciless playground brawls fought by kids in recess over their lunch money. What made that game stand out was not its game play, which could be best described as simplistic. This is not to say that the game play failed to capture the nastiness of a schoolyard scrap, because it certainly did. Rather *Lunch Money* stood out because of its graphic design, which made use of unsettling images of children combined with off-kilter, but eloquent captions that together combine to give *Lunch Money* a dream-like quality that sits surprisingly well with the violence inherent to the game play.

Here the theme is not playground fisticuffs and the pulling of hair, but post-last orders brawls in the dingy ill-lit behind the bar. Participants fight not for the pocket change needed for lunch, but for the dollar bills that will buy the victor his next draught. Fans of *Lunch Money* will find that game play unchanged in this standalone sequel. The brawlers still start out with 15 life points and a hand of five cards, which are used to attack opponents, to defend against attacks, and to heal themselves. The cards come in four color-coded types: Basic Attack cards (yellow), Defense (blue), Weapons (red), and Specialties (orange).

Basic Attack cards, such as Death From Above, Kick, and Sucker Punch inflict straight damage, but can be Blocked or Dodged. As can Weapon cards, such as Beer Bottles and the player described Hardware, which for example, might be a pool cue or a chair. Unlike other cards Weapons are not discarded after use, but can be retained by a player to use again if he wants. Alternatively a Disarmament card will force a player to drop a Weapon. Redemption and Self Help both restore a player's life counters, while Block and Dodge work as suggested. Chokes and Holds can be escaped by playing a Freedom card.

Specialty cards inflict a variety of effects, sometimes lasting more than a player's turn. Many also only work in combinations. For example, Choke & Puke requires a Grab (or a Block and Grab if defending) before it can be played, and then inflicts one life counter's worth of damage until the victim can escape. In comparison, the Piledriver requires the same combination, but is only a one-shot maneuver, inflicting more damage and being discarded after use.

At the end of his turn, a player refreshes his hand, as can his opponents if they played cards to defend against an attack or to aid one instead. Play continues until there is only one brawler standing, who is declared the winner. Like *Lunch Money*, games of *Beer Money* rarely last longer than ten minutes.

Something that has been carried over from *Lunch Money* is the sense of atmosphere. The clearly written rules for *Beer Money*, which include a nicely detailed example of play, encourage everyone to sling verbal barbs and witticisms along with the blows and bottles. Further, *Beer Money* keeps to the same graphic design of its predecessor, employing

both the same photographer and his model daughter. Only of course, she is eight years older than first seen in *Lunch Money*. While the photography in *Beer Money* possesses a certain elegance, it is not as effective as in *Lunch Money*. This is mainly because we see more of the model in the photographs, and her poses seem more staged. There is also less ethereality and more gentility to the images, though the threatening nature of the captions is more in keeping with the violence of the game.

Although designed for two to four players, *Beer Money* can easily be expanded to enable more to participate. It can be combined with the original *Lunch Money*, and the rules do explain the compatibility of cards between the two games. Alternatively, cards from the first *Lunch Money* expansion, called *Sticks & Stones* -- also released this year -- could be added to allow for more players.

Anyone looking for something different to the original *Lunch Money* will be disappointed with this new game. But anyone wanting more of the same will definitely be satisfied with this slightly more grown-up version of an original favorite. It is perhaps, only let down by slightly less than effective graphics, but *Beer Money* is just as fun as the original.

--*Matthew Pook*

Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Dogs of War

A Military-Espionage Adventure in Modern Turkmenistan, with *GURPS* Stats

Written by Erick-Noel Bouchard, MPA
with the assistance of Jean-Christian Drolet, L.L.B.

Introduction

Set in the modern world of international espionage, this paramilitary adventure is written to be played-out in contemporary Turkmenistan. It assumes the player characters are part of a paramilitary organization of some sort. By default, the player characters are assumed to work for the Green Berets (a.k.a. special forces), using as cover the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA; the espionage branch of the American army). In practice, the protagonists could work for almost any organization, private or public, with an interest in the Middle-East: the British SAS, the Israeli paratrooper Regiment, the Russian SPETNAZ, the French foreign legion, etc. This assignment fits the "seek-and-recover" type, with a twist.

Although game mechanisms have been provided for *GURPS Espionage* only, *d20 Modern* and *Spycraft* would also be very appropriate game systems to play this adventure. Conversion guidelines have been provided in an appendix for various RPGs and settings, ranging from mundane to supernatural, past to present, as well as suggestions for tabletop wargaming.

Mission Assignment

The player characters are temporarily barracked at Omega Base, a small subterranean bunker located in Darvaza, a desert city surrounded by a barren landscape in central Turkmenistan. They are assigned to a special intelligence mission under the orders of Lieutenant-Commander William Moore, a diminutive white-haired officer from Trenton, New Jersey. The player characters were assigned to the Lieutenant-Commander's regiment for a secret and delicate operation set in the desert mountains of the Garagum region (Turkmenistan), in an isolated settlement called Amal (which means "Hope" in Arabic), located some 100 miles west of the city of Darvaza (location 56,7° East, 39,8° North). The DIA does not want any official part in this endeavor for fear of political backlash, for this undercover mission is unwarranted and unknown to local authorities. The details of the protagonists' engagement are left to the GM, who is to adjust them to fit his personal campaign.

Despite his mild attitude, Moore is reputed as a very disciplined and professional soldier. The officer joined the DIA after the caravan he traveled with was scattered by raiders at a pass near a radioactive river. Reclassified from computer specialist to gun-toting soldier after the accidental loss of a finger in mission, Moore has served with the Recon battalion of the Marines for three years, mostly in reconnaissance missions, making the best of his deep knowledge of the wilderness and sharp-shooting skills.

Reconnaissance missions to Amal reported the fortified place served as a base of operations for an organized group of terrorists known as the Red Scourge. Moore suspects the authorities of Amal of using its front of a humanitarian community of miners and radiation survivors for its raiding operations against isolated communities from Turkmenistan and sometimes even the northern states. Photographic evidence brought forward by Moore suggests this group be involved in several surprise attacks against bunkers of Kazakhstan.

It seems the people of Amal made a bargain with some raider gang of rogues, apparently led by a renegade officer from the DIA. Reconnaissance reports by Vortex Squad (from the US Marines) brought forward the possibility this

man might be Captain Ulysses Skinner, a DIA operative who went AWOL over a month ago after a failed mission regarding abandoned Soviet nuclear sites. Pictures taken by Private Stephen Dallaird from Vortex Squad show Skinner using an advanced and recent laptop computer, something quite unusual in the wastes.

The player characters' task is simple: Skinner is to be eliminated. Considering the town's defenses and alarms, subtle methods are to be preferred to brute force. Without a leader, the raiders will quickly disband and Amal will be left for the DIA to secure and add to its network of "allied communities."

The advanced condition of the laptop computer suggests this technology comes from the DIA. Since vital data were stolen at the time Skinner went AWOL, there are reasonable grounds to believe it contains vital data for the DIA. The laptop must be retrieved at all costs. The player characters are given carte blanche to make their mission a success, but are not to make personal contact with Skinner under any circumstances. The man is a traitor and a menace to the DIA. Negotiating with the enemy would be treasonous.

The Town of Amal

Amal stands cliff-side on the ruins of a small city overrun by a rockslide following military skirmishes with neighboring nations some 20 years ago. The town of 750 is surrounded by a natural mountain barrier at north and a cold swamp in the east. It is a small fortified community built on the ruins of a minor city whose name nobody remembers. Much of its installations extend deep beneath ground level. Built over an abandoned mine and underground facilities, Amal is rich in ore and produces a small but promising mining industry. Its most notable facility is a small, experimental nuclear power hidden in a secret facility dating back to the days of Soviet occupation. The nuclear plant's battered condition produces very little energy, just enough to make the area dangerous: not even the Russians know about it, for the facility was thought to be closed down. Its recent discovery by "Boris the Russian," an ex-KGB officer hiding out in Amal, is certainly not a coincidence.

The landscape around Amal is surprisingly well defended, with several machine-guns on tripods and automated rocket-launchers on sentry towers, surrounded by an extended field of landmines and silent sentinels scouting the area. Remote-controlled detonators (and anti-personnel mines) are scattered among the neighboring hills, at strategic positions where enemies would be likely to set up observation or attack post. Amal is known to harbor three functioning motorized vehicles: a Russian BTR-80 armored personnel carrier (APC), two pick-ups equipped with heavy machine guns in the flatbed. The airbrush-painted APC belongs not to Amal but to the Red Scourge raiders, a.k.a. the DIA's Red Squad (see below for details).

The town is defended by 30 warriors separated in three squads of 10 hardened warriors. In emergency situations, a civilian militia of up to 120 infantrymen can be formed, with minimal combat skills and improvisational equipment. Previous experience has made them wary of foreigners, especially the military. Anyone who wishes to enter the town will have to convince the four sentries at the gate it is worth their time. Prospects or traders will only be admitted in the inner perimeter after being disarmed, searched and surrounded by an armed escort of armed warriors before being led before "Boris the Russian," the informal leader of the community. The man going by the name of Boris is very suspicious and will not let strangers wander around his town under any circumstances. Neither Captain Skinner nor any raiders are anywhere to be seen. Potential spies will be swiftly deported outside the town's walls. Any form of overt violence will be met with lethal response. It should appear obvious to any casual observer that Boris is hiding something and extremely nervous.

With a good dose of diplomacy and a silver tongue, the operatives might succeed in arranging a meeting with Boris and convince him of the integrity of their intentions. Since the Russian is more than a little bit paranoid about the whole operation, chances are the DIA agents will be caught and interrogated under less than pleasant circumstances. Nevertheless, perhaps with Skinner's intervention, Moore's treachery can be unveiled and the operatives called on to assist the gold recovery operation for the greater interest of their nation. Should Moore learn that his agents (which he's been spying on from afar) have sided with the Red Squad, he'll simply rearrange his plans and have the Uzbeks deal with the situation. The final outcome of the operation remains a little more optimistic nevertheless, since the operatives now have Skinner and the Red Squad on their side.

The Truth

Captain Skinner did go underground but he didn't go AWOL. Instead, he was sent on a secret assignment by Colonel Mike Klein (from Omega Base) to negotiate in the utmost secret an important arrangement between Amal and the DIA. While mining underneath the city for ore deposits, a handful of Amal townsfolk came upon a hidden bank vault that had been sleeping under the rubble for ages, hidden from detection by the metallic soil. After blasting the vault's doors open, the townsfolk were amazed to find a river of gold bars. Town leader Boris was quick to realize the danger however, understanding any armed community or group within 1,000 miles would be willing to raze Amal to the last child should it be known the little town kept its own "Fort Knox" unprotected.

So Boris sent a messenger, a hardy Mujahideen survivalist named Khalid, across the wilderness to meet Colonel Klein at Omega Base to negotiate an arrangement with the DIA. After some negotiation, both parties agreed the DIA could keep half the gold while safeguarding Amal's remaining half. In return, the townspeople would be provided with technology, survival equipment, and loads of transgenic grain and vegetable seeds to insure its population's growth and prosperity.

As for Captain Skinner, he was sent by Colonel Klein to arrange the transfer of the gold from Amal to Omega Base using a mundane APC. Six veterans from Red Squad were assigned to his protection, disguised as raiders (the so-called "Red Scourge") for discretion. Only high-ranking officers of the DIA were informed of Skinner's mission, but Moore's nosy habit of hacking into the computer system to blackmail his fellow officers let the cat out of the bag.

The promises of almost limitless wealth acted like a beacon for Moore's greed. Using a burrowed motorcycle to travel to the city of Darvaza, he made an arrangement with Jaffir Rey, a.k.a. "the Pasha," head of a local raider and arms dealer trading mostly in stolen arms contraband. According to their agreement, Uzbek mercenaries hired by the Pasha were to attack the caravan and share the wealth with Moore. Moore did not trust his "allies" to any extent so he kept for himself the name and location of Amal, only providing the mobsters with a part of the hacked DIA file as proof. The Pasha hired a band of Uzbek soldiers of fortune to do his dirty work, i.e. kill all the bastards and bring back the vehicle to Darvaza.

The Betrayer Betrayed

Neither Moore nor the Pasha ever had any intention of living up to their word. While the Pasha's Uzbek mercenaries were under orders to kill William Moore the moment he wasn't useful any more, the rogue soldier devised his own plan that required the assistance of naïve player characters. Using his computer and electric skills, Moore fitted the APC with a remote-control device that allows him to control from some 1,500 yards afar. Unfortunately for him, Captain Skinner had the vehicle equipped with a wave scrambler to prevent radar and radio systems detecting the APC. To turn on the remote-control device and take control of the APC, Moore needs the scrambler's access code hidden within the laptop computer. With the code in hand, he plans to blow up the APC's passengers with C4 explosives and take the vehicle for himself.

For that purpose, Moore also hired some backup in the form of 10 desperate Afghan raiders and to eliminate the Uzbeks afterwards, ambushed at the rendezvous point to make raider stew out of them. So as the DIA player characters make their way into Amal, kill Skinner, steal the laptop and bring it to Moore, he'd have them executed, let Red Squad and the Uzbek mercenaries slaughter each other and then have the desert raiders kill the mercenaries.

Such a complex plan, the paranoid brainchild of a twisted mind, will obviously backfire . . . In fact, Muhammad Karimov, the Uzbek mercenary boss, plans to slaughter everyone indiscriminately and keep the APC for himself since whatever it might be, it's probably valuable. His second in command, Omar Samarkand, is genuinely loyal to the Pasha after the grumpy old timer saved his life in a crumbling mine shaft. He would step forward to defend the family's property at any cost, even the life of his greedy pal Karimov.

Tying Loose Ends

Whatever the outcome of the player characters' foray into Amal, much bloodshed will occur as soon as the APC makes it out of town. Using Rocket Propelled Grenade (RPG) launchers and light mortars, Karimov's Uzbek mercenaries will attempt to take the vehicle down through no subtle means. Karimov has given them strict orders not to fire their rockets at the APC under any circumstances (a huge molten lump of gold is hardly a commodity). The soldiers will thus be using mines to blow up the tires and immobilize the vehicle.

The desert raiders will come out from their hiding places afterwards to kill of the survivors while Moore takes remote control of the APC, following it at a mile's distance on a battered motorcycle, using a GPS tracking device. The scoundrel will then kill the desert raiders using the APC's electronic turret-gun and make off whistling in the dusking sun, driving the APC.

There is one thing that Moore doesn't know though, but that might come to the attention of someone who found the laptop. Not a simpleton himself, Captain Skinner installed two pounds of old-fashion C-4 and a remote-detonator beneath the APC's driver seat and another 10 pounds under its fuel tank. He'll choose to blow up one or the other depending whether he wants to simply kill the driver or permanently stop the vehicle.

The only thing required to make the whole thing explode is the frequency code (found in the laptop) and a simple emitter . . . Unless the townsfolk managed a sneak trick of their own, like irradiating the gold bars to make sure no one gets away with their hoard!

The player characters have a chance to make a name for themselves in the DIA by taking advantage of this mayhem. Or they could arrange to keep the gold themselves if loyally surrendering their fortunes to Omega Base is not exactly their type. On one hand, they could gain friends among the townsfolk at Amal, respect from their DIA comrades and a quick promotion in the fraternity's ranks. On the other hand is the promise of a dream life luxury, leisure, women . . . and radiation poisoning. So what is it going to be? The medals or the babes?

Main Characters

Captain Ulysses P. Skinner, MIA officer of the DIA

140 points

Born 1964. Age 38; 5'10," 160 lbs. Light amber skin, auburn hair, blue eyes. A "born again" Ohio American, Skinner served in the 101st Airborne and the Rangers before transferring to the DIA in the late 1990s. With a rather traditionalist and extremely sober temper, he was considered boring and unsociable by his fellow soldiers, so he chose to spend his free time studying foreign languages. His family was taken by surprise when the shy Ulysses presented them with his wife, Silsilat, which he met during an extended assignment in Afghanistan.

Knowing Skinner's distaste for casual luxuries, the Colonel has given the captain his complete trust. The polyvalent and hardworking Skinner was entrusted by Colonel Klein to carry the town's gold bars back to Omega Base. Skinner speaks Russian, Spanish, Arabic, Turkic and Pashto (Afghan) fluently, having learned the latter from his wife.

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 13 [30]; **IQ** 14 [45]; **HT** 10 [0].

Speed 5.75; Move 5.

Dodge 5.

Advantages: Military Rank (4) [20]; High Pain Threshold [10].

Disadvantages: Dependent (wife) [-5]; Odious personal habit (unsociable) [-5].

Quirks: Marked dislike of luxury.

Skills: Area Knowledge (Afghanistan)-16 [4]; Administration-14 [2]; Armoury/TL (type)-13 [1]; Guns/TL 7-13 [1]; Camouflage-15 [2]; Cartography-15 [4]; Computer Programming/TL-12 [1]; Cryptanalysis/TL-14 [4]; Cyphering-16 [4]; Demolition/TL-15 [4]; Driving/TL 7 (car/truck)-13 [1]; Electronic Operation/TL 7 (communications)-13 [1]; Explosive Ordinance Disposal/TL-13 [2]; Survival (desert)-13 [1]; Tracking-13 [1].

Languages: English (native)-14 [0]; Arabic-14 [2]; Pashto-14 [2]; Russian-14 [2]; Spanish-13 [1]; Turkic-13 [1].

Lieutenant-Commander William Moore, officer of the DIA **100 points**

Born 1956. Age 48; 5'5," 125 lbs. Tan skin, white hair, blue eyes. A New Jersey American always looking for the easy way to fortune, computer specialist Moore was lightly disabled after a stupid accident involving expensive electronics, gasoline and a plush toy, of which he never speaks. First serving under the US Marines (Recon battalion) then promoted officer of classified rank for the US National Reconnaissance Office (NRO), Moore never bothered to precise to the DIA his reason to be in Turkmenistan in the first place was espionage for the Pakistani Directorate for Inter-Service Intelligence (DISI). Acting as a double agent for Pakistan and the US, Moore is considered "missing in action" (MIA) by the DISI with a sizeable bounty on his head. He was promoted to officer rank in the DIA after being accidentally wounded in combat while defending a superior officer. This opportunity provided him with a way to blackmail some officers into yielding him some privileges, slowly rising in the ranks. His current project is to get Amal's gold without getting exposed, although his preference for complicated scheme could get him into trouble. Graduated in both Electronics and Liberal arts from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Moore speaks Urdu and Punjabi fluently, as well as some Turkic and pidgin Russian. An atheist in a world of Muslims, Moore has faith in nothing but himself. He harbors a deep resentment against Islam for the austere living conditions he endured while working with the Pakistani.

ST 9 [-10]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 14 [45]; **HT** 8 [-15].

Speed 4.50; Move 4.

Dodge 4.

Advantages: Military Rank (3) [15]; Wealth [20].

Disadvantages: Greed [-15]; Secret (double agent) [-20].

Quirks: Mildly impaired; Unethical opportunist.

Skills: Area Knowledge (Afghanistan)-16 [14]; Administration-13 [1]; Art History-16 [6]; Cartography-14 [2]; Computer Hacking/TL-15 [12]; Computer Programming/TL-17 [10]; Cryptanalysis/TL-14 [4]; Cyphering-16 [4]; Demolition/TL-16 [6]; Driving/TL 7 (APC)-12 [2]; Electronic Operation/TL 7 (communications)-15 [4]; Fast-Talk-16 [6]; Guns/TL 7-12 [4].

Languages: English (native)-14 [0]; Punjabi-15 [2]; Russian-12 [0.5]; Turkic-15 [0.5]; Urdu-15 [2].

Boris The Russian, physician and leader of Amal **115 points**

Born 1960. Age 44; 5'11," 165 lbs. Light brown skin, grey hair, green eyes. It is a mystery why a brilliant Russian psychiatrist would suddenly leave in April 1994 his country's Federal Counterintelligence Service (FCS) for a shanty town of the Turkmen badlands. Back in 1993, the state police known as the FCS was formed from what was left of the KGB. It was reborn as the Federal Security Service (FSS) in 1995.

Boris won't speak of his past nor will he mention his real name, but it has been hinted that his defection from the FCS has something to do with an internal power struggle, with him siding with the losing side. A temperate if anxious fellow, Boris is prone to paranoia and especially anxious of fellow Russians, which he suspects to be FSS moles. He can't wait to get rid of the gold bars that he sees as a threat to his people's safety. Not willing to take any risks, he had the gold bars irradiated without informing the DIA. Boris is quite adept at treating radiation poisoning: he'll have the process reversed if all goes well. Boris is a coward at heart but will take arms if necessary to protect his people.

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 15 [60]; **HT** 10 [0].

Speed 5.00; Move 5.

Dodge 5.

Advantages: Social Status (1) [5].

Disadvantages: None.

Quirks: Mildly paranoid; Will not speak about his past.

Skills: Area Knowledge (Afghanistan)-15 [1]; Administration-15 [2]; Cartography-15 [2]; Diplomacy-15 [4]; Fast-Talk-15 [2]; Intelligence Analysis/TL-14 [2]; Interrogation-17 [6]; Driving/TL 7 (car/truck)-16 [2]; Electronic

Operation/TL 7 (communications)-14 [4]; Genetics 16 [8]; Guns/TL 7-15 [1]; Pharmacy/TL-15 [4], Physician 16 [8]; Psychology [6].

Languages: Russian (native)-15 [0]; English-15 [2], Pashto-16 [4].

Muhammad Karimov, Uzbek mercenary leader

60 points

Born 1967. Age 37; 5'10," 195 lbs. Sandy brown skin, black curly hair, brown eyes. Karimov enjoys the simple things of life: he likes carousing, drinking, smoking, and gambling, but more than anything else he likes the "good old fashion" fisticuffs. A provocative rebel against the precepts of Islam, Karimov gets bored very easily, is something of a wastrel and would do nearly anything to get rid of his frequent boredom. The mercenary life suits his appetite for adventure but he's looking for something that could be lucrative for a change. He couldn't care less for Moore or the Pasha, though he knows his lieutenant Samarkand might think otherwise.

ST 13 [30]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 9 [-10]; **HT** 12 [20].

Speed 5.50; Move 5.

Dodge 5.

Advantages: Absolute Direction [5].

Disadvantages: Compulsive Carousing [-5].

Quirks: Thrillseeker; Emotionally immature. [-2]

Skills: Area Knowledge (Middle-East)-12 [4]; Area Knowledge (Turkmenistan)-9 [1]; Camouflage-9 [1]; Driving/TL 7 (car/truck)-8 [1]; Electronic Operation/TL 7 (communications)-9 [1]; Gunner/TL (type)-9 [1]; Guns/TL 7-10 [1]; Guns/TL 7-12 [4]; Survival (desert)-9 [1]; Tracking-9 [1].

Languages: Uzbek (native)-9 [0]; Pashto-8 [1]; Russian-8 [1].

Omar Samarkand, mercenary lieutenant

50 points

Born 1959. Age 45; 5'6," 155 lbs. Sandy beige skin, short black hair, brown eyes. Karimov's silent second-in-command, demolition specialist Samarkand is the proverbial black sheep of a conservative Sunni family of factory workers from the capital city of Tashkent. He feels a deep loyalty for the Pasha, Darvaza's notable crime boss, after the latter saved his neck some 15 years ago while they were both biding their time at a prison camp in Kazakhstan for banditry. Samarkand's loyalty to the Pasha supersedes by far that to Karimov, a fact that might get them both in trouble should the Uzbek leader let his greed overtake his rational judgement (a likely event).

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 11 [10]; **HT** 10 [0].

Speed 5.00; Move 5.

Dodge 5.

Advantages: None.

Disadvantages: Reputation (-1) [-5].

Quirks: Shunned by his family; Loyal to the Pasha. [-2]

Skills: Area Knowledge (Afghanistan)-13 [2]; Area Knowledge (Turkmenistan)-13 [6]; Camouflage-11 [1]; Driving/TL 7 (car/truck)-13 [8]; Electronic Operation/TL 7 (communications)-9 [1]; Guns/TL 7-14 [4]; Knife-13 [4]; Stealth-12 [4]; Strategy-9 [1]; Survival (desert)-11 [4].

Languages: Uzbek (native)-11 [0]; English-9 [1]; Pashto-8 [0.5]; Russian-8 [0.5].

Generic Characters

The militia of Amal (30)

15 points

Born 1960-1981. Ages 25-44; size and weight varies. Tan skin, black curly hair, black eyes. Desperate survivors, many

of whom are Afghan refugees who fled their country after the Mujahideen rebellion against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (1979-1989) and the following civil war. These people are not warriors, they live in miserable conditions and simply wish to be left alone. All of them are Sunni Muslims.

The militiamen of Amal are armed with hunting rifles. Members of squad #2 also have 3 fragmentation grenades each while members of squad #3 have old but effective AK-47 rifles. For close combat, the townsfolk use spiked baseball bats, knives and rifle butts. Civilians fight with sticks, rocks and knives at best.

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 10 [0]; **HT** 10 [0].

Speed 5.00; Move 5.

Dodge 5.

Advantages: None.

Disadvantages: None.

Quirks: None.

Skills: Area Knowledge (Turkmenistan)-11 [1]; Camouflage-11 [1]; Guns/TL 7-12 [1]; Knife-11 [1]; Stealth-10 [1]; Tracking-9 [1]; Driving/TL 7 (car/truck)-10 [1]; Survival (desert)-10 [1].

Languages: Pashto (native)-10 [0].

Skinner's Red Scourge (a.k.a. Red Squad) (6)

35 points

Born 1969-1982. Ages 22-35; size, weight and appearance vary. Seasoned DIA soldiers disguised as common raiders. Trained for guerilla and hand-to-hand fighting. Lieutenant Waters is an expert demolitionist, Sgt Drolet is a pilot; Privates "Wako," Heathrow and Steel are respectively a sniper, a scout and a field medic. Their standard equipment is a M-4 carbines, a flak jacket, 3 fragmentation grenades, low-light vision goggles and Bretta 9mm pistol. Heathrow is also armed with a portable rocket launcher (M-72 LAW) while "Wako" bears a Barrett .50 sniper rifle.

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 11 [10]; **IQ** 10 [0]; **HT** 10 [0].

Speed 5.25; Move 5.

Dodge 5.

Advantages: None.

Disadvantages: None.

Quirks: None.

Skills: Area Knowledge (Afghanistan)-11 [2]; Camouflage-9 [1]; Driving/TL 7 (APC)-10 [1]; Gunner/TL 7 (APC)-11 [2]; Guns/TL 7-12 [4]; Running-9 [1]; Savoir-Faire (military)-11 [1]; Stealth-10 [2]; Strategy-9 [1].

Languages: English (native)-10 [X]; Language (Turkic)-9 [1].

Karimov's Uzbek mercenaries (7)

30 points

Born 1967-1984. Ages 20-37; size, weight and appearance vary. Brutes with pea-sized brains but intensive military training, light mortars and a nasty temper. Three of them are deserters from the French foreign legion. All of them carry AK-47 rifles, Ma.k.a.rov pistols and various Soviet contraband equipment.

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 10 [0]; **HT** 10 [0].

Speed 5.00; Move 5.

Dodge 5.

Advantages: None.

Disadvantages: None.

Quirks: None.

Skills: Area Knowledge (Uzbekistan)-10 [1]; Area Knowledge (Middle-East)-10 [1]; Camouflage-10 [1]; Driving/TL 7 (car/truck)-9 [1]; Guns/TL 7-11 [4]; Knife-12 [4]; Stealth-9 [1]; Strategy-9 [1]; Survival (desert)-11 [4]; Tracking-11 [4].

Languages: Uzbek (native)-10 [0]; Pashto-9 [1].

Skinner's Red Scourge (a.k.a. Red Squad) (6)

35 points

Moore's desert raiders (10)

15 points

Born 1962-1985. Ages 19-42; size, weight and appearance vary. These are desperate and remorseless raiders from Afghanistan with a taste for gratuitous violence, going along with Moore for the pay. Behaving like overexcited teenagers, they carry ragged equipment and behave with slack discipline, disbanding if seriously wounded or losing advantage. They are equipped poorly, with hunting rifles and antiquated WWII pistols.

ST 10 [0]; *DX* 10 [0]; *IQ* 10 [0]; *HT* 10 [0].

Speed 5.00; Move 5.

Dodge 5.

Advantages: None.

Disadvantages: None.

Quirks: None.

Skills: Area Knowledge (Afghanistan)-10 [1]; Camouflage-11 [1]; Driving/TL 7 (car/truck)-9 [1]; Guns/TL 7-9 [1]; Knife-10 [1]; Stealth-9 [1]; Survival (desert)-10 [2].

Languages: Uzbek (native)-10 [0].

The BTR-80 8×8 armored personnel carrier

Released in the 1980s by the Gorki Mechanical Plant in Russia, the fully amphibious BTR-80 8×8 armored personnel carrier (APC) is designed to carry troops on the battlefield and provide close fire support. Capable of carrying ten soldiers, the APV has a total of 7 lateral weapon hatches as well as ports on the upper hatches, with armored doors on both sides.

Aside for standard nuclear, biological, chemical (NBC) protection systems, the BTR-80 has six smoke grenade dischargers (three on each side) a BPU-1 turret machine gun mount supporting houses 14.5mm KPTV and 7.62mm PKT coaxial machine guns, with a shooting range of 1.25 mile. The vehicle's maximum speed is 50 mph on paved roads and 6 mph on water.

Other Times, Other Places

Since this adventure is set in our own world and time period, no special adaptation is required for using it with *GURPS SWAT*, *Spycraft*, or even simply Wizards of the Coast's generic *d20 Modern* rules. With a little twist, many other variations are possible, however.

Modern Fantasy

For contemporary supernatural games such as *GURPS Technomancer*, *Delta Green*, *Mage: the Ascension*, *Urban Arcana*, *Feng Shui*, or *Unknown Armies*, the scenario can be played either "as is" or with a few paranormal phenomena added for good measure. Radiation poisoning could simply be replaced with dark sorcery or some sort of tainted infestation brought forward by a dead conjurer. Boris the Russian would hence become a renegade sorcerer of moderate power with some surprising tricks up his sleeve, with Moore as a traitor from the player characters' own organization. Skinner himself would remain a mortal, albeit an extremely competent marksman and soldier.

Pulp

This adventure also flows easily with pulp or semi-pulp settings such as *GURPS WWII*, *Gear Krieg*, *Torg*, and *Dangerquest*. While the latter two have occult elements that GMs might wish to highlight, adapting the adventure to a typical 1930s-1940s pulp setting is pretty standard fare. Evil Swiss CreePs or agents from the Nile Empire would make terrific replacements for the Uzbeks in their appropriate contexts.

In the context of World War II, the story needs to be resettled to Egypt, during Marshal Erwin Rommel's northern African campaign against the Allies. The DIA would be working on the Allies' side, of course. The computer laptop would become a briefcase with encrypted dossiers and Moore would be an Italian infiltrator seeking the gold to finance the Axis' military campaign, using Swiss mercenaries to further his ignoble goals. Since radiation doesn't fit with the period, have the gold tainted with contact poison instead (e.g. tetrodotoxin). Working it out with *GURPS Old West* or *Deadlands* would be likewise possible, displacing the events in Arizona.

Far Future

For the *Heavy Gear* game, the setting can easily be relocalized in the Badlands, possibly nearby the Paxton Protectorate. The DIA would be serving the interests of the northern regimes, either as a mercenary group or a full-fledged military regiment. While the town would remain independent, Moore would be sold out to the Southern Republic and employing GREL mercenaries to do his dirty work. Simply equip the DIA agents and the townsfolk with light General Purpose Gears (GPG) and a Mammoth strider, handing out the GREL mercenaries some appropriate anti-vehicular armament.

Classic Fantasy

Playing out "Dogs of War" in a medieval fantasy setting isn't as tricky as it seems, once stage props get rearranged a bit. Amal would become an isolated mine in a remote and rocky region. The town would be replaced by a massive fortress built over a forgotten kingdom or deep mine, where timeless treasures have been hidden for generations. The gold is then tainted by an ancient curse or perhaps a spell, Skinner is a secret envoy from a powerful nation and Moore masters the black arts of magic, using evil humanoids for minions. The APV is replaced by a giant creature, whether an Oliphant or a wingless Dragon, and the computer used to control it becomes a magical flute in Skinner's possession.

Setting-specific elements would need to be fleshed out in detail. In Tolkien's Middle Earth, for example, Men from the Caradhras mountain that lies over the dwarf kingdom of Khazad-dûm have negotiated with the renegade Riders of Rohàn led by the king's nephew, Eomer, their assistance against the rising armies of Isengard. In return, they offer to share the gold, not knowing it was cursed. As lieutenant of Gondor, "Moore" would betray his own people by having them slain by Orcs, Goblins and southern mercenaries. For a planar adventure, a merchant-sorcerer could employ the adventurers to recover lost Xorn treasures on the Elemental Plane of Earth, then have them killed by conjured Dao and evil Genies. Endless variations on this theme are possible with a little imagination.

Tabletop Wargames

Converting this adventure to a wargaming scenario would require a minimum amount of work. For *Warhammer 40,000*, stage the skirmish on a remote frontier world where an Ork town is holding on a rare energy resource, used to fuel Warp gates. A traitor Commissar of the Imperial Guards, Moore conned a small squad of Marines into bringing back the computer files. This adventure would be staged in two parts. The first part would oppose the Space Marines against the Orkish townsfolk (both 750 points). The objective for the Marines is to secure the computer and bring it back to their starting space. The Orks' objective is to kill the Marines, but they start with the advantage of protective cover from the town walls. The second part would oppose a small commando of UltraMarines from the Red Squad with their APV against Moore's Imperial Guards (both 500 points). The first group to annihilate the other wins.

To use this scenario with *Vor the Maelstrom* wargame, the setting would be an isolated town of the Russian Empire where renegade Neo-Soviets are bargaining with a secret Union operative (Skinner) to sell their gold and keep the profits for themselves, instead of giving it over to their Motherland. Moore is an Union traitor planning to sell the gold to the Pharod in exchange for life-extending technology. In the first part, one player controls a small group of Union

soldiers (200 points) against the town's poorly equipped Rad Troopers (200 points with only Rad Troopers and one Kommander allowed). The second scenario features a small squad of Moore's Pharod allies (300 points) against elite Union soldiers (200 points, plus a 100 points vehicle). Both scenarios' objective are the same as the *Warhammer 40,000* adaptation.

Of course, these guidelines can serve to adjust this adventure to any other average-to-high technology or wargame (or RPG for that matter), such as *Gear Krieg* or *Heavy Gear*, modifying the setting as suggested above.

Pyramid Review

Doom Striders (for the *d20 System*)

Published by [Bastion Press](#)

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Mecha and the high-fantasy roleplaying of the standard *d20 System* are tough genres to mix successfully. On the one hand, the *Battletech* giant battle robots and the various forms of power armor from *Rifts* can easily be conceptualized as having fantasy versions in a high-magic fantasy game world as a development of standard magical armor and golem construction taken to the next level. There are some examples of this in fantasy literature and anime, and Victorian Steampunk is sometimes considered its own roleplaying genre with steam- and/or magic-powered automata and power armor.

On the other hand, fantasy roleplaying is often a very first-person immersive experience. The character faces challenges physically and interacts with others directly. Playing in a giant mecha, the perspective shifts to that of the robot and away from the piloting character. Also with the party structure there is the issue of whether everybody will be a pilot for their own mecha, everyone works only part of a single big mecha (similar to *Voltron*), or if the PCs are the pilots, mechanics, and people who only work outside of the mech battlefield.

Bastion Press provides a system for creating and using magical mecha in a high-fantasy *d20 System* game. First presented as a small section the mass combat rules found in Bastion's *Oathbound Arena* supplement, Bastion has developed the concept of doom striders into a full sourcebook of its own, divorced from the *Oathbound* setting and greatly expanding the options from those presented in *Arena*.

The basics are that doom striders are magically powered constructs with pilots. The suits amplify the hit points and strength of their pilots; bigger ones can have crew working in different parts of the doom strider, controlling (for example) the action of an arm or leg and all its armaments. The physical power and level of the pilot are important components of how powerful a doom strider is overall on the field.

Doom Striders presents special armor and weapon options for these vessels as well as a few miscellaneous powers and functions they can be constructed to do. Hits to the doom strider affect the pilot in proportion to the hit point multiplier as the pilot and doom strider mecha are mystically tied together.

A doom strider is basically an expensive, big, tough, armored version of the pilot, and treated that way for most of the rules, although there are limits on how much of a smaller target the doom strider can target with its weapons that can render doom striders less effective than a standard big creature or character outside of the doom strider. The pilot and any crew, however, are fully inside the strider and cannot be directly targeted by outside attacks or spells.

A profession doom strider piloting roll is used for some maneuvering, profession doom strider engineering is used for maintenance and repair, and profession siege engineer is used for some big area effect weapon rolls. According to the stats provided in the NPC section fighters and barbarians have these as class skills although this is not spelled out in the skill section.

When a doom strider is size huge or larger, the crew can operate and control different portions of the strider. The main benefit here is that each member of the crew can perform attacks or even full attacks using their portion of the strider, so a fully manned big doom strider can have significantly more attacks in a round than a single creature of comparable size, although the number is the same as if the crew were out of the strider.

As a player, though, most PCs will probably not want to play as controlling the legs; most PCs will probably find playing Voltron's left leg less than satisfying, even with a hip mounted crossbow cluster. Similarly a cleric stationed with the pilot to heal him can be quite effective, but it is not that fun a PC role to play.

Doom striders are powered by energy points which can come from spell levels, life force, and faith of a religion's followers, depending on the strider's engine. Many of the weapons and special options require energy expenditures, but simply moving around does as well. Since the doom striders can't hold that much energy, requiring an expenditure for every six seconds of movement seems crippling mechanically; either eliminating the expenditure or requiring it only per day's movement would seem to work much better. Otherwise, doom striders must be wheeled out onto the battlefield on ox drawn platforms to conserve their energy for actually fighting.

The options available in constructing a doom strider are satisfyingly broad, ranging from type and size of the engine, a wide variety of weapons and armor options, the various exotic materials the strider can be constructed from, and even options for the pilot connection mechanism. The effects of doom strider weapons and options in mass combat are explained, but without *Oathbound Arena's* mass combat system this information is not be that useful.

The sourcebook is rounded out by some discussion and rules for mercenary doom strider campaigns and sample doom strider NPC companies, a copyable sheet for recording doom strider statistics, and a bunch of sample doom striders. The book contains interesting illustrations of the various armaments and special armor types, and they do a good job of bringing the options visually to life.

As written, the energy for movement and targeting limitations of big doom striders make them a poor choice for rich heroes to spend their gold pieces on. However, with a few house rules to eliminate these problems and a DM plot eye toward keeping PCs in the action, *Doom Striders* can be an interesting way to bring mecha into a high-fantasy *d20 System* game.

--John Henry Stam

"Jolly" Howard R. Sydenham

An Impaired Procurer of Puissant Properties for 1890's Call of Cthulhu

by J. Edward Tremlett

I am prepared to reward your efforts on my behalf, gentlemen. Of course, I will need your word as gentlemen that you will not speak of what you may see to anyone outside of this transaction . . .

Good God! Please sir, I pray you put that pipe out! Please . . .

Ah . . . thank you. My apologies, good sir, but the fire is . . . troubling to my nerves . . .

* * *

Once a fixture of London's night life, following his return from the Orient, the personal fortune of "Jolly" Howard Sydenham has been greatly reduced.

Brought low by some strange condition, the owner of White and Sydenham Oriental Importations -- famed for their expertise and discretion in acquiring mysterious items from abroad -- now stays at his ancestral home in Berkeley Square. There, surrounded by one of the most extensive collections of occult items in England, he sits in bed, a maddened invalid.

They say he cannot stand the sight of fire. They say he starts at the coming of night, as though the stars themselves were his enemy. They also say he accepts no new callers . . . but those with a gift for uncovering the unknown and the mysterious may yet have a chance to meet with him.

For while Howard's days of carousing -- and handling matters himself -- are over, he still has needs. Items must be retrieved, rumors tracked down, people squeezed for information and so on. And since he can't do it himself, he's always on the lookout for people to do it for him.

People like the Investigators, perhaps . . . ?

An impresario of the occult with a number of fiery, mythos-laden secrets, Howard R. Sydenham makes for an evocative NPC for Victorian-era *Call of Cthulhu*. Keepers can use him as a resource, a taskmaster, a foe or the focus of a scenario based around either his many treasures or secrets, and the people in London who would kill him for both.

Background

Howard Rudyard Sydenham was the second of two sons born to Rupert Stockling Sydenham Sr.: a shipping manager of the East India Company, stationed in London. Howard's older brother, Rupert Jr., preceded him by two years, and their mother died following Howard's birth. This turned their father into a taciturn, loveless fellow, but he raised his two sons as best he could, with an eye on having them sent to India after a gentleman's education.

While Rupert Jr. was happy to bask in the world of the first-born son, Howard watched the world in the shadows, and learned more than he should. By night he walked the halls of their spacious Berkeley Square mansion, gazing upon the odd curios the company sent his father "in appreciation." And he could feel the pull of a strange, distant truth calling to him.

He began to comb libraries for information about India, and what little he found inflamed his imagination. His dreams began to take odd and alarming shapes, but he wasn't repulsed at what made him wake up in a sweat. He cherished it.

In spite of fevered dreams, School was quite easy for Howard, and he followed his brother to University College, at Oxford. But while Rupert Jr. was content to go into accounting -- as father expected -- Howard inquired after History in class, and Orientalism on his own. His father was not pleased, and the two of them often rowed.

Rupert Jr. did rather well for himself. He graduated, and was sent to Bombay to work for East India on his father's recommendation. Meanwhile, Howard continued in his studies, envious of Rupert Jr. and wracked by great and thunderous dreams.

While he was engaged in his third-year studies, he had the happy luck to meet another fellow interested in Orientalism. This was William White, esq., of London: a man of some standing in the city's high life. He ran a reasonable business procuring "special" items from the Orient for the decadent and rich, and had become well-heeled for his doing so.

The two men met while researching identical topics, and White readily took the student into his confidence, based on the look in his eyes. They got on splendidly, and ever thereafter White would occasionally approach Howard for his opinions. White even offered the younger man a job, once he graduated, but Howard had to politely refuse, given his driving goal. White was disappointed, but understood, and they promised to keep in touch.

Two more years passed, and Howard finally earned his degree in History. He then presented himself to his father, and asked for the chance to work in India. His father refused to recommend a "useless daydreamer" for such a job, and another terrible argument ensued. It ended with Howard vowing never to set foot in the house again so long as his father lived.

So he took his own money out of the bank, and sought passage to India. He planned to stay with his brother there and research on his own. Rupert Jr. agreed, however reluctantly, and bade his brother come so long as he didn't inform their father.

Howard gladly agreed, and before long he was on a ship for Bombay. After that, London's elite lost direct track of Howard Sydenham, and his father had to confess to both an ignorance of his whereabouts and a lack of concern. He no longer had a second son, after all.

The years that followed gave Rupert Sr. little hope of getting Howard back. Strange stories reached his ears: stories concerning his lost son's slide into decadence and abandon; his shadowy consortations with native heathens; a terrible change upon his demeanor that came as a result . . .

His acknowledged son always denied any knowledge of these things when questioned. As time went on, the lie slowly resembled the truth: Howard *had* lived with him, at first, but he came "home" less and less, and finally moved out. After that, Rupert heard his brother lived with the stranger locals -- ones whose rites were considered aberrant even by other natives.

Then came the night of fire. In a single evening, many of the more noxious warrens to be found in the city -- hives known for their strange goings-on -- burst into flame and fell to the ground, their occupants dying inside them. Had it not been raining that night, Bombay itself might have been razed.

Rupert Jr. and his help stood on the front porch, watching the fires and praying that they would not spread. As they did, a burned and dirty fakir walked by, laughing with wild eyes as he clasped a smoldering clutch of papers to his bosom. Rupert was shocked by the man's maddened look, and the fakir trundled on, giggling at some private joke . . .

So it was that, just after New Years' of 1876, Howard returned to London -- dressed as fine as ever. He'd lost weight, and his head, hands, and neck were marked with strange, pock-marked burns. But he also carried himself with a confidence and gait that he hadn't possessed before, as though he'd come back victorious from war.

He presented himself at home, and stated that he wished to see his father. The feeling was not mutual; the butler would not let Howard enter the doorway, and instead handed him a folded envelope containing money. He politely tendered Rupert Sr.'s wish that Howard make good of himself, at last, and not return until he did.

Of course, Howard expected this, and had other plans. That very afternoon, Mr. William White esq. received a familiar gentleman caller -- one with a business proposition. He and Howard resumed their friendship from where it'd left off, and by the end of the day they were partners.

Thus was White and Sydenham created. Their shared contacts in the Orient created a large net they could cast out to procure the odd and unusual for their customers. They also kept their ears open at home for chances to acquire things, and many London-based travelers, adventurers, and explorers became both customers and suppliers.

Within the year, their business earnings squared. Most pieces were bought to sell to other, interested parties, but some of the finds were kept for their own, unique collection. In particular, Howard was always seeking pieces that had to do with fire, which he now loved with a rather peculiar passion; The burns he'd "suffered" seemed to leave him wanting more.

If asked, Howard would say that his time in India had been very instructive. As for what *had* happened while there, Howard would never tell too much. Once, while quite loquacious, he spoke of having dallied with the Kapalikas -- left-hand Tantrics with extreme tastes -- but dismissed them as "ignorant fools."

William surmised the truth of the matter had something to do with those odd, slightly burnt papers he kept under lock and key. But he did not push the subject, just as he acceded to Howard's requests that William be the one to go aboard, rather than him. It seemed his time abroad made Howard nervous of leaving England. And, as William now had a partner to watch the shop, his dreams of far-off travel were now reality.

And so -- sufficiently moneyed -- Howard rejoined London society. He soon became known as "Jolly Howard" among London's less-upstanding social whirl: seeing eligible ladies by day, and carrying on into the night with the less-than-mentionable ones.

Many lovers spoke of odd and exotic goings-on in the bed chamber -- stories that spread as quickly as the fire he supposedly liked to play with. But the tales made him even more alluring to the people he and his partner associated with.

His allure made other friends as well. The various occult organizations who populated London's eccentric corners were easily caught up in the notion of purchased goods from afar. And White and Sydenham were quite happy to fulfill their needs.

Thus did the years pass. White and Sydenham prospered on others' vices or curiosities and Sydenham's personal collection grew. He remained ever-haunted by those maddened visions of his, but kept them in check. Every so often, however, when he could take no more, he took those burned papers out of his desk and reread them, dreaming of the fire . . .

In late Winter of 1890, things changed. First, William White was killed while in India: his body found strangled and hung from a tree just outside of Calcutta. Then, just as Howard was arranging for his assumption of their shared business, he learned that his own father had died.

He went home to see about the will-reading, but the butler still denied him entrance; he had final instructions not to allow Howard inside. There would be a reading of the will, but he was assured that his name was nowhere within it. And then the butler bade him to leave before he called the police.

Of course, that wasn't the end of the matter: one of White and Sydenham's clients was his late father's own solicitor. Howard reminded the fellow what "odd" purchases might come to light, should Howard be left out of the will. Lo and behold, when it was read Howard was the primary recipient of his father's house, and everything in it. Meanwhile, Rupert Jr. was slated to receive the whole of his father's money, upon his retirement from his present position with East India.

(He seemed rather content with that, as India had become his true home. He and his brother said not one word to one

another throughout the entire thing, and parted as near-strangers.)

A week later, Howard returned to his true home, and moved the curio business there as well. The butler was soundly ejected by Howard's help, and refused any chance of a favorable reference.

Things proceeded apace for the next four years, and Howard's fortunes grew. This was in no small part due to having his father's connections to add to his own: a turn of fortune aided by his father's solicitor, who now worked exclusively for Howard.

His fortune wasn't the only thing that grew, though. Battered by luck, Howard's brashness and confidence returned. He began to take more risks than ever before, believing he could always salvage a situation with money or blackmail.

So, one night, while proudly boasting of his personal collection to a customer, Howard's curious papers from India came up. It might have come to nothing, but one of the other patrons of the establishment overheard. And he went to tell another fellow of a similar bent, who told another, and then another . . . until the wrong person was informed of them.

And then, just under a year ago, as he was leaving for his nightly forays, Howard Sydenham looked up, and was astounded to see that the stars in the sky were closer than ever. As he watched, they began to move towards him -- a living swarm of sparks that he'd not seen since India . . .

He started and ran, barely getting back inside before those burning motes singed holes in his hat and topcoat. One of his maids went outside to see what the matter was, as their master was hysterical with fear, but she saw nothing. However, the next time Howard ventured outside, the sparks returned yet again.

Soon, things became quite clear to Howard: for some reason, someone was sending the children of the Fire God after him. They were not coming inside the house, but the moment he stepped outside, they would swarm upon him (oddly enough, they would not attack his servants, or those who came to call). And nothing Howard did could dispel the creatures -- it seemed he was a prisoner in his own home.

Who was sending the Children? He quickly suspected that someone was trying to run him out of business: another individual who'd dreamed of the fire, perhaps, or someone he'd crossed on a deal.

However, Howard refused to be beaten, much less made a fool of in front of his circles of business and pleasure. He hoped to stall his would-be conqueror into thinking he'd crippled him, thus gaining time to discover and thwart, his adversary.

So he arranged for a convenient fiction: a doctor's "diagnosis" was bought and paid for, and word was allowed to leak out about an odd, crippling complaint. Thereafter, only Sydenham's previous customers came to see him (new ones were politely rebuffed, lest they be pawns of his adversary) and he put on a very good show for them, seeming to be in a delicate condition.

However, the trick worked too well. Sitting at home, pretending to be weak and paranoid, Howard started to truly *become* weak and paranoid. He became convinced the Children might leap from the fireplace, or even a candle or pipe. So he ordered that all flames be extinguished in his presence, and at night he is watched by a man with a water bucket, just in case . . .

And this is the state of "Jolly" Howard R. Sydenham, as the Investigators would know him now: a cold, shivering wreck of a once-proud man who breaks into an uncomfortable sweat at the mention of certain subjects, and becomes visibly agitated at the sight of any flame.

Using Howard

Howard Sydenham has multiple uses in a Victorian *Call of Cthulhu* setting. As Howard is *the* broker of occult

artifacts in Victorian London, he'll either have anything the Investigators want, or be able to provide a clue of where it is. At the very least he can tell them who had it last, and where, or that it doesn't exist at all.

But there are three barriers to speaking with Howard about such things. One is that he no longer receives unannounced visitors. The Investigators must do something to impress him, first, and only then does he send his young, earnest-looking butler, Phillip White (no relation) to speak with them. And, as these matters must always be discussed with Howard in person, Phillip arranges for an appointment for them to visit.

Upon entering the Sydenham manse at the appointed hour, the Investigators also enter his vast collection of occult and native artifacts from the world over. A myriad collection of exotica lies within: books, statues, objects and other, less-identifiable things stare balefully from behind sturdy, glass cases. Those well-schooled in matters occult and anthropological should be flabbergasted by the sheer scope of the man's reach -- especially when the butler dryly informs them that these are only the items which are for sale. (The rest are locked in the basement: almost *anything* could be down there . . .)

Paraded through the house, they eventually reach Howard's private chambers. That's when they discover the second barrier to dealing with Howard: his insanity. His moods are so mercurial that he'll handsomely compliment an Investigator one moment, and direly curse him for a fool the next. All visits with him are direct, compelling, and mercifully short, but his eccentricities are well worth it.

But nothing Howard does comes without price, and this is the third barrier: anything gained from him -- whether it be a sale, a query, or a professional answer -- requires a favor, first.

He could ask them to arrange a sale or do some research on his behalf, but he could also impel them to theft, burglary, or aiding in blackmail. He also has need of people to go far abroad and bring things back -- an errand inevitably fraught with danger, as he well knows. Howard might even demand a kidnapping or outright murder if all other means to acquire something will not work, and he thinks he can trust the Investigators (or their dire circumstances).

(One thing he refuses to do, no matter what he's offered in return, is to give the names of his contacts or clients. Anyone who asks is quickly ejected from the house, and invited no more.)

Those who deal honestly with Sydenham find him to be good to his word, and he will deliver on his promises. Those who cross or trick him, however, find they have made a grave mistake. If he suspects as much, his butler calls on them no more, and Howard sees to their personal ruin through his many connections. London's high life and occult societies will be less friendly to them from now on.

Keepers could also use him as a rival or enemy, right from the start. If they get their hands on something he wants, either for himself or a client, he can send other agents to take it out of their hands. Retaliating draws them into his hidden history, and may engender some suspicious allies (see *Mythos Connections*, below).

If the Keeper wishes to make Howard the focus of a Scenario, there are many people in London's high life and low corners who have reasons to dislike Howard, or want something he has. Some of his previous blackmail victims might also want to take advantage of his current condition, too. Any number of stories or causes could be tendered to the Investigators, but they will find Howard a tough man to break, however reduced.

There's also the matter of his eventual death: he has no heirs, and having the man's vast collection be unspoken for is sure to cause ripples and opportunities. Most likely his estranged brother comes to take charge of the estate, and -- never knowing what to make of his brother's "queer things" -- sells a great deal of it without knowing its true value. But there might also be a "turf war" between Sydenham's old customers, rivals and enemies as they try to snatch this, that and the other thing from one another.

Clever Investigators could play this chaos for all its worth, or might get buried over their heads . . .

Mythos Connections

In addition to whatever tomes or artifacts the Keeper places in Howard's collection -- or lets him have had previous contact with -- his own, hidden history has its own connections. In fact, one of them is causing his current problems.

While in India, Howard made contact with the Kapalikas, as he claims. After he slid into the dirt, they took an interest in him, and arranged several disturbing encounters to see what he would do. To their astonishment, he did just what they would have done, no matter how grotesque or degrading.

After the final, sickening "initiation," they fully approached him. He leapt right into their lifestyle, and learned much. However, he soon realized that his dreams didn't lie with them, and instead used their knowledge to seek his visions anew.

Thus, he came into contact with the Nestarians: Zoroastrian followers of the purifying flame (otherwise known as Cthugha). He tried to approach one of these sere, burn-faced men, begging to be taught their secrets, but he was rudely ignored. Maddened to be so close and yet denied the truth, he killed the Nestarian, and took what he had on him.

On the corpse was a priceless treasure: a copy in Hindi of the Letters of Nestar -- the defining document of the Nestarians. Howard spent some time reading these papers, and learning what he could. However, retribution was not too far behind him.

The Nestarians soon learned that an infidel had taken their sacred text, and they called the Children of Cthugha down on every Kapalikan warren in Bombay they knew of. Howard barely escaped with his life -- indeed, the Nestarians were certain that they'd killed him -- and the papers were badly burned, ruining some of their vital information forever. But still, he got away.

He might have stayed dead to the Nestarians, had he not regained his old overconfidence. His proud boasts reached the ear of London-based Nestarians: a "splinter" sect, on the run from the central faction in Bombay and recently emigrated to London. They lurk anew in the darkness of the city, waiting for the time to call a new, great fire upon it.

Getting their hands on Sydenham's copy of the Letters would have been a great thing, but they considered his death to be more important -- who knew what the infidel had learned? As such, their reaction was much the same as those in Bombay, only slightly more controlled.

So they summoned the Children of the Fire God to kill him, but for some strange reason the Children have been unable to do so. The infidel stays inside his home, and the servants of their god cannot enter it. They do not know why, and have decided to find out for certain before taking more drastic measures, as they do not want to call attention to themselves yet.

For his part, Howard finds it inconceivable that the Nestarians have found him. He believes there is no way they could be here, in England, and that if these doings have any connection to them it's because a fellow Englishman -- or maybe a Chinese -- has learned of the purifying flame. It's a weak self-delusion, but one that had allowed him to function without crippling paranoia as he stayed home and assembled his collection, much like a woodland creature building a defensive nest around a burrow.

And what no one -- including Howard, himself -- knows, is that he owes his life to that same collector's zeal. One of the many curios in the collection has the peculiar ability to shield a dwelling from all servants of Cthugha -- human or otherwise. So long as the item stays inside the house, any of the Star Vampires or Nestarians who try and enter it will feel a distinct need to flee, followed an MP drain of 1d3 every round spent inside the house should they ignore it.

As for which particular item it is, how Howard or his late partner came to acquire it, what it can do and what it needs . . . such details are left to the Keeper.

(More information on the Nestarians and The Letters of Nestar can be found in The Keeper's Companion 1, on pp. 111-113, and The Keeper's Companion 2, on pp. 126 -- 127, respectively.)

Name: Howard Rudyard Sydenham

Born: 1850 in London, England

Age in 1895: 45

Occupation: Wealthy businessman, occult collector, blackmailer and fallen rake

Degrees: Degree with honors in History, Oxford, University College

STR 12 **DEX** 15 **INT** 16

CON 8 **APP** 15 **POW** 18

SIZ 13 **EDU** 20 **SAN** 45

HP 10

Damage Bonus: +1d4

Skills: Accounting 50%, Anthropology 25%, Appraisal 64%, Archaeology 35%, Bargain 60%, Become Hysterical at the Sight of Fire 49%, Credit Rating 65%, Cthulhu Mythos 10%, Dodge 35%, History 75%, Law 35%, Left-Hand Tantric Sex 65%, Library Use 65%, Occult 60%, Linguistics 35%, Other Languages: French 30%, German 40%, Hindi 53%, Latin 50%, Spot Hidden 40%, Theology 20%

Spells: Call/Dismiss Cthugha, Enchant Torch, Summon Children of Cthugha (Fire Vampires) as well as any prurient, fire-based spells Howard might have learned from his time amongst the Kapalikas, at the Keeper's discretion.

Tomes Read: The Letters of Nestar (Hindi -- partially burned and incomplete), 1d3/1d6 SAN, +4 Mythos, 32 Weeks, Spells: Call/Dismiss Cthugha, Enchant Torch, Summon Children of Cthugha, Fire Dance (note that the damaged copy of the Tome means that the means to Summon the Children is given, but not the means to bind them . . .)

Weapons: Fist/Punch 50%, damage 1d4 + 1d4; .38 Revolver, 35%, 1d10;

Mental Disorders: Pyrophillia/Pyrophobia. When he's in control of it, he loves fire, and finds it irresistible. When he's *not*, however, he's quite terrified of it. When the Investigators first meet him, he's clearly *not* in control.

Description: Sydenham is a slightly built, pale fellow who seems underweight and feverish. He's raven-haired, clean-shaven, and hook-nosed, with the family's noted green eyes smoldering in his somewhat wilted gaze. He also has noticeable burn scars on his hands and face. He tends to wear a nicely-embroidered, off-white bathrobe about his home, along with a pair of darkened, "horse-blinder" medicinal sunglasses.

Items Carried: As he stays at home, Mr. Sydenham has anything he may ever need within reach, if not a room away. Some of it may be both magical *and* deadly, should the Keeper desire it.

Income: Around 3,000 Pounds per annum, all from his import business

Savings: 30,000 Pounds in liquid assets, plus the house and everything inside of it, which could probably come close to a million if certain objects were sold to the right people . . .

The Omniscient Eye

What Would a Cart-Load of Treasure Do to a Fantasy World?

In a high-fantasy game, the heroes end up hauling back six cartloads of magical treasure and gold. They now currently have something in the order of a few hundred million times the normal wealth of a typical member of the peasantry and they are about to spend a lot of it. How is this going to impact the local economy? Realistically, what impact (if any) would this have on the regional economy? National economy? How much money would be in said economy to purchase the dozen +1 swords they have that they cannot use? This sort of thing.

--K. David Ladage

(To bring those of you who aren't K. David Ladage up to speed: We originally received a question which was, lightly paraphrased, "How do I model economics?" That's a bit more than even the Omniscient Eye can do in 4000 words, so we asked for something more specific and concrete. This is one of the questions resulting from that.)

The presence of magic takes us well beyond "the fields we know," to say nothing of going beyond the accounting practices usually used to value and tax them. However, even mad necromancers and gals in chainmail gotta eat, so just as the politics and society of traditional fantasy games attempt to model, or at least give the impression of, real ancient and Medieval societies, we'll answer the question in terms of the economies of real ancient and Medieval societies. As a starting point, we'll take the conditions as given: assume six carts laden with booty. We'll call that 1,000 pounds of treasure per cart, a reasonable capacity for a modest wain, or 6,000 pounds altogether. What impact that has depends in part on the composition of the treasure, so let's look at what, historically, that much treasure might buy.

At the low end of the treasure scale is a load of pure silver in bullion or coin. Six thousand pounds of silver is, for example, about a tenth of the annual production of the Athenian silver mines at Laurion, the products of which allowed the Athenians to float a sizable war fleet over several years leading up to the Persian invasion of 490 BC, build the Parthenon, and in large part fund the construction of a very small empire. To put it another way, it's a very respectable personal fortune, a nice but small boost to an influential city-state, and pocket change to an empire. Several cartloads of silver coin would be enough to build and furnish a modest castle, purchase a small feudal territory, or buy and equip a few ships. It's enough to set someone up in very nice style, but won't unbalance anything.

If the carts are full of pure gold, they'll contain between a quarter and a half million coins at typical sizes. Your heroes are in possession of immense personal wealth, enough with which to buy a mid-size Medieval kingdom. Based on their income, counties such as those surrounding 12th-century Barcelona or Girona, not including the towns themselves and monastic and church lands, could plausibly be had for 400 pounds of gold; with that much gold, you could buy 15 such territories (at that point, the question becomes whether or not you could find willing sellers). Indeed, that may very well be more gold than many Medieval kingdoms possessed, although it's not quite so much on an ancient imperial scale. For example, the Byzantine emperor Anastasius is said to have amassed over 300,000 pounds of gold in the imperial treasury (although that amount is likely exaggerated), and his successor Justinian bought off the Persians for five years with about as much gold as our heroes are carting off from the dragon hoard. The impact of that much money will depend on how and where it's spent.

One thing to pay attention to is how much of it the PCs get to keep. There may be taxes, pointed requests for loans from royalty, and other not-very-productive drains on the find. The English law of treasure trove, dating back to the 12th century, entitled the crown to a large share of any found riches. Then again, fantasy kingdoms may not have such laws, or they may be unevenly enforced if they do. It's also possible that bandits, nomadic raiders, and underfunded noblemen will decide to take the money by force, requiring the PCs to spend a large chunk of their cash on mercenaries to defend it, essentially destroying the treasure in order to save it. Thieves will appear in direct proportion to rumors of the magnitude of the treasure, but open warfare by more-or-less legitimate rulers to seize the treasure is

unlikely, particularly if neighboring countries are relatively large and powerful. Their rulers will compare the likely cost of attacking another country with the likely benefit of seizing the treasure (minus whatever the PCs have already spent, graft and skimming some off the top by the soldiers who actually lay hands on it first) and probably decide against it. Still, they'll shed no tears if some of the money makes its way into their coffers. The Dutch and British, for example, didn't try to wrestle away Spain's lucrative gold and silver mines in the New World, but the massive production of precious metals led to the golden age of piracy. So while large-scale attacks are a moderate possibility for particularly lawless settings, it's unlikely for most historical periods, so let's again assume that they keep most of it.

If they just keep it and decide to live moderately comfortable lives, there's still not going to be much of an impact of any kind. If the money doesn't enter the economy, it may as well not exist. The life of Bilbo Baggins, though fictional, is a reasonable model; despite having gold from Smaug's hoard and a mithril coat worth more than the Shire itself (though he didn't know that), he lived in comfortable semi-retirement with lots of stories being circulated about his wealth but without altering the economy of his surroundings. Even the largest treasure, spent slowly enough, can be absorbed into the economy without having a tremendous effect (in fact, the Medieval European economy needed a steady influx of new gold from Africa and a few local sources to balance a general flow of gold eastward in trade). If the PCs settle in a very isolated region, it's possible that moderately intelligent peasants will take advantage of being the sole suppliers of day-to-day necessities and charge the PCs absurdly inflated prices even if the PCs are trying to economize. *Very* intelligent peasants will moderate their greed once realize that the people they're trying to gouge got their gold by an aptitude for extreme bloody violence.

But that's boring. What if the PCs want to spend like there's no tomorrow? If they want to spend all their money at once on the most expensive items they can find, they can send off for matching vormal glaive-guisarme-voulges or what-have-you, but the cash will end up wherever enchanters hang out. Such impact as the treasure will have will be in a region far away, with some of it scraped off by the considerable friction of long-range commerce in a low-tech setting.

If they spend their money on the things that historical rich people have spent their money on (fine clothes, large homes, temples with priests well-disposed towards the people who built them, etc.), the likely local effect is that the PCs will accelerate the pace of economic activity around where they settle, quite possibly transforming the economy of the area. Even if they settle in the countryside, it'll be almost impossible for them to avoid the trappings of urban life. Their demand for luxuries will make their home an attractive place for craftsmen and a destination for merchants, who will in turn need the services of carpenters and laborers to build their homes and temples for their spiritual needs. Increased traffic to the area will encourage the development of ferries or construction of bridges across nearby rivers and the construction of inns and other facilities for permanent and semi-permanent inhabitants, and everyone involved needs to be fed, making the area a large market for peasants to sell their produce. Villages will become towns, and cities will become bigger, wealthier cities. This process can happen even on a small scale: for food and drink alone, masons and laborers building a castle will easily require more supplies than a typical village can provide, at least for the months or years it takes to build it. All of this may lead to political entanglements as nearby overlords squabble over who gets to tax the growing town and eventual collapse should the PCs eventually run out of money.

Mo' Money

To take the idea to a logical extreme, let's briefly consider a treasure so vast the PCs *can't* carry it, the sort of hoard dragons curl up and sleep on, with a cave floor awash in gold and jewelry. Let's suppose a mass of treasure which would make up a layer 20 yards on a side and a foot deep. That's close to 2,200 tons of gold. Ferdinand Braudel, a prominent economic historian, proposed a *very* rough estimate of 5,000 tons of gold in circulation in Europe around the end of the Middle Ages. Suddenly increasing available stocks of gold by half will have far-reaching effects. First, the direct economic effects are likely to be a combination of the "renaissance effect," with the PCs becoming a center of economic activity, and a near-simultaneous crash in the price of gold. The PCs will be rich beyond their wildest dreams, but markedly less so than they would have been if they had collected gold already in circulation rather than introducing new gold.

Second, there are tremendous political ramifications. The collapse of gold prices will cause problems at the highest level of government and trade. Feudal obligations, international treaties, trade agreements, and other

Then again, if people play their cards right, it might lead to a permanent change in the economy and politics of the region. If the PCs can support a generation of skilled craftsmen, which a quarter million gold pieces can probably do, they may be able to export their products to other areas and sustain their way of life as support from the PCs tapers off over the years. Likewise, if they build temples which can serve as pilgrimage sites, the place they built can remain a center of activity long after they're gone. The latter is particularly probable if the PCs set their mind to it. In the Middle Ages, grand churches could be constructed and stocked with interesting relics quickly given sufficient funding, and three tons of gold more than qualifies.

Deeper effects on the value of currency and on regional economies are not impossible, but depending on the setting, they do seem unlikely. There are a very few instructive historical examples of large amounts of money suddenly being dumped into an economy. Mansa Musa, a king of Mali (a kingdom rich with gold mines), made a famous pilgrimage to Mecca in the 1320s during which he is said to have brought nearly 25,000 pounds of gold, several times what our heroes have plundered. Apparently, he spread most of that gold around Cairo, where he stayed for some time. While there, he not only bought things (food and drink for his very large entourage, lodging, and so on), he also, as a good Muslim, gave a great deal of it away as alms and gifts. It is said that the effects of his spending on gold prices could be felt in Cairo for several years thereafter. Being typically vague on details, our sources don't go into specifics about how much they're felt and how many years, but we can point to some limitations. First, the effect seems to have been local to Cairo and its vicinity, apparently not to Egypt as a whole and certainly not to the entire Medieval world. Second, the effect seems to have been on the price of gold in particular. The sudden huge influx of gold depressed the price of the metal relative to other goods, but didn't unbalance the economy as a whole. Gold, while immensely valuable, has nevertheless been a fairly small part of any ancient economy, with silver being many times more plentiful and non-monetary exchanges being more common still.

About the only global or near-global impact a load of treasure will have is if the PCs come home with wagons full of ultra-rare and ultra-valuable items such as gemstones. The sheer mass of new stones on the market is likely to send prices crashing on a continental scale. Diamonds and rubies won't become worthless overnight, but they do seem likely to be far less valuable than they once were. However, transactions involving precious stones are so uncommon in the greater scheme of things, most people won't notice.

So, then: Any treasure that a party of PCs can carry is unlikely to mean significant changes beyond the local scale because it will still be drops, or at best a single large splash, in an ocean. To compare this to one of the greatest influxes of precious metals into pre-modern Europe, even three tons of gold is a fraction of peak annual production by the Spanish in the New World and a high-insignificant sliver of annual silver production. Spanish production of huge quantities of gold and silver meant inflation through Europe and their empire's eventual collapse, but it took decades of mismanagement, rampant spending, and an inevitable decline in production to really bring things to a head.

It's worth pointing out that one thing that *won't* happen is sudden and sharp inflation, which GMs might feel like imposing as a sort of informal tax on PCs who get too rich. The money the PCs spend doesn't just sit around in the local economy, changing hands in a small, closed circle. If the PCs buy, say, the finest wine available in the area to the

arrangements of the age had very specific terms of payment, and as already mentioned, there were no traditional legal mechanisms in place to reconcile reciprocal feudal obligations where one party paid money and another paid in kind. Habitually dealing in large sums, rulers and important merchants tended to deal in gold far more often than, say, peasants and craftsmen, so shifts in gold prices will hit the upper classes disproportionately hard. Under these conditions, someone who contracted to sell a pound of pepper for a pound of gold or who expects a sack of gold coins from an underling in return for various feudal privileges would suddenly find himself getting a far worse deal than he expected. Kings and merchant princes will scramble to attempt renegotiation of age-old agreements or simply watch helplessly as their wealth and power collapses. Wealth of that magnitude is also likely to attract unwelcome attention in the form of invading armies after a share of the immense loot. All of this could very well make significant trade too risky to attempt. Given a decade or so for the dust to settle, the end result would likely see the PCs either at the center of an immensely rich new mercantile power or maintaining a stronghold in the center of a chaotic region where all the old arrangements have broken down and piracy, banditry, and border squabbles are rampant.

great profit of its producers, those vintners will be able to buy more things for themselves, which will either bring new labor into the local economy or require exports from outside, giving that money to still more people who will buy more things for themselves, and so on. In short, rather than staying concentrated in one place and raising prices, the money will move into a wider pool of people, diluting the effects of the new source of cash as it goes. Some inflation is a possibility, of course, but largely as a side-effect of a general increase in economic activity.

And that's a *realistic* Medieval economy, something with which most fantasy settings are blissfully unburdened. The fiscal basis of most fantasy economies is ludicrous. If the gold piece is standard currency or peasants have enough money to make it worth stealing their purses, you've already left reality far behind. Moreover, these are settings in which this sort of thing seems to happen every day: every wandering critter has a sack of gold, a Noun of Verbing, or a wet-bar full of potions. Every hole in the ground has a sturdy wooden box full of emeralds and rubies. It's hard for a group of reasonably skilled adventurers *not* to cart a few buckets of treasure home at the end of the day. The implication is an economy with far more wealth moving around than any real economy matching the nominal level of technology. Perhaps the potential effects of adventurers putting more money into circulation are balanced by monsters taking it out.

As for the leftover magic items: The prices of magical items listed in game rules may be far out of line with their practical value and apparent availability. If, for example, the benefit derived from a lightly enchanted weapon is equivalent to that of a few additional months of training or experience and one can be obtained by finding and killing a moderately powerful beastie, it's not going to command a premium several orders of magnitude over the price of a mundane weapon. But even ignoring that, there probably won't be enough money to buy those leftover +1 swords, wands of whatever, and bracers of giant smell. Or, at least, not enough money in the hands of people who want them. And that's okay. Cash is in short supply in most historical economies. It may very well be that, no matter what price your game system lists for a magical item, the PCs won't be able to sell it for money. Barter or a mixture of cash and "in kind" exchange is a traditional way of doing business; feudal obligations, for example, could easily have an underling owing his liege lord grain and livestock and being owed cash with no easy way of reconciling the two. It's both realistic (or, at least, as realistic as you can get with magical items in play) and colorful to trade a flying carpet for a small bag of gold, a jeweled chess set, two amphorae of olives, and a horse.

--Matt Riggsby

Sages theorize that the Omniscient Eye might actually be composed of a panel of Experts chosen through mysterious and arcane means. Regardless, the Omniscient Eye is benevolent, and every other week it is willing to share its lore to all. Or, at least, to all with valid *Pyramid* subscriptions.

The Omniscient Eye seeks to answer questions that are tied to knowledge of the real world, providing information with a perspective that is of use to gamers. The Omniscient Eye does not concern itself with specific game systems or statistics.

Do you have a question for the Omniscient Eye? Feel free to send it to pyramidquestions@yahoo.com, and the Omniscient Eye might answer it!

Pyramid Review

Eberron (for *Dungeons & Dragons*)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

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320-page full-color hardcover; \$39.95

If you're one of the thousands who submitted a one-page treatment for Wizards of the Coast's world-setting competition, you may want to go ahead and skip this review. But if you're still here: *Eberron*, the winning entry in the \$100,000 contest to select a new world for *Dungeons & Dragons* fans to play in, is the winner in more ways than one.

The kingdom of Galifar on the continent of Khorvaire enjoyed centuries of peaceful succession until King Jarot finally laid his burden down. Going against the long-standing tradition, his five children made attempts to secure the throne for themselves instead of taking subordinate positions to the eldest. Long story short: A war that lasted just over a century and has only recently resulted in the Treaty of Thronehold, which has torn the five constituent nations apart and sewn them crazily back into 12 countries. One of those nations, however, is *not* Cyre, though a mysterious explosion, origins unknown, has blasted the area and left the land under a cloud of strangely resilient smoke. Refugees streamed from there and took cover in any land that would have them, and there are precious few of those.

Peace is hardly synonymous with agreement among these people, however. Intrigues continue, and many folks are playing a waiting game, watching for weaknesses among their fellows in hopes of seizing more power without plunging the whole world back into war. Soldiers, still fresh from the conflicts, are at a loss what to do now, especially the warforged. These things, constructs built for the war (and now illegal to produce), have lost their reason for being, and are now armed only with their newfound freedom, having been declared legal citizens of the empire. Lycanthropes have been hunted to near extinction, and changelings -- those descended from doppelgangers and such -- blend in with the populace.

Magic isn't just the purview of a few hoary old wizards locked in towers. It's everywhere you look, from the lightning rails that carry people from place to place, to the everbright lanterns that illuminate your nightly step, to the instant communications between towns the gnomes can offer. There are still many secrets hidden away from prying eyes, lands beyond where giants once ruled but are now reduced to savages in their own cities, but most things are right in your face. The generous use of spells removes some of the "bookkeeping" of *Dungeons & Dragons* adventures; you're

no longer worried about how you'll get to the Demon Wastes, just how you'll kill things when you get there. Entire mountains are statues, towers reach toward the heavens, and the dragonmarked houses, powerful mercantile families whose brands give them near-exclusive control over various magics, can give any nation-state a run for its money (and probably will, when the time is right).

Psionics isn't just a sideline anymore; if you don't know a Kalashtar or someone with skill with these abilities, sooner or later you're going to run across the quori or one of their transdimensional ilk and find yourself at the mercy of their prodigious mental powers. *Eberron* suggests the *Expanded Psionics Handbook* comes in handy when playing, but it's by no means necessary.

Power is practically lying at one's feet; legend has it three dragons are locked in the fabric of the world after a cataclysmic battle, with Siberys now forming the ring above in the night sky; Khyber embedded in the underworld; and Eberron infusing the very land. These beasts have shattered, leaving mighty dragonshards lying about. These are powerful items to have when creating magic, and they're even better for psionic devices -- assuming you can steal them without notice from the dwarves.

The book is a thick and enormous volume, with small type, packing as much information as possible into the space allotted. A lot of this is a tour of the major locations PCs will blow through in the course of play, and it does get pretty dry in some places. There are notable exceptions sufficient to keep it from raising the horrible specter of one's high school classes (like the lovingly crafted goblinoid empire of Darguun), and the setting material is necessary to get things started on the right foot. The book gives the big-name NPCs short shrift, but at the same time this keeps it from being another roll call of needlessly over-detailed movers and shakers -- there will be plenty of room in the supplements for that.

The guidelines Wizards of the Coast posted for the competition make a good deal more sense in context. It's easy now to see where a submission like *Eberron* is similar to previous company releases, while bringing a certain fresh new feel to the traditional fantasy setting. This world is being reborn as the characters step into their places on stage, and the pulp-like adventure and wonder makes you feel as though you're standing on a stretch of virgin forest. The sober, epic nature of the *Dungeons & Dragons* you're used to now has a more open feel. Action points, formerly the purview of *d20 Modern*, are now a part of *Dungeons & Dragons* as well, and are used to increase dice rolls or activate certain powers. Heroes are expected to rise, meet the challenges, and fall into big piles of power. Everything is larger than life, and the party need not wait for double-digit levels to be known throughout the land for their exploits. The land is hungry for someone to fill the void left by its rending in the last war. Dizzying adventure sweeps across the landscape and plays to the Indiana Jones in you, and not the Tolkien.

The artwork is gorgeous, with portraits that paint a heady picture of the locales and people. There are several maps throughout, all marvelous, and what's not inspirational has a two-fisted Allen Nunis attitude about it.

Eberron has been designed to leave some of that stuffy tradition behind and give heroes the tools they need to really let loose. It doesn't demand that players treat it as a Buffy-esque in-joke with modern references and no sense of style, nor will they become god-kings in the space of a few adventures, but they will be like protagonists in a spaghetti western, larger than life and able to make their mark on this new land. The designers have troubled themselves to develop a world whose spectacular events have uncovered (or buried) as many fresh challenges as they solved. The changes are small, hidden, and fun, but these countless little things add up to a new way to experience *Dungeons & Dragons* that has all the action and few of the limitations.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Zombies!!! 4: The End

Published by [Twilight Creations, Inc.](#)

Written by Kerry Breitenstein & Todd A. Breitenstein

Illustrated by Dave Aikins

30 Map Tiles, 50 Card Event Deck, 100 Plastic Zombie Dogs, six plastic Shotgun Guys, one sheet of Red Heart Tokens, one sheet of Black Bullet Tokens, two six-sided dice & 4¾ by 7½-inch four page rules sheet; \$24.99

2004 is a year for endings. *Friends*. *Frasier*. *Angel*. And now [Zombies!!!](#). From its tortuous beginnings, the franchise has had you scrambling around town in search of the helicopter that will get you out and away from the clutches of the corpse cortège. Of course, another helipad could be found on the army base of [Zombies!!! 2: Zombie Corps\(e\)](#), but then so could be the special glow-in-the-dark "gubermment zombies," while yet a third sat on top of the holy shopping halls in [Zombies!!! 3: Mall Walkers](#). Its sequel, [Zombies!!! 3.5 Not Dead Yet](#) really only added a few more options, but now, in a fully playable, standalone expansion, players can discover the cause of the cadaver-animating curse and in a dark desperate act of arcane reading, put an end to it! And if [Zombies!!! 4: The End](#) proves anything; it is just how dangerous the woods are at night.

The first thing you notice upon opening up [Zombies!!! 4: The End](#) it is the lack of zombies. Instead of zombies, you get zombie dogs. In play, these turn out to be faster than ordinary human zombies, and do less damage. In game terms, this means that they move two squares instead of one, that two zombie dogs can sit on a single square, and that they do only a half a point of damage when they bite (the game includes half heart tokens to account for this). Further, they are more difficult to kill, requiring a roll of five or six, as opposed to the four, five, or six needed for a human zombie.

Another change is the tiles, which represent the dark, dreaded woods on the outskirts of the town. Unlike the tiles in previous games, they are open, and allow movement from tile to tile in any direction. In other words, players are not confined to the straight routes of roads and buildings of the town and army base. Of course, the zombie dogs have the same freedom to roam. The location tiles of this expansion match the rustic charm of the forested setting and include caves, a campground, a shed, a burnt out cabin, a boathouse, the pet cemetery (which explains where all the zombie dogs came from), an abandoned car dump, a ranger post, an outhouse, and a cabin. Each named tile must be seeded with Bullet and Heart Tokens as it is drawn, and by simply moving through them players can collect these. That is, if the zombie dogs protecting the tokens can be put down.

But the cabin location is actually all-important to winning the game. Like the helipad in the previous games, it is the players' ultimate objective. If a player can get to the cabin, clear it of zombie dogs, then he can attempt to undo the spell that caused all of the dead to rise. And the key to doing that lies in the Event Cards.

One of the best things about the [Zombies!!!](#) games has been the wonderfully atmospheric art of Dave Aikins that illustrates each of the cards. Several of our favorites from this expansion included:

- "Rolled-Up Newspaper," which shows a zombie dog being swatted on the nose with said improvised weapon.
- "Bad Zombie, No Biscuit!" (Just for the title).
- "Full Moon Fever" which turns a player into a werewolf and sends him to attack the other players.

Zombies!!! 4: The End also introduces a new Event card type, the "Page" card. Done in sepia tones, each "page" card represents a sheet torn from the spine of the Book of the Undead. These are played from a player's hand directly in front of him, much like weapons are in the standard game. Once there they can be discarded to give a variety of effects. For example, "Twist of Fate" enables the discarding player to steal a Bullet Token from everyone else. But for each "page" card that a player has down in front of him after he has cleared the cabin of zombie dogs, he receives a +1 bonus on the roll to successfully cast the spell that will undo the curse.

The basic play of ***Zombies!!! 4: The End*** is much like its prequels. The game starts out from the Bridge tile that sits astride a river separating the woods from the town. On each turn a player draws and lays a new tile. Then he continues searching the woods for the cabin, blasting zombie dogs away (and running away it when proves to be the better part of valor), and grabbing as many tokens as possible. At the end of his turn, a player gets to move a die's worth of zombie dogs in any direction -- mostly towards his opponents and away from him.

Like the second and third expansions before it, ***Zombies!!! 4: The End*** can be combined with the original ***Zombies!!!*** to create an extra large ***Zombies!!!*** game. This would, of course, take up a lot of space, but then that has always been a problem with this line of games. That said, it is not something that ***Zombies!!! 4: The End*** suffers from, as the placement and design of the tiles means that they do not have to run in straight lines. Anyway, to combine this expansion, just simply shuffle the Bridge starting into the main ***Zombies!!!*** deck, while keeping the other ***Zombies!!! 4: The End*** tiles and Event Cards separate.

Zombies!!! 4: The End has as much of a *Blair Witch Project* or *Evil Dead* feel to it as it does that of *Night of the Living Dead*. It does a very nice job of being both an expansion and a standalone game, and the open nature of the playing style imparts a more board game like feel while still remaining a ***Zombies!!!*** game.

--Matthew Pook

TLC2006

Feelings, Nothing More Than Feelings . . .

"You'd better be prepared for the jump into hyperspace. It's unpleasantly like being drunk."

"What's so unpleasant about being drunk?"

"You ask a glass of water."

--Ford Prefect and Arthur Dent, *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (Douglas Adams)

I had every intention of continuing my discussion of being deprived of [snazzy powers](#) this week. But somewhere in the past 12 hours I've gone from "Hmm; I have a slight tickle in my throat" to "Hmm; maybe if I nap, my blissful slip into oblivion will obviate my need to write a column."

So I'm not quite up to that topic this week.

Being sick (or "illin'," as I refer to it with my peeps) -- along with my successfully making my Dodge roll for my powers column -- has gotten me thinking about special abilities and feelings.

Namely, why do so many RPGs give relative short shrift to how all these snazzy abilities make the wielder feel?

I mean, think about it. Many games give PCs access to secret powers of the universe, powers beyond those of mortal men, the ability to commune with otherworldly entities, great service at low low prices, and other beloved toys. But most of them don't give any indication about how tapping those energies makes you feel, what it's like.

Consider two cyberpunk universes that start out identical in every way. However, in the first one, accessing cyberspace brings about a peaceful tranquility and sense of inner calm, while in the other the feeling of being part of the cyberrealm is one of paranoia and unease, like constantly being in a dark unsafe alley at 2 a.m. Despite using identical rule sets, h@ck3r characters from both games would probably be completely different in their outlooks, approaches, and interests.

What if the act of using magic felt exactly like the tickling sneeze that won't come? What if interdimensional travel gave that tingle in your skull like a scalp massage? What if accessing one's inertialess flight superpower felt like dry heaving?

Again, none of these need to offer any kind of game effects. In fact, the impact of trying to evoke these sensations can be *lessened* if they are given game mechanics, since these feelings can then be turned into something to be overcome. ("Hmm. Traveling through time feels like a 2D6 punch in the kidney? I can soak that.")

Some games do this already. The science fantasy game *Fading Suns* has as one of its conceits that interstellar travel -- which uses something called jumpgates -- is incredibly pleasurable to organic lifeforms. The in-game church, frowning on this, forces all vessels to install dampeners that keep this sensation from happening. (Probably the most amusing extension of this idea was the revelation that a race of symbiotes using bio-organic spaceships for space travel had a problem controlling its ships, since, once taken through the jumpgates, they just kept hopping back and forth through the gate to experience that wonderful feeling.) Likewise the superpowered game *Aberrant* has as its premise that the act of spawning superpowers is incredibly traumatic, akin to a massive migraine only much, *much* worse.

While this will be treading on familiar territory for most of you, it's worth nothing the likely effects of various sensations.

First, if it feels good, people will be more disposed toward doing it.

If it feels really good, some people will become addicted to it.

If it feels really, really good, society will probably try to control, regulate, or suppress it (especially if it inhibits productivity or poses a danger to others).

If it feels bad, people will be less interested in doing it.

If it feels really bad, people will be very uninterested in doing it, and those who do will likely either have strong wills or suffer from various neuroses stemming from the pain.

If it feels really, really bad, people will strongly avoid it, unless the benefits it provides greatly outweigh the rewards. (Some people, of course, will consider it a sign of machismo to endure the awful sensation, just to get bragging rights.)

If it feels different, or provides a sensation that isn't found elsewhere, this will be considered "good" to a certain group of people, who may seek out the sensation, out of curiosity or addiction. (This would be akin to the space tourists who pay to experience weightless conditions in a plane in Earth orbit.)

It's possible for a sensation to defy classification. For example, tickling is pleasurable to some people, and annoying or even painful to others. (And even those who find tickling pleasurable usually have a threshold beyond which it's no longer enjoyable.) Likewise it's possible that a sensation will vary for different people, situations, or groups. This can lead to interesting roleplaying or sociological discussions. For example, just like it's not possible for men and women to directly compare and contrast the genders' orgasms, so to might there be clashes and debates between (for example) those who practice mana-based magic and those who tap into divine energies. (And if the two kinds of magic are not usable by the same person, an interesting theological debate could stem from the realization or proof that both kinds of magic feel *identical*: "Maybe all miracles are actually utilizing an inner magic . . . or maybe all arcane effects are tapping some unknown deity!")

It's possible for powers to have different feelings in different situations. For example, runners talk about hitting a wall and pushing through it, resulting in a "runner's high." Maybe handling arcane energies is uncomfortable or even painful for a long while, but in the middle of extended usage or a long ritual the practitioner undergoes a "magician's high."

And, finally, it's possible that a *lack* of sensation can be an interesting side effect of an ability or power. For example, if entering cryogenic storage results in a feeling of intense calm and an absence of anxiety, then some people may undergo it just for that feeling.

The existence or modification of feelings can be a great way to justify just about any type of character behavior and attitudes. For example, if you wanted a character with a powerful attack ([Voltron](#)-level), but didn't want to access it all the time, the solution could be as simple as saying that it hurts like blazes to use it. ("Jack! We're outnumbered; use the Primal Scream attack!" "No way; that thing feels like an icepick to my skull! Until I see them wielding icepicks, I'll take my chances.") Contrariwise, if you wanted to justify a character having unusual levels of some ability or modification, it can be as simple as saying that your character *likes* it. For example, suppose the installation of cyberwear is intensely pleasurable to the character (perhaps by merely the Nietzschean idea that pleasure is the absence of the aches and pains associated with flesh parts). The character, already composed of more metal than normal, might struggle between the desire to install more cybernetic components -- and thus intensify the pleasure -- and the worry that he'll cross some threshold beyond which his mind can't cope. Such a person could creepily teeter on the brink of maniacal bliss, all the while eyeing just *one* more shiny toy . . .

Games often focus on what its heroes can do, and how they should act. But part of the human experience -- arguably an incredibly important part -- is how it *feels* to be human. And if your character has abilities far beyond those of mortal men, it might be interesting to consider how those abilities feel to him.

In the interim, I'm hoping the feelings behind this head cold I'm experiencing are the precursor to wondrous superpowers.

--Steven Marsh

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Fellow Travelers

Passengers for a GURPS Space campaign

by Stephen Dedman

This article is intended as a companion to an earlier piece, "[Cargo Space](#)." While it may sometimes be important for the PCs to know *what's* in the hold of the starship they're traveling in, it can be vital to know *who's* in the cabins next to theirs. What skills do they have? What are their intentions? Do they play chess, or poker, and how well? Are they doing field research for the revised edition of the NASA Sutra? Or are they potential hijackers, assassins hired by their enemies, repo men, or undercover tax investigators?

If a campaign or adventure involves large numbers of passengers, most GMs won't want to create detailed NPCs for every available berth. Players, however, may become suspicious if everyone on board is a soccer fan named Jones, or they're constantly ferrying a movie star, a professor, and a couple of multi-millionaires from planet to planet.

The following list can be used to generate random passengers (or hotel guests) for any space-faring campaign. With a little tweaking, it may also be used for travelers in any earlier setting from a Roman road to a Wells Fargo stagecoach. If physical descriptions and other details are needed, use the tables on p. B15 and pp. B84-85.

Random Passenger Creation Tables

Roll on Table 1 (1d) and Table 2 (1d)

- 1-4 Human or mostly-human
- 5 Robot or obvious cyborg
- 6 Alien

Table 2

- 1-4 One from Table 3
- 5-6 One from Table 4

Table 3 (1d)

- 1 Executive/Bureaucrat/Lawyer
- 2 Jobseeker/Migrant
- 3 Academic/Scientist
- 4 Student
- 5 Tourist
- 6 Refugee/Runaway

Table 4 (2d)

- 2 Conman/Forger/Hacker
- 3 Soldier
- 4 Kid (traveling alone)
- 5 Athlete
- 6 Entertainer or Journalist

- 7 Dilettante
- 8 Pilgrim
- 9 Cop/Bounty hunter
- 10 Courtesan/Prostitute
- 11 Politician
- 12 Time Bomb

Using the table: The *Olivia* is leaving Galt bound for New Seattle, with eight cabins and 10 freeze tubes to fill. The GM decides that there are 16 people seeking passage offworld, and begins rolling. The first roll produces the result Robot Executive; he decides the robot is status-conscious, and wants to fly First Class, accompanied by a human lawyer, who also insists on her own stateroom. When the next two rolls turn out to be a human scientist and a human student, he decides that a research team is returning to NSU: four professors and six students (five humans and a Sparrial), all paying for Standard passage. Having filled the cabins, he rolls again, getting a human jobseeker. He decides the jobseeker has been made redundant and will take cheap Freeze passage for himself and his family, filling five of the six remaining places. The last roll gives him a human athlete -- why not an overconfident kickboxer, with just enough money left for Freeze passage to his next bout?

Academics and Scientists (see p. S46)

Academics and scientists may be traveling to/from conferences, field research, a new job (see Jobseeker), a court case (as an expert witness), or a vacation (see Tourist). There will usually be a university or research station at at least one end of their journey (see p. S173): depending on their specialization, field research may take them anywhere from an apparently lifeless desert world to the most riotous pleasure planets in the sector.

Academics and scientists will usually travel as standard passengers. As well as at least one science skill at 14+ and Research 13+, most will have some useful shipboard skills (using sensors, computers, etc.). Many will also have Outdoor and Athletic skills, and may be equipped for field work on inhospitable planets. Most will spend most of their time in their cabins with their books, but some like to party or gamble. IQ is typically 13+; ages range from mid-twenties to the maximum lifespan possible at that tech level.

For a collection of suitable scientists, see "[Men In White](#)."

Aliens (see p. S55)

Aliens will probably be traveling for the same sort of reasons as human passengers, and may hold similar jobs (e.g. a Gormelite bounty hunter, a Treefolk scientist, etc.). They may pose different problems for the crew -- e.g. unusual life support requirements, or personality quirks that make them sharing a cabin with them unpleasant or hazardous. They will usually want private quarters, or even a controlled environment container in the cargo hold.

Athletes

Professional and amateur athletes will often travel great distances to compete in events, either singly or in teams (2d-1, or choose a sport). The more successful they are, the more likely they are to be accompanied by an entourage of Personal Assistants (trainers, managers, medics, bodyguards, lawyers, journalists, etc.) Athletes will usually have ST and/or DX at 14+ and HT at 12+ and the High Pain Threshold and Very Fit advantages (professional chess players are more likely to have IQ 14+ and Eidetic Memory). The Obsession and Overconfidence disadvantages are also common.

In a setting where cloning, braintapes, and Torpine mean that death and serious injury may only be temporary inconveniences, some very dangerous spectator sports may be popular -- gladiatorial contests, full contact martial arts, autoduellings, etc. Athletes may have Combat skills as well as Athletic skills at 15+; most will have high levels of Social skills as well, and smart ones will also have professional skills in case their careers don't last. Depending on the rules of the sport, some may have bionics or bio-mods, or depend on wonder drugs.

Successful athletes will usually travel First Class to events, and stay in deluxe hotels. Losers on their way back home may travel sleeper or steerage.

Where athletes go, fans and groupies will often follow. Treat these as Tourists.

Bodyguard

Wealthier travelers will often have bodyguards as well as other servants (and bodyguards may also serve other functions -- chauffeur, trainer, valet, secretary, cook, masseur, tracker, etc.).

A typical bodyguard will be taller than his client, large enough to hide behind, and tough enough to use as a shield (traditional yakuza favored sumo wrestlers as bodyguards). Alertness and Combat Reflexes are essential; Danger Sense and/or Peripheral Vision are also desirable. In a TL10+ setting, at least some of these advantages can be bought as cyberwear or bio-mods, and many bodyguards will be robots, cyborgs, or parahumans: the "Cerberus" Security and Patrol robot (p. RO117) or Orion-Series Upgrade (p. BIO45) would be ideal.

Useful skills include Body Language, Fast-Draw, First Aid, Holdout, and a variety of weapons and unarmed combat skills. Many bodyguards are former cops; some have Special Forces backgrounds. They may share their employer's First Class or Luxury cabin, or be housed nearby.

For a template for human Bodyguard characters, see *GURPS Covert Ops*.

Bounty hunters (see p. S44)

Bounty hunters will usually travel by Steerage or Standard passage, and stay in low-cost hotels, while tracking down their targets. Their prisoners, if alive, will usually travel back to the world where they're wanted in Freeze tubes.

For a template for Bounty Hunter characters, see *GURPS Rogues*.

Conmen, Forgers, and Hackers

Competent conmen will be indistinguishable from other sort of passenger, and will travel in whatever degree of comfort suits their particular scam. They may be hastily fleeing a world where they are no longer welcome, en route to another world in search of fresh suckers, or trying to run a scam on board: they may even be trying to steal the ship. Conmen often work in pairs or small groups; forgers and hackers are usually loners.

For templates for Conman, Forger and Hacker characters, see *GURPS Rogues*.

Cops

Cops traveling outside their own jurisdictions may be escorting prisoners who are being extradited or deported, visiting the sector capital for a trial or other official business, or for the reasons listed under "Tourist." High-ranking police will travel first class, but most will take standard passage (corrupt cops may pay for an upgrade). Prisoners usually travel as Sleepers.

For templates for different types of Cop, see *GURPS Cops*.

Courtesans/Prostitutes

Prostitutes may ply their trade on board the ship -- if the crew permits, and if suitable premises are available (most draw the line at freeze tubes). Alternatively, they may simply be in transit for the same reasons as anyone else. For a template for Prostitute characters, see *GURPS Rogues*.

Dilettante (see p. S45)

The Idle Rich will usually take the most comfortable quarters available (First Class at worst), though some may prefer to travel in freeze tubes if they're not satisfied with the quality of entertainment available on board. They mostly restrict their travels to rich worlds, though some have business interests on Agricultural, Industrial or Mining planets. Treat as Tourists with more money and (usually) better gear. Dilettantes often have Personal Assistants and/or Bodyguards, and may attract Conmen and Courtesans.

For a template for the Dilettante, see *GURPS Cliffhangers*.

Entertainers

Actors plying the spaceways will probably be on their way to work (usually in standard passage, though stars travel first class or better), or in search of it (usually in freeze tubes or steerage). Musicians may be able to work their passage (a la Heinlein's Rhysling), in a degree of luxury commensurate with their skill.

Entertainers usually have good Social skills (particularly Bard, Carousing, Fast-Talk and Sex-Appeal), and may also have a few Athletic, Combat or Thief/Spy skills. Some will also have useful technical skills; others may have the Overconfidence disadvantage and the Delusion that they have these skills.

Executives, Bureaucrats, and Lawyers

Administrators and businessmen will often need to travel to/from places where their business interests lie -- conducting audits, troubleshooting projects that run overtime or over budget, looking for property to buy and/or sell, etc. Lawyers, similarly, may need to travel offworld to interview witnesses, serve papers, or make court appearances. Those with Administrative Rank/1 may take Standard or even Sleeper passage, but most will travel First Class. High-ranked administrators and lawyers (Administrative Rank, Reputation or Status bonuses of 3+) may travel with one or more personal assistants.

Some administrators will be making return trips to/from Government worlds (p. S173) or Corporate Headquarters (p. S172); others may have been assigned to new posts (colonial offices, prisons, factories, mines, etc.) on a long-term basis, and may be taking their families and a few cargo containers full of personal effects.

Necessary skills for an administrator or lawyer include Administration, Accounting, Computer Operation, Detect Lies, Diplomacy, Law, Psychology, Research, and Savoir-Faire. Businessmen will usually have Merchant skill. Some administrators may also have technical backgrounds -- Architect, Computer Programming, Engineer, Planetology and Xenology skills would be useful for anyone seeking to build or maintain an outpost on an alien planet. Administrators from Theocracies will also have Theology skill and Clerical Investment; those from Military Oligarchies will usually be ex-soldiers; those from Cybercracies may be robots.

Jobseekers

While few people may have the time or money for interstellar tourism, many more may be willing to pack up their belongings and go offworld in search of a better life. Those traveling from Poor worlds with little more than hope will probably opt for Freeze or Steerage passage; those more confident and more skilled may opt for Standard or First Class (or may have had it pre-paid by their future employer). Jobseekers may have any of the skills listed on the Job table on p. S53, or none: they will usually be bound for Rich worlds, or at least populous ones where work is said to be plentiful.

Journalists (see p. S45)

Journalists will want to go to wherever the news is -- even if that's where most people are trying to get away from (which reduces the risk of the PCs having to deadhead back: see Refugees). Freelancers will usually take Steerage

passage; high-status journalists wishing to avoid delays may charter an entire ship for themselves and their Personal Assistants, and insist on luxury treatment.

Kids (see p. B14)

Kids will usually share quarters with a parent or guardian -- typically a Jobseeker, Refugee, or Tourist. Kids over a certain age (2d+3 years) may also have to travel alone to rejoin their families, or to attend a boarding school: some carriers refuse to transport children traveling alone, except as Sleepers.

Personal Assistants

Wealthy and high-status individuals will often have their staff travel with them. While a TL10 wristcomp may be able to perform secretarial duties better than any human, human (or humanoid) servants may still be status symbols. As a rough guideline, give each individual with Wealthy or higher wealth one Personal Assistant (secretary, valet, trainer, adviser, etc.) per level of Status and/or Reputation. These may share quarters with their employer, or be housed nearby at a lower level of comfort according to their income bracket.

Pilgrims

If religions survive into TL10, so will the concept of the pilgrimage to a religious center (see p. S173). Many pilgrimage sites will be on Earth or on alien homeworlds, though others may well exist.

Treat pilgrims as Tourists in most respects, though Clerical Investment, Disciplines of Faith, Fanaticism and Vows may be more common than among most tourist groups. Not all will be honest: conmen and forgers (including counterfeiters of religious relics) often prey on pilgrims.

Politicians

Similar to executives, bureaucrats and lawyers, but with more Wealth, Reputation and Status than most -- and therefore, even more likely to have an entourage, including a Bodyguard (possibly a serving military officer), at least one Personal Assistant, and others (including lawyers, bureaucrats, personal physicians, intelligence agents, etc.). Politicians are also likely to be followed by Journalists.

Politicians usually demand Luxury passage, unless they're trying to appear frugal, when they may settle for First Class. They have the same skills as administrators, plus Politics -- if they come from democratic societies, at least. Those from Military Governments, Theocracies, etc., should have other appropriate skills.

Societies unable to afford their own consular ships may also transport diplomats and diplomatic couriers by commercial starship. See p. S45.

Refugees and Runaways

Refugees may be fleeing a war, a plague, or a similar planet-wide disaster, or political or religious persecution (the higher the CR, the higher the probability that people will want to escape, and the more difficult they will find it). Refugees may be traveling alone, in family groups, or in entire communities. Runaways are more often loners, trying to escape a more personal version of the same type of nightmare: slavery, abuse, or prosecution (justified or not).

Few refugees or runaways have the money even for Steerage or Freeze passage; fewer still will have the travel documents or contacts they need to be accepted on the worlds where they are seeking refuge. Most have never been offworld, but some may have useful skills: Einstein and Freud were refugees, and many despotic regimes have conducted purges of academics, medical doctors, and other professionals and intellectuals. Deposed politicians, military officers, intelligence agents, police interrogators, etc., may also seek to escape from their homeworlds after a change of government has occurred.

Robots

Many passengers aboard a TL10 starship may be robots, cyborgs, or androids. Robots who don't require life support can even travel as cargo, if necessary, though others enjoy human company enough to pay for steerage or standard accommodation.

A variety of robots, cyborgs, bioroids and parahumans from *GURPS Robots* and *GURPS Bio-Tech* would make excellent Bodyguards, Bounty Hunters, Cops, or Soldiers. "Lemon Angel" Android Companions (p. RO119), Eros-Series Bioroids (p. BIO37), or Ishtar-Series Upgrades (p. BIO42) may work as courtesans, entertainers, or personal assistants. Sentient humanoid robots might work in any occupation, particularly those that would benefit from an Eidetic Memory (lawyer, bureaucrat, scientist, hacker, etc.)

While robots are unlikely to visit their grandchildren or grandparents, the question of whether they take vacations, go on pilgrimages, or travel to attend weddings, is left as an exercise for the GM.

Sleepers

While most Sleepers will be unable or unwilling to pay the higher cost of conscious passage, some may have other reasons for traveling in freeze tubes -- Phobias, Motion Sickness, Addictions, or simply to avoid the boredom of a long space voyage. Prisoners are also usually transported in freeze tubes, as are patients needing medical care unavailable on their homeworld or on board the ship.

Soldiers (see p. S7 and pp. S45-46)

Merchant ships will rarely be expected to transport regular troops to war zones, but may carry them between military bases in demilitarized zones, or between a base and a world with better opportunities for R&R. Those with Military Rank 0-1 will usually travel Steerage; Ranks 2-4, Standard; 5 and above, First Class.

Mercenaries are much more likely to charter a ship to take them to a war zone, or even travel somewhere by commercial flight with the intention of rescuing hostages or starting a coup. They may try to disguise themselves as tourists, pilgrims or jobseekers (with their heavier weapons carefully concealed), or take the starship crew into their confidence.

Star soldiers on R&R may include Marines, Fighter Jocks, navy spacers, and medics: all of these should have some useful shipboard skills (including the all-important Vacc Suit). For templates for different types of soldier, see *GURPS Special Ops* and *GURPS Warriors*.

Students

Treat as scientists or academics, but with slightly lower skill levels in their chosen specialization, and even less money. Some wealthy students may opt for Luxury or First Class passage, but most will take Standard or Steerage passage and save their money for books or entertainment. Students may accompany scientists on field trips, but are more likely to be traveling between a university and their homeworld.

Time Bombs

Time bombs are passengers who seem like normal tourists or jobseekers when they board, but later prove to be troublesome. Possibilities include hijackers or terrorists; spies or thieves who rob passengers; assassins hired to eliminate another passenger or a crew member; suicides who want their bodies to disappear into hyperspace; intolerant fanatics who find themselves sharing space with members of a hated race/class/religion; mad (or at least unethical) scientists conducting bizarre experiments; individuals incubating an unknown disease; serial killers; etc. Lesser time-bombs might include alien eggs that hatch unexpectedly, manic-depressives, kleptomaniacs, bullies, addicts who run

short of their drug, or passengers whose Odious Personal Habits set off those with the Bad Temper disadvantage.

Tourists (p. S46)

In any campaign where travel times between worlds are measured in weeks, rather than hours or days, interstellar tourists may be as rare as they were on Earth in the days before the airplane. That said, retirees and the idle rich, with time as well as money to waste, may still travel widely. Students and academics with money to spare may take advantage of long vacation breaks. Others may save up for a year-long Grand Tour, or for special occasions: the Olympics on Earth (see Athletes), hunting season on Roosevelt, their children's weddings or graduation or the birth of the first great-great-grandchild.

Tourists will usually pay for Standard or First Class passage. Many display Odious Personal Habits and/or other disadvantages (Clueless, Compulsive Spending, Gluttony, Greed, Intolerance, Miserliness and Lecherousness are all fairly common among tourists) while away from home.

Tourists may have any skills appropriate to Average or better jobs (see p. S53).

Adventure Seeds

- **Eyestrain:** The PCs' ship is hit by a mutant virus that attacks the vitreous humor of the eye, and slowly migrates into the CSF surrounding the brain. The first symptom is blindness in one or both eyes (roll HT for each), followed 2d days later by a coma. Panimmunity and known drugs don't provide any resistance; suspended animation stops the progress, but doesn't cure the disease. The only humans safe are those with bionic eyes.

While the medical officer and any scientists on board search for a cure and try to prevent the disease spreading, crew members with failing eyesight may have to train passengers to do their jobs. The chaos becomes even worse after some passengers blame the robots or aliens on board for the plague, and break into the ship's armory.

- **Geist Room:** When the ship is plagued by a series of minor technical problems (see "[Appendix Z: Starship Troubles](#)") en route to Samedi, parapsychologist Dr Nile accuses a 13-year-old passenger, Josh Ojha, of being a poltergeist, and insists Josh finish the journey in freeze. Josh's father is a successful lawyer traveling first class, and he threatens to sue the crew if this happens. Meanwhile, the technical problems worsen, becoming life-threatening, and the coffins in the cargo hold have started moving.

Is Nile right, or are he and Ojha running a scam? Is someone else on board sabotaging the ship? If so, who -- and why?

- **Getaway:** War criminal Mali Ras is captured by a bounty hunter, who books passage for both of them on the PCs ship... but another passenger releases Ras from her freeze tube, and when the ship pops back into normal space for a mid-course astrogation check, Ras steals the lifeboat and escapes to a nearby planet. The bounty hunter wants to recapture her, but the other passengers want to continue to their destination without delay.

None of the other passengers are missing, which means that Ras's accomplice -- a skilled hacker -- may still be on board. Or maybe the lifeboat was on autopilot, and Ras is also hiding somewhere on the ship.

- **In the Frame:** The PCs are transporting several forensic scientists and senior police to a conference. Two weeks from their destination, an attractive young detective is murdered, and the evidence implicates a PC who had spent the night in her cabin. The PC has been framed by an expert, and if he can't prove his innocence, he may face brainwiping when they reach their destination.
- **School for Scandal:** Tia Shields, an Eros-Series Bioroid (p. BIO37) is returning to Marlowe University, where she claims to be finishing her MA in Theatre Arts. During the long voyage, she plans to seduce as many crew-members and fellow passengers as possible, then goad them into fighting over her. Though she's studied theatre, Shields's major is in psychology, and she's secretly performing an experiment for her doctoral thesis. If she also gets enough material for a dreamgame, so much the better.

Tia Shields

ST 9; **DX** 11; **IQ** 13; **HT** 12. Move 5.75.

On top of her Racial Advantages and Disadvantages, Tia Shields has the Wealth (Comfortable) advantage, the Greed and Sadism disadvantages, an Eros Plus bio-mod (p. BIO64), Recorder Implant (p. HT107) and Silver Tongue (p. HT108).

Skills: Acting-14; Beam Weapons/TL10 (Sonic)-13; Body Language-13; Brawling-11; Courtesan-12; Diplomacy-13; Disguise-13; Electronics Operation/TL10 (Communications)-12; Judo-12; Psychology-14; Research-13; Savoir-Faire-14; Sex-Appeal-15; Video Production/TL10-13; Writing-12.

Gear: Sonic Stinger (p. HT55), with Nauseator setting (pHTT59); Neuronic Handcuffs (p. HT91); Clothing Belt (p. HT27); Personal Computer (p. S65); Emergency Medkit (p. S96) stuffed with doses of Crediline (p. HT97), Dryad (p. HTT90), Sin (p. HTT91), and Wideawake (p. HTT91). Her First Class cabin is fitted with hidden holomotion cameras.

Special

by Paul Drye

Introduction

The Specials' time on Earth was short but spectacular. Over just a few years they exploded on the scene, came to be perceived as a threat, and then were nearly driven into extinction over the entire planet. The conflict was a stain on human history, but one most people still find justified. What is less well known is that the Specials found a bolthole, and carry on barely in touch with their home, trying to carve out a niche in a hostile universe.

Outbreak

Acute Cerebral Hyperpyretic Syndrome (ACHS) appeared in Australia in the winter of 2004-5, and swept the world over the next 18 months. It was not particularly infectious, but 90,000 people suffered from it, and the death rate was 100% as their brains overheated for unknown reasons.

By the spring of 2006, Elise Konczewski at the CDC discovered that ACHS was a prion disease affecting the microtubule proteins of the brain. Microtubules were suspected to be a site of quantum activity, and the heating was caused as the deformed microtubules tapped into zero point energy, pumping it into the surrounding tissue.

ACHS was a surprisingly odd disease but treatment was now possible. The death rate dropped precipitously, and only a few thousand more people were infected over the next few months while a vaccine was rushed into production. Then came the surprise.

Before the vaccine was widespread (but after treatment was possible) there was a short window during which someone could catch ACHS and survive. People infected by ACHS were cured in the sense that their brains no longer overheated and killed them, but some of their proteins were bent out of shape before the disease could be stopped. Microtubules had also been fingered as a possible seat for human consciousness, and this now proved to be true: the distorted tubules gave voluntary control over zero point energy. ACHS survivors displayed a wide variety of psionic powers, their nature varying depending on the extent of their injuries.

The Specials had arrived.

An Uneasy Peace

For the next four years, the Specials fascinated (and unsettled) the entire world. Elise Konczewski was the interface between them and everyone else, constantly reminding people that they were human -- and not superheroes or lab rats. A group of neuropsychologists gathered around her and did their best to understand how the Specials worked, while also trying to provide the younger ones with some semblance of a normal life.

There were mostly "younger ones." Psychic side effects or not, ACHS caused brain damage. With few exceptions, anyone over the age of 25 who caught the disease severely enough to become psionic was also reduced to insanity or coma.

Similarly, children under the age of 12 rarely ended up psionic. Their brains were still too plastic; their neural pathways would route around the damage. A few months of therapy might be needed to recover lost skills, then life returned to normal.

Most mentally normal Specials, about 750 in all, were between the ages of 12 and 25; 16 older ones stayed sane.

Another 5,000 Specials, almost entirely over 25, were mentally ill in one way or another, and confined. This was true even for ones who weren't particularly sick, and could have been stabilized with medication. It was an ominous note in an otherwise spectacular time.

Landstuhl

This situation lasted until March 11th, 2010, when an older Special reduced to a psychotic state by his bout with ACHS brainwiped every person within 1.8 kilometers of Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, Germany. Private Douglas Rousse -- still in the care of the US Army (loath to give up control of a Special in their hands) -- had been kept in Germany after coming down with ACHS while serving in Darmstadt. To this day, no-one has figured out why, or how, he did what he did.

Whatever it was that caused Private Rousse to erase the consciousness of several thousand people, the response was panic. Many people had been nervous about what the Specials could do; now that nervousness became fear. Matters got worse when the first child of two Specials was born three months later. Reserves of the ACHS prion lurked deep within the body, and children of Specials were Special themselves. Exposed to ACHS from conception, their brains didn't recover like those of older children: second-generation ACHS survivors were psionic from the moment of consciousness, usually before birth. Fortunately the ones that were telepathic could be taught restraint without language, while still in the womb; the ones who weren't had anti-psi in close proximity during the pregnancy. It sank in to the world that the Specials were not going to fade away.

Backlash

In July 2010, China declared that Specials within its borders represented "a health issue that threatened the stability of the Chinese state" and began rounding up survivors of ACHS. Other countries soon followed. In the West, Specials began dropping out of sight. Many of these were laying low as public opinion turned against them, but there were several cases of Specials being held indefinitely by the governments of the United States, Japan, France, and others after committing (or being accused of) various crimes.

Sanctuary

Elise Koscieszewski felt that fighting back against the repression could not turn out well; Special powers were all they had to counterbalance being vastly outnumbered, and they were a blunt instrument. It would be a war, and no matter which side won, things would change for the worse. As more and more governments tried to bring the Specials under their control, she and a majority of her charges moved from country to country, eventually ending up in New Zealand. They were rapidly running out of places to go, though.

Her ace in the hole was Javier Avilar, a young Spaniard who had descended into autism after his bout with ACHS. Avilar had teleportation powers, but their extent was unknown. Certainly he was the most powerful teleport known (and once had to be retrieved from Perth, Australia after starting in West Virginia), but sometimes he'd disappear entirely and could not be found until he re-appeared on his own.

At first it was assumed that he was going some isolated place on Earth where he was difficult to find, but one day he returned with a flower in his hand. It was analyzed in the hope of finding the plant's natural range and solving the mystery of Javier's destination. It turned out to be unrelated to any species on Earth. The similarity to a flower was a product of parallel evolution; it was actually an alien life form.

About a year after Landstuhl, Dr. Koscieszewski managed to penetrate Javier's autism sufficiently to ask him for a ride to his "special destination." A moment later, they were in Sanctuary. Located an unknown distance from Earth, it is a Dyson Sphere of unknown origin.

Sanctuary is a "real" Dyson Sphere, in the sense that the term was originally proposed: a horde of independently

orbiting space habitats rather than a solid sphere. Javier had somehow picked up on a "beacon" (possibly a zero-point energy source, no one knows) on one habitat, and tunes himself to it in order to make the immense jump. No one knows how he then makes it back home.

Avilar's flower and the beacon were from one particular habitat, a rotating cylinder some 10 kilometers in length and a kilometer in diameter. The environment within was remarkably Earth-like, with similar gravity, breathable air, and a compatible biosphere. Apart from the habitat's alien plants and animals, it was entirely uninhabited.

Penned into New Zealand with the Specials, and reading the writing on the wall for them, Dr. Koscieszewski hatched a desperate plan. Javier could teleport things with him; with repeated trips, he could transfer equipment and groups of Specials to his habitat. There they could build a colony. There were a number of exceptions who refused to give up the fight at home, but she secretly convinced many Specials to come with her.

Endgame, or So It Seemed

On May 5th, 2012, the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution insisting that New Zealand detain all known specials, to be turned over to the newly formed Human Safety Council (UNHUSACO). New Zealand had 15 days to comply. Specials in other countries were arrested, and brought to internment camps.

To their credit, the government of New Zealand refused, and on May 21st a combined force of American, British, French, and Chinese troops invaded. New Zealand immediately surrendered -- the last Special on their soil had left for Sanctuary six hours before.

On May 23rd, at 0700 hours local time, the largest internment camp in Europe was attacked by Specials who escaped with 114 people. At midnight local time (almost simultaneously with the European jailbreak), the largest American camp was assaulted, and 180 Specials rescued. The two attacks were later discovered to have been based out of an abandoned weather station in northern Newfoundland, from where Javier Avilar sent the two strike teams before returning them, the internees, and himself to Sanctuary. Eighteen hours later, another strike based out of Howland Island in the Pacific rescued the New Zealanders who had been arrested for aiding them in the previous few months. Increased security at all sites and defensive dispersal of potential targets has reduced the potential for rescues like this, but 60% of all sane Specials have been rescued.

The people of Sanctuary maintain contact with Earth, both to continue rescuing their kind, and to get needed supplies. Dr. Koscieszewski, the escaped New Zealanders, Javier Avilar, and dozens of others who have escaped to Sanctuary were indicted by the ICJ in the Hague for crimes against humanity.

Running a Special Campaign

The default assumption is for a Special campaign to begin shortly after the escape to Sanctuary, and explores refugee interaction with Sanctuary and an increasingly dangerous Earth. If more time is available, however, the campaign can begin at any point in the history above, depending how long a GM is prepared to invest in building up to the evacuation. Bear in mind that the more adventures that take place before Sanctuary enters the picture, the more the players are likely to be invested in Earth. This cuts both ways, making it likelier that the retreat to Sanctuary takes on interesting tragic and hopeful notes, but also increasing the chances that the players will be reluctant to cut and run when an escape presents itself. Be prepared to de-emphasize the long-term nature of the Specials' sojourn to Sanctuary if needed.

Once on Sanctuary, adventures fall into two categories:

- Continuing contact with the Earth, both for more extractions of Specials left behind, and for "grocery shopping." Smash and grab is likeliest, but setting up "Underground Railroads" for people and things is an option.
- Exploring the Dyson Sphere. Sanctuary is empty and hospitable to the newcomers, but there are numerous questions. Where are we? Where are the Builders? Are there other squatters besides ourselves, such as

aggressive alien races? How does the Sphere's alien technology work? Can we get to the other habitats and what are they like? Will we find something that will let us return to Earth permanently, or is Sanctuary home for better or for worse?

In the latter kind of adventure, keep in mind the usual statistics about Dyson Spheres. Though not a solid sphere, Sanctuary still has billions of times the surface area of Earth enclosed within its habitats. Once the Specials can get to the other habitats, anything and everything can be placed by the GM.

Characters

"Special" is intended for use with any gaming system that can model psionic powers. In general this is superhero games, even though the "four-color costumed do-gooder" quotient is very low. It can be increased as desired, but the intention is to offer a place for people who use their own names and dress normally, and just happen to be able to do odd things with their minds.

Powers

No matter what the system, there are a few points for a GM to keep in mind. In-game, psionic strength is limited by the amount of zero-point energy tapped to produce the effect, and the energy involved has to go somewhere. With sufficient control some of it can be dumped back from where it came but the conduit between zero-point space and the real world is not perfect, and it runs through someone's brain. A reprise of ACHS' main symptom -- death due to cerebral overheating -- will occur if too much energy is manipulated too quickly. GMs are advised to use this as an excuse to ban any power they deem too unbalancing, or alternatively give players the option of "pushing" their characters at the risk of brain damage or death.

That said, what powers are appropriate? Simplest to rationalize are those based on tweaks to chemistry or electromagnetic fields: telepathy in particular, and other abilities like telepresence. Precognition is problematic under the quantum mechanical rationale for powers, and is not recommended.

Next easiest is "anchoring" in the fabric of space in order to counter some of the major laws of physics. Specials can affect real world objects with the entire universe as their momentum and energy sink. Even the apparent gross violations of conservation of energy and momentum inherent in Javier Avilar's teleportations can be explained away. Super-strength and flight are also possible -- both as variations of telekinesis -- but GMs are strongly suggested to keep their power low: a few tons of capacity, or flying no faster than a run.

Most difficult of all for a Special is a power that manipulates large amounts of energy, such as pyrokinesis, or energy absorption. These depend on the raw capacity of the conduit into zero point space, either in or out, and should be supremely difficult.

Impossible are feats that can't be justified in terms of psychic abilities. It takes tortured logic to produce extra limbs or super-stretching from mental control of energy. Allow players to come up with rationalizations for their powers, but try to err on the side of realism.

Disadvantages

Specials are people too, and have the same potential disadvantages as other human beings. There are certain types of disadvantages that can be emphasized, though, because of their peculiar situation.

First of all, Specials are susceptible to mental problems. Many escaped ACHS apparently unscathed, but all suffered some damage to their brains. Varying degrees of mental illness of any type are justifiable.

Second, all Specials suffered the trauma of being punished for something they did not control -- being ill. Almost all had to deal with family or friends turning away from them, and police, military, or government actively trying to

imprison or kill them. There is also survivor's guilt: murder or imprisonment has cut the number of sane Specials by a third, and if one includes the mentally ill ones left behind, only 5% of all Specials have escaped. Players may want to investigate the psychology of refugees and trauma victims to better understand how their characters might be thinking after all this upheaval.

Backgrounds

Thanks to the breakouts from the American and European internment camps, the Specials on Sanctuary are largely European and American. There are many Specials from the industrialized nations of the Pacific Rim, though these are now imprisoned throughout Siberia and western China; Sanctuary has only a few of them, for now.

There are not many Specials from Africa, South Asia, or the Middle East, because the lack of available medical treatment in those countries kept people from surviving ACHS, even after a cure was discovered. There are exceptions, though, and some of them have remarkable stories to tell.

Opponents

The only individuals who are more than human in "Special" are the Specials themselves. This is one major reason for keeping power levels low. In rule systems that offer advancement, the characters will reach the point that there are no antagonists that can stop them without some improbably convoluted justifications. It's possible to work in a few Specials who've been turned by an Earth government, and there's always the option of putting some aliens into the mix on Sanctuary, but by and large Special characters will be up against normal people.

As such, normal people will try to level the playing field. They have numbers, and they have a vast technological society with a great communications network behind them. Every military and security analyst on Earth has been chewing on the problem of Specials for more than five years. The GM is encouraged to be as devious as possible, and to be prepared to pile on highly trained soldiers with top-of-the-line military equipment if the Specials are foolish enough to allow their opponents time to react. Books such as *Military Operations in Low Intensity Conflict* and part two of *Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Understanding the New Security Environment, Readings and Interpretations* are highly recommended for a GM lacking in inspiration as to how regular people could hinder Specials.

Adapting to Specific Rule Systems

GURPS: Use powers from *GURPS Psionics*, basing characters on 150 points (with 50 points in skills and 100 points in powers). Mixing with *GURPS Supers* is possible, but beware of powers that are too powerful or overtly break the laws of physics. Also beware of *justifications* for powers that are anything but "psionic."

If the GM decides to drop in an alien race or three, there are numerous options in *GURPS Traveller: Alien Races 4*, or for creative use of some of the "races" found in the various horror supplements. *GURPS: Aliens* is geared towards space opera and doesn't mesh easily, but the Memer and Serat, Markann, or a variation on the Traders would work.

GURPS: Special Ops is also handy for modeling the cutting-edge soldiers Earth's security forces will develop to deal with Specials.

Champions: Most characters should use the Mentalist template, though there are excuses for low-powered Bricks and Energy Projectors. A Low-Powered Campaign (150 base points and a maximum of 100 points of disadvantages) is recommended, and there is room to lower this even more.

Silver Age Sentinels: Use the game's definition of a Low-Powered Game for character creation, with sanction for increasing STR or INT past 24 if a reasonable justification can be provided. Some characters will be Psychic class, but players should be allowed to use the more flexible Adventurer class if they wish -- so long as they are using the Psychic archetype (see page 155 of the *Silver Age Sentinels d20* book).

As a fairly standard *d20 System* game, there's a wide variety of "modern" supplements that will be useful, notably *d20 Modern* itself. Aliens and alien technology can be culled from a variety of different games based on the system, and not just the science fiction ones. The author's "Special" campaign used *Call of Cthulhu d20's* Fungi From Yuggoth (with the serial numbers filed off) as the major non-humans of the Sanctuary Dyson Sphere.

Mutants and Masterminds: Begin characters at Power Level 5, and be careful when handing out Power Points. In particular, consider the "Other Rewards" on page 151 of the Core Book as options to keep advancement low.

As a heavily modified *d20 System*, it's more difficult to slide in elements from other books. As of this writing there are no supplements from *Mutants & Masterminds* publisher Green Ronin that would be particularly useful when implementing a "Special" campaign.

The Ro-Ped

Low-Cost Personal Urban Transport in the World of *Transhuman Space*

by Phil Masters

A typical urban street scene in *Transhuman Space's* world of the year 2100 includes a lot that would puzzle or startle a viewer from a hundred years before, but also a lot that would seem fairly familiar, even in the most sophisticated Fifth Wave cities. What are perhaps most interesting, though, are the elements which would be half familiar and half strange -- concepts and technologies which have survived the 21st century, but which have evolved and mutated in the process.

The type of civilian vehicle known variously as the ro-ped, robobike, cyberscooter, and by dozens of other names, belongs in this category. The direct and obvious technological descendent of the light motorized two and three-wheeled urban transports which became so popular across much of the globe in the second half of the 20th century, the ro-ped is often used in much the same way. However, increasing technological sophistication has given it additional capabilities, and in 2100, it is no longer *simply* a vehicle.

The Ro-Ped as Cybershell

The key development in this process was the installation of increasingly sophisticated computer systems in motorized vehicles, a design approach which long since reached even this type of light, cheap transport. Such vehicles have become fully capable of maintaining and steering themselves, and indeed, manual vehicle operation is now prohibited on some roads in some areas. That in itself technically transforms vehicles into cybershells, but the term really means most with smaller designs. In particular, many manufacturers have included manipulator arms in their "ro-peds," enabling them to perform routine maintenance on themselves, run errands -- often without any human operator or passenger -- and help around the garden. The borderline between personal transport and medium-sized civilian utility cybershell has thus become blurred, and most industry observers believe that it will disappear entirely within a few years.

The Market

As with its ancestral "motor scooter" of the late 20th century, the ro-ped is found in almost every city in the world, but its image and socio-economic niche varies with local conditions. In *Fifth Wave* cities, such vehicles represent cheap personal transport for the young and the (relatively) poor; popular models tend to be designed for looks and style rather than durability or long-term reliability, and often incorporate minor luxury features. Parents often appreciate the idea that a good AI, installed in the vehicle's computer, can supervise their adolescent offspring, preventing unsafe or illegal behavior and reminding them of deadlines and curfews; those same adolescent users sometimes trade supposed methods for subverting or befuddling standard AI types.

The one snag with such vehicles from the recreational user's point of view is of course that they are open to the elements, which is why, for the last 150 years, such things have been most popular in regions with warmer climates, but their low cost and agility in traffic make them popular even in wetter and colder countries. A small but significant secondary market consists of couriers who are employed to move portable urgent packages around urban areas, which helps to make the ro-ped a familiar sight in every advanced city on Earth.

The ro-ped sees similar use in *Fourth Wave* areas, and indeed the technology may even be slightly more common in such regions, as their citizens are more accustomed to physical travel over short distances rather than conducting their social and business lives *purely* in networked virtual reality. Prices of even the latest designs are well within the budgets of many "Fourth Wavers," although the typical model of choice may be slightly more utilitarian than in richer

markets, with fewer luxury options. In fact, though, ro-peds are perhaps most popular among the younger members of wealthier social classes, who use them as a way of flaunting their wealth and emulating Fifth Wave sophistication.

Third Wave city streets are also frequently full of ro-peds, although these are often older models, kept running by diligent or improvisational maintenance work, or even purchased in more advanced areas by dealers who ship them to the poorer regions for second-hand sale. Many lack much in the way of computer capacity, with only the most basic AIs installed; indeed, some older models are completely incapable of independent operation. Several older but serviceable designs have been flagrantly pirated by manufacturers in the TSA, and can be seen on the streets of Alliance cities, giving observant Fifth Wave visitors a persistent sense of *deja vu*.

Many ro-peds found in Third Wave areas have only one manipulator arm fitted, or even completely lack this feature. While a few young, wealthy users seek to imitate fashionable Fifth Wave folk, most "Third Waver" ro-peds are employed for much more utilitarian purposes, sometimes serving as a whole family's only form of transport. (This in turn tends to prevent them being seen as much of a status symbol by wealthier locals.) They may be overloaded, under-maintained, and shabby. Even so, the ro-ped is helping to bring the concept of ubiquitous cybershell use even to the poorest countries.

The CIT "Arlesienne" mk.III (*GUPRS Third Edition*)

Subassemblies: Body +0, two Arms -2, three Wheels -2.

Power and Propulsion: 5 kW ceramic engine with wheeled drivetrain. 0.5 kWh energy cell.

Fuel: 2 gallon standard fuel tank for alcohol.

Occupancy: 2 CYCS. *Cargo:* 3 cf.

Armor

All: 2/4

Equipment

Body: Small computer (incorporates GPS). Short-range radio with cellular capability. LLTV (×5 magnification) and passive IR sensors (front, back, right and left). Basic sound detector.

Statistics

Size: 3'×2'×5' *Payload:* 471.60 lbs. *Lwt.:* 728.28 lbs.

Volume: 7.8 cf. *Size Mod:* +0 *Cost:* \$3,621.90 + computer

HT: 9 *HP:* 15 [Body], 6 [each Arm], 3 [each Wheel]

gSpeed: 60 *gAccel:* 3 *gDecel:* 15 *gMR:* 1.5 *gSR:* 2

High Ground Pressure. Off-Road Speed 10.

The CIT "Arlesienne" mk.III (*GUPRS Fourth Edition*)

The ro-ped has ST/HP 25, Hnd/SR +1/2, HT 10f, Move 3/30, LWt 0.36, Load 0.2, SM 0, Occ 1+1, DR 4, Range 800, Cost \$4K, Locations E3W2A.

Use of electrical batteries rather alcohol fuel than eliminates the ro-ped's flammability; however, it also reduces Range to 240.

The most popular model in CIT/Provencale's cyberscooter range, the Arlesienne is about as sleek and stylish as a three-wheeled urban transport can probably hope to be. Typically sold with a cheap computer pre-loaded with a standard NAI-4 plus skill sets for Driving (Automobile)-13 and Mechanic (Internal Combustion Engine)-12 (total cost

\$600), the Arlesienne uses a system architecture and interfaces based on a well-established, even slightly outdated industry open standard. This helps make the model popular with hobbyist "cyber-hackers" who upgrade and tinker with the software and often the processor; while this brings relatively few additional sales directly, it gives the Arlesienne's image a degree of "cool" in wider markets -- as the company's memeticists intended.

The performance figures above are for when the ro-ped is laden with two riders and their luggage. With just a 200 lb. driver, it has gSpeed 75, gAccel 4, and off-road speed 13; completely unladen, operating as an autonomous cybershell, these figures rise to gSpeed 100, gAccel 5, and (thanks to ground pressure falling to moderate) off-road speed 25.

Design Notes: This typical ro-ped design was created using *GURPS Vehicles* and the "[Transhuman Space Technical Appendix](#)". It uses an alcohol-burning ceramic engine for versatility; a full tank of fuel costs around \$1 and is good for 11 hours of use at full speed, or about twice that in more normal use. It has three wheels rather than two so that it can function independently as a cybershell at low speeds; two-wheeled motorcycles still exist in 2100, but are usually designed as long-range high-speed tourers rather than as urban runabouts.

The design also has a light, cheap, steel alloy frame (robotic, like all modern vehicles in the setting), an aluminum bodyshell, cheap arm motors, and improved brakes. The controls are fully computerized, and indeed the computer has no problem operating the vehicle, with or without a rider. Maintenance interval is 330 hours.

The Ro-Ped as a Cybershell

Converting the above vehicle design into a "character" cybershell gives the following template:

GURPS Third Edition

Attribute Modifiers: ST Upper Body -5, Lower Body +40 (No Fine Manipulators: -40%) [35]; HT -1 [-10].

Advantages: Absolute Direction (Uses GPS, -20%) [4]; DR 4 [12]; Extra Encumbrance [5]; Extra Hit Points +6 [30]; Filter Lungs [5]; Increased Speed +1 (only improves ground movement, not Dodge, Initiative, or anything else: -75%) [6]; Infravision [15]; Machine Body [37]; Night Vision [10]; Passive Defense +2 [50]; Peripheral Vision [15]; Polarized Eyes [5]; Radio Speech [25]; Super Running x3 [60]; Telescopic Vision x2 [12].

Disadvantages: Limited Sense of Touch [-10]; Mistaken Identity [-5]; No Sense of Smell/Taste [-5]; Social Stigma (Valuable Property) [-10]; Very Restricted Movement (Wheels/Tracks) [-25].

Features: Complexity 5-7 small computer. External seats for two people. Internal space (room for 3 cf of luggage).

Date: c.2060 **Cost:** \$3,621.90 + computer.

This template has a total cost of 261 points.

As the ro-ped's carrying capacity implies a load-bearing strength far greater than that built into its manipulator arms, the "Split ST" rules (p.C1176) have been applied. The "upper body" ST should be used if the vehicle ever tries to exert force with or through its upper structure, reflecting the fact that its frame simply isn't engineered for this.

Two disadvantages in this template, Limited Sense of Touch and Restricted Movement, come from an earlier *Pyramid* article, "[The Car as the Star](#)"; see that for details, and for discussion of several other issues arising when treating vehicles as characters.

Also as discussed in that article, this treatment assumes that the controlling AI can monitor just one of the vehicle's four camera arrays properly at a time, but can pay enough attention to the others to justify the Peripheral Vision advantage. It *might* be possible to design an AI to monitor every camera at once, giving 360-degree Vision (+10 points to the package cost); however, this would probably be limited to AIs specifically designed as vehicle controllers or for very similar applications.

Technological Variations

Electric Power: This option is most often taken in more advanced regions, where there are cheap, reliable electricity supplies and often significantly tighter anti-pollution laws. It also tends to be popular with any user who wants to employ the ro-ped indoors in confined spaces; even 2100-era alcohol-burning engines generate some unhealthy exhaust fumes. For a typical example, replace the engine, fuel tank, and small energy cell in the above design with a 15 kWh energy cell (permitting 3 hours of operation at top speed or about twice that in normal use). This reduces the unladen weight by 16.5 lbs., and changes the price to \$3,866.90 and the maintenance interval to 320 hours. If treating the ro-ped as a cybershell, replace Filter Lungs with Doesn't Breathe [20] and add Limited Endurance [-10].

Arm Modifications: Thanks to the cost of arm motor/control systems, the manipulator arms included in the above design increase the cost fairly substantially, to the extent that several ro-ped manufacturers were surprised with how popular they proved when they were first introduced. (It turns out that people are prepared to pay quite a lot for a vehicle that can maintain itself and help carry the shopping.) Hence, there are still quite a few cheaper models around with just one arm (reduce cost by \$750, add One Arm [-20] to the template), and a few with none (reduce cost by \$1,500 and add No Manipulators [-50] to the template).

A compromise can involve using cheaper, low-dexterity manipulator systems (reduce cost by \$750, add Bad Grip [-10] to the template), but this is generally seen as losing too much functionality for too little cost reduction. (Some older, badly-maintained ro-peds effectively acquire Bad or Poor Grip anyway . . .) At the other end of the scale, some ro-ped purchasers demand greater strength, making the cybershell a more useful general servant; for example, raising ST to 10 in both arms adds \$1,500 to the cash price and 20 points to the template cost.

Liquid Crystal Skin: Liquid crystal "paint" is popular with wealthier users who can't decide what their favorite color might be, and is also sometimes acquired by anyone who has to use a ro-ped for clandestine operations -- a "shadow" is somewhat less likely to be spotted by an unsuspecting target if the vehicle involved changes its appearance periodically, at carefully judged moments. It can also be programmed to display a serviceable camouflage pattern. The coating costs \$800, and may give a small bonus to Camouflage, Shadowing, or Stealth rolls on some occasions, at the GM's option.

All-Terrain Capability: This variant gives a ro-ped off-road wheels and all-wheel steering. The result cannot actually operate on *any* terrain, but it has markedly less problem with difficult conditions than a standard model. While popular with some recreational users, the main objective of these enhancements is actually to make ro-peds more useful as general-purpose cybershells. The cost becomes \$4,897.60, the weight becomes 268.88 lbs. unladen or 740.48 lbs. fully laden, and the total volume becomes 8.3 cf, while the larger wheels have 4 HP each. As a result, gMR becomes 1.75, and off-road speed with a single rider becomes 19, or 33 if completely unladen. In the character template, change Very Restricted Movement to Somewhat Restricted Movement [-15].

Even more sophisticated and versatile models also have powerful miniaturised motors driving the steered front wheel, giving the vehicle all-wheel drive. This increases weight to 281.38 lbs. unladen or 752.98 lbs. fully laden, and cost to \$5,397.60, while reducing top speed slightly to 70 with just one rider or 95 fully unladen; however, it also increases off-road speed, to 15 when fully laden, 23 when carrying a single rider, or 48 when unladen.

GURPS Fourth Edition Notes

The ro-ped template is as follows:

Attribute Modifiers: ST +15 [150].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: Basic Move +1 [5].

Advantages:

Absolute Direction (Requires Signal, -20%) [4]; Damage Resistance (4) [20]; Enhanced Move (Running) 3 [60]; Filter Lungs [5]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Infravision [10]; Machine [25]; Night Vision 5 [5]; Payload 5 (62.5 lbs, 3 cf) [5]; Peripheral Vision [15]; Protected Vision [5]; Radio [10]; Reduced Consumption 3 [6]; Telescopic Vision ×2 [10].

(Note that Absolute Timing is now included in the templates for AI software.)

Disadvantages: Electrical [-20]; No Legs (Wheeled) [-20]; No Sense of Smell/Taste [-5]; Numb [-20]; Social Stigma (Valuable Property) [-10]; Weak Arms (1/4 Body ST) [-10].

Quirks: Road wheels only (suffers even worse problems on rough country than most wheeled characters) [-1].

Features: Complexity 5-7 small computer; External seats for two people; Looks identical to countless others; Sterile.

Date: c.2060 **Cost:** \$3,621.90 + computer.

Total template cost: 259 points.

Variations

Electric Power: Replace Filter Lungs with Doesn't Breathe [20] and delete Reduced Consumption. (Electrical recharges are treated as "refuelling" for game purposes.)

One Arm: Add the One Arm Disadvantage [-20], while the value of the Weak Arms Disadvantage becomes [-5].

No Arms: Apply the -40% "No Fine Manipulators" limitation to ST (reducing the cost to 90 points) and replace Weak Arms with No Manipulators [-50].

Bad Grip: Add some level of Bad Grip, usually -4 [-10].

Stronger Arms: Weak Arms (1/2 Body ST) is worth [-5] instead of [-10] (or [-2] if the cybershell only has one arm).

Liquid Crystal Skin: Add one level of Chameleon [5] and a Perk (Variable surface color; a neat gimmick, and may give a small bonus to, e.g., Shadowing rolls on some occasions, at the GM's option) [1].

All-Terrain Capability: Delete the "Road wheels only" Quirk.

Game Uses

Obviously, a ro-ped is nobody's idea of a glamorous pursuit vehicle; anyone who wants speed, combat effectiveness, or serious agility and versatility will choose almost anything else. However, this very innocuous inoffensiveness can bring such vehicles into many scenarios.

If nothing else, PCs may encounter countless ro-peds getting in their way on busy streets or being used as transportation by important but unsuspecting NPCs, or they may use such vehicles themselves for shadowing and surveillance work. Ro-peds can certainly factor into impromptu chase scenes; they *are* a lot faster than a human being on foot, after all, and a mugger or other criminal might plausibly choose to use one as a getaway vehicle on cramped and busy streets. Youth gangs in Third Wave cities might well ride around on the best transport they can afford, while Fifth Wave "AI hackers" might favor such cybershells for numerous purposes, from the innocuous to the nefarious.

Scenario Ideas

Bonus Feature: The purchaser of an imported second-hand ro-ped in a Third Wave city (maybe a PC, or one of the PCs' friends or relations) has just discovered to his surprise and delight that its computer appears to be more powerful

than its documentation suggests -- and indeed, its AI appears to be a fairly sophisticated LAI, rather than a cheap, basic NAI. Of course, this raises the question of what else might be stored (perhaps encrypted) in the computer's memory, what else the AI might be capable of which it won't admit, and who might want any of this stuff back if they find out.

The AI certainly seems secretive and evasive, but that may not be deliberate; it may just be a poorly designed amateur "hack job," or damaged by memory corruption. If the PCs can discover some relevant encryption keys, they might even find that it's simply treating them as inadequately authorised to use it. But who can they trust to ask for help? And when the AI asks for access to the Net in order to acquire some error patches which might make it more useful, dare they agree?

Streets of Fire: The PCs are employed as part of a counter-terrorist operation in a "low Fourth Wave" city when an insurgent group launches a large-scale campaign against the local political structure. Early attacks show that the assassins are expert and ruthless bombjackers, employing innocuous ro-peds as weapons. A little detective work finds that the vehicles used were built by the same popular manufacturer, and it emerges that the terrorists have subverted the supervisory software in that company's local maintenance center. While the security hole can be fixed, a software "upgrade" transmitted to vehicles throughout the city means that they might be taken over at any moment, and they are refusing to accept new software patches.

The government might order all of the relevant vehicles off the road, at the risk of triggering widespread hysteria -- but scores are already on the loose without riders and now ignoring recall signals. Some carry bombs, others are acting as decoys. Furthermore, ro-peds are popular in this city; banning their use, or even spreading the news story, is going to cause economic problems and general chaos, while jumpy PCs and other agents are going to have difficulty telling potentially dangerous units from visually similar models built by other manufacturers. And then there are the home-modified models using processors and software from one manufacturer in another's vehicles. Things are going to get messy before they get better.

My (Software) Generation: A new, rather experimental SAI-7 being developed in a Fifth Wave laboratory is displaying personality problems. The designers attempted to enhance its ability to benefit from training and education by giving it a less rigid, more "questioning" personality, and to a certain extent they may have succeeded -- at the cost of making it rather surly and uncooperative. It's not malevolent or any sort of "rogue," so far as they can tell; it just has something of the personality of a human adolescent. Unfortunately, fixing this directly would require low-level manipulation of its software structures, to a degree which local AI protection law only permits with the informed consent of the SAI itself -- which isn't forthcoming. Anyway, the researchers aren't sure that they *can* fix the problem without damaging the successful aspects of their work. "And besides, he'll grow out of it . . ."

All of which would be an entirely academic issue if the SAI hadn't recently declared a need to interact with the world at large. It was built to be capable of learning; refusing to let it acquire experience could be considered cruel, and might possibly even be damaging. So it needs, well, *babysitters* -- which is where the PCs come in. Unfortunately, one of the first things the SAI discovers is the joy of first teleoperating and eventually downloading itself to cybershells, with a particular taste for ro-peds, for no apparent reason. Ro-peds, 130-year-old soul music, and not telling its "guardians" where it's going when it goes out . . .

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Icosahedron Adventures

The Handiest Magic Item 30 Things to do with a *Glove of Storing*

by Owen K.C. Stephens

A *glove of storing* is a fairly simple magic item. According to the core *d20 System* rules, it has the following properties: This device is a simple leather glove. On command, one item held in the hand wearing the glove disappears. The item can weigh no more than 20 pounds and must be able to be held in one hand. While stored, the item has negligible weight. With a snap of the fingers wearing the glove, the item reappears. A glove can only store one item at a time. Storing or retrieving the item is a free action. The item is held in stasis and shrunk down so small within the palm of the glove that it cannot be seen. Spell durations are not suppressed, but continue to expire. If an effect is suppressed or dispelled, the stored item appears instantly.

Faint transmutation; CL 6th; Craft Wondrous Item, *shrink item*; Price 10,000 gp (one glove).

The cost may seem high when compared to a *handy haversack* (at 2,000 gp) or one of the cheaper *bags of holding* (starting at just 2,500 gp), but the *glove* has lots of advantages over those items.

First, getting something out of or putting something into a *glove of storing* is a free action. It takes no time at all. Imagine, then, being a thief. You pick the pocket of a mark, and even if he catches you, the object taken can just be *gone*. Of course this trick can be revealed with the right spells, but not everyone is a spellcaster. Especially if your mark has no reason to think of you as a rich adventurer, it may not occur to him you've shrunk his purse down to a tiny size to store on your palm.

Additionally, things stored in a *glove of storing* are still present on the character's plane of existence. The problem with other mass storage devices is that they place items in a "non-dimensional space." There are no clear guidelines how this space works, but at least some GMs are going to assume it can be accessed with transportation magic. With the *glove*, the item is still in your hand here in normal dimensional space. Additionally, a *glove* that is accidentally placed into another storage item doesn't rip a portal to the Astral plane, as things like *portable holes* do.

Further, the *glove* doesn't have an opening you have to fit things through, nor can anyone but you access it when in use. Any bag or haversack is going to have trouble fitting a gallon of ale -- the thing is just too wide regardless of its weight. I can certainly hold some gallon containers (even two or three gallon casks) in one hand, so they can go into a *glove*.

These properties all add up to an amazing degree of versatility. The *glove* isn't so useful because of any one thing you can do with it, but because you can set it up to help deal with common circumstances, or to get around a particular problem when it crops up. And unlike placing 500 lbs in a *bag of holding*, if you need to use your *glove* for something out of the ordinary, you likely have a friend who can carry your spare longsword.

So, here are 30 things you can keep in a *glove of storing*. Of course it's up to a GM how many of these work (some assume a pretty broad definition of the *glove's* limitations), but they should at least spark some interesting other thoughts.

1. **Live cat.** Since items stored in the *glove* are kept in stasis, a cat can be kept there indefinitely. This is useful for rogues and other sneaky character. If the *glove's* wearer makes a noise while sneaking into someplace, she can simply release the cat to throw off suspicion. More dangerous tiny creatures can be turned into thrown weapons the same way.
2. **Ladder, 10-foot.** It can be carried in one hand, but it a pain to haul around any other way (and is reasonably too large to stick in a *bag of holding*). Same logic applies to a 10-foot pole.

3. **Ram, portable.** For quick and easy door access.
4. **Any weapon.** For characters who want to retrieve a weapon as a free action, but can't manage to pick up the Quickdraw feat. Also useful for back-up options, such as a silver or cold iron version of the character's preferred weapon or a hammer for fighting skeletons. (It's more convenient than carrying spare weapons in a golf bag, anyway.) Additional examples include a long spear (allowing the character to quickly set to receive a charge), a loaded repeating crossbow (allowing five attacks to be made in quick succession), a net already folded to throw, or any throwing weapon.

This is particularly useful for clerics, who can use a weapon and shield but need one hand free to cast spells with somatic components. A cleric could carry a large steel shield all the time (maintaining his AC), and have a morningstar in a *glove of storing*. When the cleric needs to cast a spell, he stores the weapon in the *glove* to free up a hand. Since using the *glove* is a free action, the cleric can even bring his weapon back out after casting, allowing him to make attacks of opportunity.

5. **Material component.** For the most part, if a character can get at a material component quickly and easily enough it's not worth wasted a *glove's* abilities on it. However, a spellcaster who is grappled can only cast a spell if its material component is already in hand. Thus a sorcerer might find it useful to keep a pinch of powdered iron (for *enlarge person*), a few hairs from a bull (for *bull's strength*), or even a bit of gauze and a wisp of smoke (for *gaseous form*) to allow casting when grappled.
6. **Alchemist's Fire.** It can be very useful to have fire ready to go, but alchemist's fire is volatile and takes time to pull out of a pack. Carrying it in a *glove* allows a character to have it ready in an instant without any risk it'll blow up (a similar logic applies to carrying a *necklace of fireballs*). Even at high levels, alchemist's fire can be useful, to deal with things like trolls sitting in an *antimagic field*. The same logic applies to an acid vial.
7. **A shield.** Useful for character that fight with multiple styles. A character fighting with a bastard sword could have a heavy steel stored in the *glove*, and easily switch between using the sword two-handed or using it one-handed and getting the extra AC from the shield.
8. **Studded leather armor.** For a fighter to sleep in, as opposed to his heavy daytime armor.
9. **Locked gauntlet.** It's not so useful to store a locked gauntlet in a *glove of storing*, as it is to use a *glove of storing* to take off a locked gauntlet quickly. Since the *glove* can only store one item, rather than unlock and remove the gauntlet, simply store it in the *glove* when done with it and be immediately ready to switch weapons or cast spells.
10. **A valuable gem.** Twenty pounds is enough to store an immensely valuable gem, a perfectly concealed, theft-resistant source of emergency wealth.
11. **Potion of healing.** It's difficult to take time to retrieve a potion of healing when you really, really need it. By placing a powerful one in the *glove*, a character saves valuable time when healing himself or another character becomes crucial.
12. **A familiar.** Like the cat, once stored the familiar is safe, needs no food, and takes no damage.
13. **Bag of caltrops.** Ready to discourage pursuit.
14. **Thieves' tools.** Especially in areas where such tools are illegal. Any frequently used kit (especially a healer's kit) also makes a good choice.
15. **A stolen object.** If stealing something that qualifies, placing it where it can't be found by a mundane Search check if caught is useful.
16. **An 11th- or higher-level druid.** If a group needs to sneak an extra character into a situation, such as a negotiation, an 11th-level druid is able to become a tiny animal, and then get stored in the *glove*.

More realistically, a party trying to fit an extra person into a *teleport* can cast *reduce person* on anyone weighting 160 pounds or less and stick them in a *glove*. This will certainly allow any gnome or halfling to be brought along in this manner, and may work for elves and sleight humans as well. The *reduce person* still has a very short duration, but a *teleport* is a single action after all.

If a horse or ogre has to be brought along, *polymorph* them into a cat instead. The item can be used to carry a small infant (if one must transport the infant safely, for example) without resorting to spells.

17. **Twenty pounds of food.** For character with low carrying capacities, a sack of food, or feed for horses, can be

kept lightly in the *glove*, allowing the character to stay lightly encumbered. (This this also allows for having food even if horses are driven off or lost in a flood, which is useful for really dangerous wilderness.) Even better, the food stays perfectly fresh. I imagine a number of adventurers appreciate the option of a fresh slice of pie or some hearty stew after weeks of iron rations in the bottom of a dank dungeon.

18. **Magic rings.** Since there are far more than two kinds of useful rings, a character can keep one stored in a *glove* and one worn on the finger. As it's a free action to retrieve or store an item, a character wearing a *ring of climbing* with a *ring of feather falling* stored can climb a cliff and, if he falls, take a free action to retrieve the *ring of feather falling*, and then a second free action to store the *ring of climbing*. (This only works if the GM counts pressing a thumb against a worn ring as "holding" it, in which case rings can be switched freely once a round).
19. **Spyglass.** These mundane items are expensive and fragile, so it's a good idea to keep them stored someplace they won't get hurt when not in use. To a lesser degree, the same is true of a magnifying glass.
20. **Activated sunrod.** Since it's not magical, its six-hour duration is suspended when in stasis, just like a torch. This makes them practical and inexpensive when only used for emergency lighting, even underwater, and with no need to light it. Of course, a lit lantern works almost as well, though its not as useful when swimming).
21. **Activated smokestick.** If stored as a free action after being activated, but before filling an area with smoke, the smokestick can be called up as a free action to provide cover, while leaving the character a full round to run or hide.
22. **A 200 ft. silk rope.** This may push the limit of what can be "held in one hand," but it's only 20 lbs, making it perfect for delving in caves or throwing after a friend who's fallen into a river. Alternatively, a smaller rope with grappling hook built in may save time when climbing in a hurry, but would be awkward to carry any other way. (Characters trying to justify carrying a spiked chain may also find the glove useful for easy access.)

This is also a neat way to eliminate someone crawling up a rope behind you. Once you've reached the top, just grab the rope and store it. Anyone still climbing is most likely going to fall.

23. **Masterwork manacles.** Not so much to store them, but to get them off quickly. By grabbing the chain, the glove wearer can store the manacles, thus getting them off his wrists. This works well if a character must pretend to be a prisoner, allowing him to act quickly when the gig is up.
24. **Pack saddle.** In case you get rid of a pack animal upon reaching a dungeon, it's nice to have someplace to put the gear you strapped on it. Alternatively, this allows a wizard to convert an animal summoned with a *mount* spell into a beast of burden for carrying newly-acquired treasure.
25. **Clay jug of hot tea.** Even weeks later, the tea is hot and refreshing. (This also works with cold lemonade.)
26. **Sack of berries.** Useful for a druid looking to cast *goodberry*. Being in a *glove of storing* doesn't cause the magic of a *goodberry* spell to last longer, but it does prevent berries from spoiling, allowing a druid access to fresh berries even in the depths of winter.
27. **Spellbook.** A wizard's spellbook is important enough to take any steps to protect it. It's difficult for a wizard to sleep while holding his spellbook, but easy enough to sleep wearing a *glove*. This also prevents it from being destroyed by a failed save vs. an area attack, and the same logic applies to an expensive scroll.
28. **Rod, staff or wand.** Staves in particular can be a pain to carry around, but useful to have. In all of these cases, the spellcaster can gain quick and easy access to an item that grants extra power, without having to carry it around door pull it out.
29. **Anything that qualifies, which you need to keep ageless.** Imagine having kidnapped a prince, and wanting proof he's alive, but you fear he may not be for much longer. Have him write a short note and sign it, and while the ink is still wet place it in the *glove*. Then, if you're trying to arrange for an exchange, have a dummy placed in a carriage. If the ransom payers demand proof the prince is within, hop inside and produce the document. If they realize the ink is wet and recognize the prince's handwriting, your ruse is more likely to succeed.

Similarly, bets can be won by having ice stored for travel into a desert, keeping berries until they're out of season, or even placing a beloved pet away while its owner is off for years at a time. A wizard who leaves a kitten behind when he goes off on a decade long quest can still have the kitten preserved if it's spent the whole time in a *glove of storing*.

In an extreme case, a powerful spellcaster could keep a target alive forever in stasis. The last daughter of a

house destined not to return to power for three centuries, for example, could be turned into a toad with *baleful polymorph* and then stuck in a *glove*. Three hundred years, a *break enchantment* restores the long lost heir no worse for the passage of time.

30. **Anything that qualifies you also want in a *bag of holding*.** This gets expensive, fast, but it does allow a single character to carry a vast amount of material. Since a *glove of storing* can safely be put in a *bag of holding*, a character can buy multiple *gloves*, store one item in each, and then place the *gloves* (item still stored) in a *bag of holding*. Even if a GM rules a *glove of storing* weighs a pound, you could place 250 of them in a type I *bag*, each holding 20 lbs. of goods. This is also a good way to stick things with low weight but high volume in a *bag of holding*.

Pyramid Review

Reality Storm: When Worlds Collide (for *Champions* & *Silver Age Sentinels*)

Published by [Hero Games](#) & [Guardians of Order, Inc.](#)

Written by Darren Watts & Allen Thomas

Cover by Chris Stevens

Illustrated by Tara Lustik & Udon

96-page b&w softcover; \$19.99

Team-ups between the characters of differing comic books are far from uncommon, but between the heroes of comic books from different publishers, it is another matter. Since the first in 1976, *Superman vs. The Amazing Spider-Man*, they have grown in number such that the appearance of such crossovers is no longer as highly anticipated. But if they are merely uncommon in the world of comic books, they are virtually unheard of between games publishers. Fittingly, the first to appear in some two decades, *Reality Storm: When Worlds Collide*, is a crossover between two superhero RPGs. It is not, as the books claims, entirely unique. The first was 1983's *AUTODUEL Champions*, which brought the leading superhero RPG and the premier auto duelling game together.

Reality Storm: When Worlds Collide brings together two of the three leading superhero RPGs: [Champions](#) and [Silver Age Sentinels](#). It provides not just the rules and guidelines for converting the *Tri-Stat* system of the latter to the *Hero System* of the former (and vice-versa), but also an adventure that allows the player characters from one setting to interact with the leading heroes and villains of the other. This is a big powerful adventure, almost on a scale of *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, requiring between four and six characters. They need to be built on 400 to 500 points for the *Hero* system, or 150 to 200 points for the *Tri-Stat* system.

While the adventure is written with the central city of either setting in mind -- Empire City for *Silver Age Sentinels* and Millennium City for *Champions* -- it can begin in any major metropolis. Indeed, the beginning is easily adapted to any major metropolis that the heroes call home. It begins with the Earth being struck with ever worsening weather. Storms, tornados, perpetual rainfall, and tsunami all threaten the world, while the weathermen are at a loss to explain it. The heroes are caught up in the chaos, rescuing those in need and conducting disaster relief. In the midst of all this, everyone receives a mysterious broadcast. Actually, it is only half mysterious. One half being the ultimatum delivered by the world's primary supervillain, the other mysterious half being the identity of the broadcast's second supervillain. If from Millennium-Earth, the heroes will recognize Dr. Destroyer, or if from Empire-Earth, they will know Kreutzritter, but in either case, not the other. Whichever the world, the ultimatum is the same. The villain asserts his right to be Emperor of the world, claims responsibility for the adverse weather patterns, and demands that the world's superheroes be handed over to him to face their due punishment. Faced with this demand, the heroes are going to wonder what is going on, especially as the leading heroes of their have disappeared -- the Champions from Millennium-Earth, and the Guard from Empire-Earth.

Simply, the two supervillains simultaneously discovered the existence of the Multiverse from their respective home worlds, and also the Timestream that runs through it. Both Dr. Destroyer and Kreutzritter, their sidekicks in tow, journey out of their universes and follow the Timestream to the Crystal Palace. Meeting within this strange building and finding the means to conquer their worlds, the dastardly duo decides to co-operate. Not only do the player heroes

have to thwart the pair, they must discover who the building is really home to, and what is his current location. A rescue attempt must be made, for the Reality Storm still threatens not only the characters' home world, but also the other.

Reality Storm: When Worlds Collide starts out simple, but once away from the Earth does grow in complexity. Not that it is necessarily difficult to run, but a less-experienced GM might be put off by the slightly plodding writing style. In particular it is likely to impede a GM's ability to impart the necessary information and clues to his players. But it does possess a cosmic scale that will make a nice change from solving simple villainy and fighting street crime. Time is taken to look at the ramifications of the Reality Storm, from the simple remodeling of the player characters' home city to actually combining one, more, or all the elements of Empire-Earth and Millennium-Earth into one. Several ideas for sequels are also discussed. After all, the dimensional barriers have been pierced this once, so there is nothing to say that they cannot be penetrated again.

Since this is a crossover between two game worlds and two game systems, ***Reality Storm: When Worlds Collide*** devotes over 20 pages to converting characters between the ***Hero*** and ***Tri-Stat*** systems. Characters from ***Champions*** are more tightly detailed, while those from ***Silver Age Sentinels*** are more broadly defined. Thus a character under the ***Tri-Stat*** system is worth up to three times as many points when converted to the ***Hero System***. The guidelines cover every attribute, power, skill, advantage, and disadvantage under both systems. Examples are included, though not one that runs from start to finish. Pleasingly, the conversion rules are helped by the book's index -- a nice touch considering its size, which also covers the adventure itself.

The book closes with the statistics for the heroes and villains that appear in the adventure, these also acting as examples of the conversion process. In this way the GM of the one game system can see its characters under the second game system, while getting new several new characters converted from the other. Thus for the ***Tri-Stat*** system, you get the write-ups for the Millennium-Earth's Champions (Defender, Ironclad, Nighthawk, Sapphire, and Witchcraft), and the villains Dr. Destroyer, Gigaton, and Rakshasa. For the ***Hero System***, conversions are given for the Empire-Earth's Caliburn, Mother Raven, Red Phoenix, Sentinel, and Slipstream, along with the villains, Kreutzritter, Alice, Queen of Hearts, and the Iron Duke.

Of course, ***Reality Storm: When Worlds Collide*** brings together only two of the three leading RPGs. So what of the third, ***Mutants & Masterminds***? In terms of making conversions, the [d20 System version](#) of ***Silver Age Sentinels*** is probably a necessity, but even without it, a GM could certainly adapt the statistics included in this book to give, if not an exact version of the character, then a perfectly playable one. As to the characters to be taken from the ***Freedom City*** setting of ***Mutants & Masterminds***, the Atomic Brain is the obvious choice for the supervillain, while the Freedom League could be the disappeared heroes. They could easily replace the characters from one of the worlds of the adventure with little effort, but including them to have the Reality Storm affect three worlds rather than two will be up to the GM to do.

Physically, ***Reality Storm: When Worlds Collide*** is reasonably done, let down only by its occasionally leaden writing style. It does not help that some of the text to be read aloud is not clearly marked, so the GM will have to mark it with a post-it note. However, the artwork is in keeping with the theme of the book. That each of the smaller pieces comes with an explanatory caption is a nice touch, but better still are the full-page pieces that precede each chapter. These are done as if they were the covers for a hypothetical ***Reality Storm: When Worlds Collide*** comic book series, and you really wish that they had been done in full color.

In bringing two game worlds and two game systems together, ***Reality Storm: When Worlds Collide*** is definitely something of an event for both systems. Certainly not quite as unique as the authors suggest, but still portraying a momentous threat to the heroes' world for either game system in the hands of an experienced GM. And in keeping with the comic book genre, worthy of a sequel. ***Reality Storm II*** anyone?

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Expanded Psionics Handbook (for *Dungeons & Dragons*)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Written by Bruce R. Cordell

Additional design by David Noonan

Edited by Michele Carter, Gwendolyn F.M. Kestrel, Charles Ryan, & Jennifer Clarke Wilkes

Art by Henry Higginbotham, Steven Belledin, Brian Despain, Wayne England, Lars Grant-West, Heather Hudson, Jeremy Jarvis, Chuck Lukacs, David Martin, Monte Moore, Jim Pavelec, Wayne Reynolds, Arnie Swekel, & Sam Wood

224-page full-color hardcover; \$34.95

When *Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition* came out, it stood to reason the *Psionics Handbook* would be updated to fit. With the rollout of *Dungeons & Dragons 3.5* it had to be done again, and it's resulted in the *Expanded Psionics Handbook*.

It wouldn't be a *Dungeons & Dragons* book without the usual lineup of extras for characters. There are new psionic classes to make use of all the new directions in which the powers can go. Character classes have a fairly tight focus: There are only a few basic types, though the psion is further subdivided into more groups that concentrate on certain groups of related powers like clairsentience and telepathy. There are also rules for epic-level psis and twice as many prestige classes as there are basic occupations. These are more imaginative, with beings who leave their physical form behind for a life of mental existence, hunters who kill illithids, and the irresistibly heroic Fist of Zuoken. The book takes a more in-depth look at psionic races, too, like the Thri-Kreen and Dromites.

Psi powers are listed much like spells: 1st through 9th-level powers for this class, six levels of power for another, some disciplines for various psions. This makes up the bulk of the book, so there's a lot of customization to keep things interesting. Some are awfully close to spells -- to put none too fine a point on it they're spells with another name, and may even say "see the PHB" -- but there's enough new material that it's not just a half-hearted reprint. On the other hand, things like vomiting acid probably aren't the average person's idea of psionic powers anyway. Another notable annoyance: energy adaptation, energy ball, energy bolt, energy burst, energy cone . . . and that's just the start of the alphabetical listing; it doesn't include stray items like claw of energy.

The big difference between magic and psi is power points. Power points are the currency for using your abilities, and the better powers cost more. By spending extra points, most powers allow you to extend an ability's duration, strength, or number of targets, among other things. You need not decide what powers are available to you like wizards and similar spellcasters, but regaining the power points still requires sleep or meditation.

And with great power comes great piles of feats. Most of these will be fairly familiar to users of magic. You can

maximize the effects of your powers, lessen the time needed to cast or invoke them, and boost your more mundane efforts (for example, charging up a weapon with psychic energy and then thrusting it deep into your enemy). Non-psis get a few options as well -- it's only fair to give them some resistance to psionic powers, and only those without such powers get the really good anti-psi choices.

Even religion gets a closer look in this book. Some fairly interesting connections are drawn between different types of psionics and the sorts of religions to which they might turn. Some new religions are introduced as well that focus to a greater or lesser degree on potentially psychic devotees.

The bestiary revamps a few critters that must operate under new psionics rules, but not everything there is a redo of something from another book. Some are just treatments of mentally adept races; some of these races are listed at the front of the book with the rest of the character options, and others are from other books (like the githyanki). There are several interesting new monsters such as the astral constructs, but plenty of monsters with a hatred for psionics (once again, many psionic creatures want to eat or kill anyone or anything with these powers). Some don't want the people as much as they want the gems they carry.

Crystals of all sorts seem to play an important role in the book, especially psicrystals. Gemstones can be fashioned into all manner of psionic devices. There are extensive rules for creating such items, for psionic and non-psionic characters alike. A psi can place a portion of his own personality into a psicrystal and form sort of a cross between a magical familiar and a willful weapon. Power stones can also give someone the use of an ability, and some may contain extra power points. These rules get a big workout in the *Eberron* setting, and this book is suggested for use with that one (though it's not necessary).

One notable oversight is the place of psionics in the campaign. Following the standard Wizards of the Coast boilerplate for *d20 System* books has left little room for any real in-depth discussion of the benefits and perils of having mental abilities in your game (unless three columns is your definition of "in-depth"). This subject has been dealt with at length in other places, editions, and competing books, but to not have more than a mention here seems like a pretty obvious hole.

If you're at all familiar with the art and design of the rest of Wizard of the Coast's line, there won't be many surprises here -- it's the same high quality. The work in the powers section tends toward the action poses, and someone really went to town in the monsters section.

The *Expanded Psionics Handbook* has a somewhat businesslike atmosphere. It's not that it's uncreative, but it's a series of ups and downs. Inspiration shines through in many places, but it also seems intent on getting the job done in that thorough but predictable paint-by-numbers arrangement to which Wizards of the Coast books cleave. Although it won't provide the juice for readers to bring their "A" game to the table, it's a solid treatment of its subject that will take psis from a footnote to a force with which to be reckoned.

--Andy Vetromile

American Ley Line: Route 66

*"Well if you ever plan to motor west
Travel my way, that's the highway that's the best
Get your kicks on Route 66
Well it winds from Chicago to L.A.
More than two thousand miles all the way
Get your kicks on Route 66"*
-- Bobby Troup, "Get Your Kicks on Route 66"

It is the spine of America, a two-lane ribbon of asphalt, chat, concrete, and gravel that for fifty years channeled dreams and sweat from the Great Lakes to the Pacific Ocean. America's energies stretched out along the Mother Road, coming to life in democratic kitsch and quiet desperation on the bones of cowboys and Indians, gangsters and rebels. Born of the automobile, it died by the automobile, paved over and broken into pieces by the new interstates, but still visible in frontage roads and overgrown side-tracks. It is America's ley line, a dragon curve of magical power laid down by the benevolent hand of Calvin Coolidge and buried deep beneath the American consciousness. Buried -- but not dead. Route 66 lives and runs forever, beneath the wheels of John Steinbeck and Jack Kerouac, in a West where jackalopes roam and the [Big Rock Candy Mountain](#) is always over the next ridge.

I've noted [before](#) that weirdness is where you find it; you can illuminate anywhere by picking out details and shining your own personally bisociated highlight on them. Take advantage of the human instinct for pareidolia, for pattern-matching and false positives. Anything interesting can be significant, can become a sign, a portent pointing to whatever madness or mystery you desire. On a highway running more than 2,400 miles, through eight states and countless small towns, there are more such details than anyone can possibly utilize or comprehend. The signs don't stop with Burma Shave and come-ons for the "Famed But Tamed Killer Rattlesnakes" of the Regal Reptile Ranch in Alanreed, Texas. (Although just like that, we've tied hexagrams and serpent cults together.) In this series, I've picked only a few of the multifarious possibilities and details available, building to a few recognizably suppressed themes. Your mileage, especially on Route 66, may vary. I definitely recommend checking out any of the many websites dedicated to Route 66 for your own details; I'm especially fond of the way the word "alignment" (used so often in stone-circle and ley-line contexts) is used to refer to the old Route 66 roadbed. I also recommend reading Michael Wallis' *Route 66: The Mother Road* for a sepia-colored gestalt into which you can settle the details you select. Wallis' 1990 book gets much of the credit for renewed "Route 66" nostalgia and interest, and I certainly give it much credit for spawning (eventually) this column, and especially the paragraphs coming around the curve just ahead.

"The association is formed to promote the early completion and secure permanent maintenance of U.S. Highway No. 66 between Chicago and Los Angeles, commonly called 'The Main Street of America,' and to encourage the people at large to use the same . . ."

-- from the charter of the National U.S. 66 Highway Association

Route 66, as such, came about as a result of the 1921 Federal Highway Act, which tied federal road assistance for the states to state upgrades on key interstate roads. This act was the result of decades of lobbying, primarily by farm interests, but the lobbyist who jumped on it the hardest was one Cyrus Avery, a realtor and oil-patch investor from Tulsa, Oklahoma. He held a number of official and semi-official positions in highway planning, most significantly that of the Department of Agriculture's consulting highway specialist. He mapped out a system of interstate roads, and selected the old Gold Road running through Oklahoma (and coincidentally right past his gas station) as the main transcontinental route from Chicago to Los Angeles. He originally wanted to call the road Highway 60, but better-connected highway officials in Virginia snaffled that number, so he settled for "66." On November 11, 1926, a joint federal and state committee officially approved Avery's map, and Route 66 became a reality.

Only 800 of the 2,448 miles of Avery's route were paved in 1926, but Avery and his booster compatriots in the other seven states it crossed steadily promoted the "Main Street of America" in statehouses, small-town newspapers, on billboards, and everywhere else they could. Route 66 got another big boost from the Bunion Derby, a 1928

transcontinental foot race that followed Route 66 from Los Angeles to Chicago (and lesser roads to New York). Fittingly, an Oklahoman named Andrew Payne won it, to great celebration and fanfare by Avery and his team. By 1937, with the Dust Bowl in full blast blowing Okies down "the Mother Road, 66" to California, the whole route was paved. Route 66 carried Patton's soldiers to maneuvers, and then to their new homes in Southern California after the war; driving down Route 66 became an American vacation and migration standard. The TV series *Route 66*, a family-friendly knockoff of Kerouac's *On the Road* (filmed mostly in Florida) ran between 1960 and 1964 and made the highway synonymous with adventure and romance.

However, midsummer had come and gone for the Mother Road; Dwight Eisenhower, whose jeeps had gotten stuck in one too many two-lane mires before the war, was president. He signed the 1956 Federal Highway Act, which called for German-style autobahns instead of farmer-friendly two-lane highways on America's prime interstate routes. The interstates began crossing, and then bypassing, and then gobbling up, the old Route 66. Rather than I-66 (which went to a road in Virginia), the Chicago-Los Angeles route became a Frankenstein linkup of I-55, I-44, I-40, I-15, and I-10. The last vestige of Route 66 disappeared from official Department of Transportation maps in 1984.

"My first ride was a dynamite truck with a red flag, about thirty miles into great green Illinois, the truck driver pointing out the place where Route 6, which we were on, intersects Route 66 before they both shoot west for incredible distances."

-- Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*

One can, as Charles Fort assured us, measure a circle beginning anywhere, and one can measure a highway beginning at least two places, but in America, the West is in front of us, so Route 66 begins in Chicago. I've discussed the superabundance of Chicagoan [sacred geometry before](#), but I'll note specifically that the highway begins at Buckingham Fountain, the largest fountain in the world, in the middle of Grant ("the whole world is watching") Park. Built in 1927 by Kate Buckingham, an eccentric millionairess obsessed with Alexander Hamilton (among other things), Buckingham Fountain resembles a compass rose or a mandala from the air; four seahorses spray water from the cardinal directions. As if that weren't enough, a mile or so west of the Fountain, Route 66 runs right beneath the Sears Tower, the tallest skyscraper in the country. Lingam and yoni, anyone? Spear and Grail? Dark Tower and Holy Well?

Running southwest out of Chicago, Route 66 parallels the [Archer Avenue](#) ghost road, mirrored by the Des Plaines River, and enters [Al Capone's](#) old stronghold of Cicero. It then runs through towns called [Romeo and Juliet](#) (now Romeoville and Joliet), continuing the esoteric theme of doubling reflected in its eerie numeral designation. Route 66 picks up a Lincolnian eldritch charge running through Springfield, Illinois, past the slain deity's home and the rotunda where he last lay in state. From thereabouts, it follows the path of the French voyageurs down the Pontiac Trail, named for the Ottawa Indian Chief Pontiac, who died (under mysterious circumstances) at the southwest end of the Trail -- and hence, at the southwest end of Route 66 in Illinois -- near Cahokia. Cahokia itself, of course, is a mystic site and ley nexus in its own right. Founded around 1050 A.D., it contains the largest pyramids north of Mexico City (packed earthen mounds) and was laid out using faultless sacred geometry to channel the magical energies of the sun god for its sorcerous priesthood. Human sacrifices filled the plazas and streets of Cahokia with power -- power that Route 66 perhaps taps into on its way past on the old Collinsville Road. Intriguingly enough, a mysterious secret society called the Monks of Cahokia held rituals on top of the mounds and, beginning in 1911, lobbied to "preserve the mounds as a national park." Did any of them get involved in highway legislation? Who can say?

"There are only two great transit arteries in the United States that have taken on mythological connotations: the Mississippi River and Route 66."

-- Douglas Brinkley

Route 66 actually crossed the Mississippi at three different places in its fifty years of official history, none of which are accessible to cars right now. (The central crossing, at McKinley Bridge -- named for another martyred king, our third so far -- is about four miles due west of the Cahokia Mounds.) For my money, there's something very "Christabel," almost Lovecraftian, in the 135-degree turn the northernmost crossing (the Chain of Rocks Bridge) makes in the middle of the river. This eerie feeling is not slaked by the knowledge that at least one person died building the Chain of Rocks Bridge in 1929, in a shade of the old custom of sacrificing a builder to the river-god in Roman times. The southernmost crossing, at MacArthur ("son of Arthur") Bridge, runs right past that Modernist megalith, the

Gateway Arch. One hardly even needs to wonder if the Masons were perhaps involved somehow: the Gateway Arch is a catenary ("chained" or "linked") curve, and its 18-degree-off-North alignment mirrors the angle of a pentagram pointing due west (where else?) but perfectly aligns with sunrise on Halloween. The Arch itself, of course, reflects the Arch of Heaven, and the seven stars (for the seven states still to come?) of the Pleiades (from whence our [Nordic alien friends](#) arrive) shine below it ("through it") in Masonic emblems. After splitting its Cahokian energies into a Hecate-style triplicity to cross running water, Route 66 draws down the celestial power of the Arch and powers west through St. Louis -- birthplace of hot dogs and ice cream cones, among other essential sacraments of American identity -- and down into Missouri.

Southwest of St. Louis, the Mother Road runs through Hecate's hounds -- a wolf sanctuary affiliated with Washington University -- and then drives the connection home by passing the Black Madonna Shrine consecrated in Eureka, Missouri in 1938. Syncretic conspiracies can also note that the "black Madonna" is often taken to be subversive Prieuré de Sion code for Mary Magdalene, of blessed memory and occult association, or of our own Lady of Weirdness, the [Queen of Sheba](#). Further on, the highway passes Times Beach, tainted with dioxin harpy-style and thence past the mysterious and spooky Meramec Caverns. The dark ladies don't have it all their own way: in Springfield, Missouri, Route 66 runs past another "woman in white" ghost, the phantom bride of Phelps Grove Park. Before that, however, the highway has taken another hit of cosmic alignment, running past the half-scale model of Stonehenge on the campus of the University of Missouri at Rolla. Technically, Route 66 never passed the mini-megalithic monument -- it was dedicated on the summer solstice of 1984, the year the government officially tried to bury the Mother Road. (For more spookiness, the Rolla Stonehenge's trilithon ring was completed during a solar eclipse.) Passing Rolla and Springfield, Route 66 jogs the "Devil's Elbow" (the last stretch of 66 in Missouri to be buried by I-44), named for lumberjacks' frustrations with the nearby twists in the Big Piney River. Not yet content, Satanically speaking, it then runs through Joplin onto the "Devil's Promenade," a road known for spook-lights and other eerie phenomena. Mystical sparks thrown off by the Route 66 ley line, or the stigmata of telluric energies that drew Cyrus Avery (or the occult geographers whose bidding he did) to run the highway through that corner of Missouri? Does the road follow the magic, or does the magic follow the road? Next week, we'll follow both of them further west.

Coming Up In Part Two: Oklahoma City Looks Oh So Pretty, Etc.

Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



When Being a Marginal Failure is Good News

Yesterday in my current Day Job, I (and my coworker) had an utterly abysmal time bringing a task to fruition. Without going overlong into details -- the bulk of which would only serve to simultaneously depress myself and bore you, gentle reader -- I will say that there are several aspects of the trip that failed to go wrong.

The basic gist was that we were to rent a truck, go to a warehouse three hours away, get a bunch of stuff (completely uninteresting things such as records, art copies of books, and the like), and return back to our warehouse. After that, we were to go to another location about 30 minutes away, get more stuff in the truck, and return back to our warehouse.

Again, I won't go into details. But I'll note some mental math I did before I undertook the trip. I had allocated 13 hours total to the outing. Assuming three hours each way, an hour at the warehouse, and another two hours picking up the other stuff, that was a total of nine hours . . . meaning I had an extra four hours for things not to work out as they had planned.

At the end of the day, we had been gone for a total of **15** hours, and we had only completed the first half of our trip (the three-hour journey part). In other words, it took over twice as long as expected to accomplish one of our goals.

Now, the most fascinating thing about this -- and I use "fascinating" in its secondary definition meaning "involving nervous tittering that borders on tears, coupled with a handful of ibuprofen" -- is that as many things went close to going wrong as possible, *without anything actually going awry*. We almost got lost, but we weren't off the path too long. We almost ran out of fuel in the middle of nowhere, but we found a gas station at around the same time the tank was flirting with the "E" mark. We were almost kept from getting our stuff, but we finally managed to convince the right person to give us access (instead of "coming back later," as was originally proposed). We almost couldn't get in touch with the person we needed to talk to who could sort everything out, but finally after a five-step web of contacts and research we were able to reach her. And so on.

I would be hard-pressed to envision many other any other complication or obstacle that we could have encountered and still consider the operation a success.

Now, some of you might think I'm merely using my international forum to vent about what was, by most standards, an utterly abysmal day.

Oh, I'm sorry. There's supposed to be a "but" there, right?

<ahem> But, as ever, I found myself, in my depths of despair, trying to fight past the tears to think of ways to tie these experiences into gaming. It doesn't help with the pain, but at least then I can write my Kleenex off as a business expense.

Anyway, in thinking about this episode as a gaming adventure, I had to note that:

- it would be [wildly unfun](#), and
- the episodes would stretch any game's definition of "success" and "failure."

Nowadays most RPGs seem to have a concept of a degree of success. In other words, the better one rolls, the better the result. How this manifests varies from game to game. Many games -- such as the *d20 System* -- treat a basic success as being a solid, good result. If the target number is rolled, an attacker does base damage, a programmer gets the job done with no frills and on schedule, the lock is picked and the door pops open, and so on. Others -- such as *Storyteller* and *Fading Suns* -- treat a basic success as a minimal result: The program does what it has to do, but barely and without handling alternate cases or contingencies; or the lock finally manages to creak open, but the picks were damaged in the process and anyone who looks at the lock will know it's been tampered with.

However, fewer games have a concept of a degree of *failure*. Oh, okay; most games do in a broad, crowbar-on-watermelon sense, dividing them into failures ("You fail to pick the lock") and critical failures ("You fail to pick the lock, accidentally jamming it into your nostril at the same time you lick a frozen flagpole"). But otherwise, most games don't provide much guidance into *how* something fails.

To a certain degree, this makes sense. While degrees of success are easy to envision, the milieux of failure are myriad, and difficult to grasp. For example, envision a game that bases a "degree of failure" based on how much you failed the roll by, or how many successes you failed to get: The greater this degree, the more spectacular the failure. If this was the rule, then somewhat silly results are easy to envision. For example, suppose that such a system was used in *Storyteller*, and a player wanted to . . . oh, I don't know . . . jump to the moon. That would require about 24,601 successes on a Strength roll. The player rolls and gets two successes, missing the desired outcome by a mere 24,599. The GM consults the "degrees of failure" table and concludes that, based on the result, the jumper tripped, skinned his knee, burst into flames, and was carted off by mole people burrowing up from the earth. (Of the multiple times I've tried jumping to the moon in the real world, this result has only happened *twice*.)

Now, it might be tempting to say that any result of a certain failure level is merely a "failure." However, let's consider two scenarios:

- 1) Dr. Mirachel W. Orker, acclaimed physician, is trapped on a desert island, is trying to perform an emergency bypass on someone using a sharpened coconut husk and some denim thread. He achieves a middling failure -- not a critical failure, but not remotely close to success either.
- 2) I try the same operation. I have no medical training, outside of watching *Trapper John, M.D.* for a few years as a child. I hate coconut. I achieve a middling failure -- again, not a critical failure, but not remotely close to success either.

Okay; first off, the guy's a goner. But I can assure you that my failure will be more spectacular. For one thing, Dr. Orker is unlikely to be seen jumping up and down on the victim's chest, shouting at him, "Stop bleeding, you doo-doo head!"

Unfortunately, this is one of those cases where I don't have any good ideas for how to represent these degrees of failure . . . and I certainly don't have one that can apply across multiple systems. However, it might be worth trying to sort out for your preferred game system, especially if knowledge of degrees of failure would help your gaming group better describe (or envision) the action.

And I do have one idea that can be fairly easily implemented in many games. Okay, it's not *my* idea; it's one stolen from the *D6 System*: the marginal failure. In that game, if you miss a die roll by one or two (in other words, just barely fail), and there's some possibility of a degree of failure, then the person acting might have the possibility to fight back from the edge of failure. The textbook example of this is at the beginning of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (and, no, I won't call it by the [false name](#)), when Indiana Jones makes a running leap for the other side of the chasm . . . and barely misses. Rather than sending him tumbling to the abyss below -- resulting in a six-minute movie -- the GM interprets his marginal failure as getting to the other side, but only by the tip of his fingers. And now he needs to fight his way out with a bunch of other rolls.

It's a neat little rule, and one that provides a bit more variation between failure and critical failure. And the idea of *just* missing a roll is pretty easy to figure out in most systems.

Of course, be warned that getting a marginal failure on your Visit Distant Warehouse roll can result in a *really* lousy day.

--*Steven Marsh*

Special

by Paul Drye

Introduction

The Specials' time on Earth was short but spectacular. Over just a few years they exploded on the scene, came to be perceived as a threat, and then were nearly driven into extinction over the entire planet. The conflict was a stain on human history, but one most people still find justified. What is less well known is that the Specials found a bolthole, and carry on barely in touch with their home, trying to carve out a niche in a hostile universe.

Outbreak

Acute Cerebral Hyperpyretic Syndrome (ACHS) appeared in Australia in the winter of 2004-5, and swept the world over the next 18 months. It was not particularly infectious, but 90,000 people suffered from it, and the death rate was 100% as their brains overheated for unknown reasons.

By the spring of 2006, Elise Konczewski at the CDC discovered that ACHS was a prion disease affecting the microtubule proteins of the brain. Microtubules were suspected to be a site of quantum activity, and the heating was caused as the deformed microtubules tapped into zero point energy, pumping it into the surrounding tissue.

ACHS was a surprisingly odd disease but treatment was now possible. The death rate dropped precipitously, and only a few thousand more people were infected over the next few months while a vaccine was rushed into production. Then came the surprise.

Before the vaccine was widespread (but after treatment was possible) there was a short window during which someone could catch ACHS and survive. People infected by ACHS were cured in the sense that their brains no longer overheated and killed them, but some of their proteins were bent out of shape before the disease could be stopped. Microtubules had also been fingered as a possible seat for human consciousness, and this now proved to be true: the distorted tubules gave voluntary control over zero point energy. ACHS survivors displayed a wide variety of psionic powers, their nature varying depending on the extent of their injuries.

The Specials had arrived.

An Uneasy Peace

For the next four years, the Specials fascinated (and unsettled) the entire world. Elise Konczewski was the interface between them and everyone else, constantly reminding people that they were human -- and not superheroes or lab rats. A group of neuropsychologists gathered around her and did their best to understand how the Specials worked, while also trying to provide the younger ones with some semblance of a normal life.

There were mostly "younger ones." Psychic side effects or not, ACHS caused brain damage. With few exceptions, anyone over the age of 25 who caught the disease severely enough to become psionic was also reduced to insanity or coma.

Similarly, children under the age of 12 rarely ended up psionic. Their brains were still too plastic; their neural pathways would route around the damage. A few months of therapy might be needed to recover lost skills, then life returned to normal.

Most mentally normal Specials, about 750 in all, were between the ages of 12 and 25; 16 older ones stayed sane.

Another 5,000 Specials, almost entirely over 25, were mentally ill in one way or another, and confined. This was true even for ones who weren't particularly sick, and could have been stabilized with medication. It was an ominous note in an otherwise spectacular time.

Landstuhl

This situation lasted until March 11th, 2010, when an older Special reduced to a psychotic state by his bout with ACHS brainwiped every person within 1.8 kilometers of Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, Germany. Private Douglas Rouse -- still in the care of the US Army (loath to give up control of a Special in their hands) -- had been kept in Germany after coming down with ACHS while serving in Darmstadt. To this day, no-one has figured out why, or how, he did what he did.

Whatever it was that caused Private Rouse to erase the consciousness of several thousand people, the response was panic. Many people had been nervous about what the Specials could do; now that nervousness became fear. Matters got worse when the first child of two Specials was born three months later. Reserves of the ACHS prion lurked deep within the body, and children of Specials were Special themselves. Exposed to ACHS from conception, their brains didn't recover like those of older children: second-generation ACHS survivors were psionic from the moment of consciousness, usually before birth. Fortunately the ones that were telepathic could be taught restraint without language, while still in the womb; the ones who weren't had anti-psi in close proximity during the pregnancy. It sank in to the world that the Specials were not going to fade away.

Backlash

In July 2010, China declared that Specials within its borders represented "a health issue that threatened the stability of the Chinese state" and began rounding up survivors of ACHS. Other countries soon followed. In the West, Specials began dropping out of sight. Many of these were laying low as public opinion turned against them, but there were several cases of Specials being held indefinitely by the governments of the United States, Japan, France, and others after committing (or being accused of) various crimes.

Sanctuary

Elise Koscieszewski felt that fighting back against the repression could not turn out well; Special powers were all they had to counterbalance being vastly outnumbered, and they were a blunt instrument. It would be a war, and no matter which side won, things would change for the worse. As more and more governments tried to bring the Specials under their control, she and a majority of her charges moved from country to country, eventually ending up in New Zealand. They were rapidly running out of places to go, though.

Her ace in the hole was Javier Avilar, a young Spaniard who had descended into autism after his bout with ACHS. Avilar had teleportation powers, but their extent was unknown. Certainly he was the most powerful teleport known (and once had to be retrieved from Perth, Australia after starting in West Virginia), but sometimes he'd disappear entirely and could not be found until he re-appeared on his own.

At first it was assumed that he was going some isolated place on Earth where he was difficult to find, but one day he returned with a flower in his hand. It was analyzed in the hope of finding the plant's natural range and solving the mystery of Javier's destination. It turned out to be unrelated to any species on Earth. The similarity to a flower was a product of parallel evolution; it was actually an alien life form.

About a year after Landstuhl, Dr. Koscieszewski managed to penetrate Javier's autism sufficiently to ask him for a ride to his "special destination." A moment later, they were in Sanctuary. Located an unknown distance from Earth, it is a Dyson Sphere of unknown origin.

Sanctuary is a "real" Dyson Sphere, in the sense that the term was originally proposed: a horde of independently

orbiting space habitats rather than a solid sphere. Javier had somehow picked up on a "beacon" (possibly a zero-point energy source, no one knows) on one habitat, and tunes himself to it in order to make the immense jump. No one knows how he then makes it back home.

Avilar's flower and the beacon were from one particular habitat, a rotating cylinder some 10 kilometers in length and a kilometer in diameter. The environment within was remarkably Earth-like, with similar gravity, breathable air, and a compatible biosphere. Apart from the habitat's alien plants and animals, it was entirely uninhabited.

Penned into New Zealand with the Specials, and reading the writing on the wall for them, Dr. Koscieszewski hatched a desperate plan. Javier could teleport things with him; with repeated trips, he could transfer equipment and groups of Specials to his habitat. There they could build a colony. There were a number of exceptions who refused to give up the fight at home, but she secretly convinced many Specials to come with her.

Endgame, or So It Seemed

On May 5th, 2012, the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution insisting that New Zealand detain all known specials, to be turned over to the newly formed Human Safety Council (UNHUSACO). New Zealand had 15 days to comply. Specials in other countries were arrested, and brought to internment camps.

To their credit, the government of New Zealand refused, and on May 21st a combined force of American, British, French, and Chinese troops invaded. New Zealand immediately surrendered -- the last Special on their soil had left for Sanctuary six hours before.

On May 23rd, at 0700 hours local time, the largest internment camp in Europe was attacked by Specials who escaped with 114 people. At midnight local time (almost simultaneously with the European jailbreak), the largest American camp was assaulted, and 180 Specials rescued. The two attacks were later discovered to have been based out of an abandoned weather station in northern Newfoundland, from where Javier Avilar sent the two strike teams before returning them, the internees, and himself to Sanctuary. Eighteen hours later, another strike based out of Howland Island in the Pacific rescued the New Zealanders who had been arrested for aiding them in the previous few months. Increased security at all sites and defensive dispersal of potential targets has reduced the potential for rescues like this, but 60% of all sane Specials have been rescued.

The people of Sanctuary maintain contact with Earth, both to continue rescuing their kind, and to get needed supplies. Dr. Koscieszewski, the escaped New Zealanders, Javier Avilar, and dozens of others who have escaped to Sanctuary were indicted by the ICJ in the Hague for crimes against humanity.

Running a Special Campaign

The default assumption is for a Special campaign to begin shortly after the escape to Sanctuary, and explores refugee interaction with Sanctuary and an increasingly dangerous Earth. If more time is available, however, the campaign can begin at any point in the history above, depending how long a GM is prepared to invest in building up to the evacuation. Bear in mind that the more adventures that take place before Sanctuary enters the picture, the more the players are likely to be invested in Earth. This cuts both ways, making it likelier that the retreat to Sanctuary takes on interesting tragic and hopeful notes, but also increasing the chances that the players will be reluctant to cut and run when an escape presents itself. Be prepared to de-emphasize the long-term nature of the Specials' sojourn to Sanctuary if needed.

Once on Sanctuary, adventures fall into two categories:

- Continuing contact with the Earth, both for more extractions of Specials left behind, and for "grocery shopping." Smash and grab is likeliest, but setting up "Underground Railroads" for people and things is an option.
- Exploring the Dyson Sphere. Sanctuary is empty and hospitable to the newcomers, but there are numerous questions. Where are we? Where are the Builders? Are there other squatters besides ourselves, such as

aggressive alien races? How does the Sphere's alien technology work? Can we get to the other habitats and what are they like? Will we find something that will let us return to Earth permanently, or is Sanctuary home for better or for worse?

In the latter kind of adventure, keep in mind the usual statistics about Dyson Spheres. Though not a solid sphere, Sanctuary still has billions of times the surface area of Earth enclosed within its habitats. Once the Specials can get to the other habitats, anything and everything can be placed by the GM.

Characters

"Special" is intended for use with any gaming system that can model psionic powers. In general this is superhero games, even though the "four-color costumed do-gooder" quotient is very low. It can be increased as desired, but the intention is to offer a place for people who use their own names and dress normally, and just happen to be able to do odd things with their minds.

Powers

No matter what the system, there are a few points for a GM to keep in mind. In-game, psionic strength is limited by the amount of zero-point energy tapped to produce the effect, and the energy involved has to go somewhere. With sufficient control some of it can be dumped back from where it came but the conduit between zero-point space and the real world is not perfect, and it runs through someone's brain. A reprise of ACHS' main symptom -- death due to cerebral overheating -- will occur if too much energy is manipulated too quickly. GMs are advised to use this as an excuse to ban any power they deem too unbalancing, or alternatively give players the option of "pushing" their characters at the risk of brain damage or death.

That said, what powers are appropriate? Simplest to rationalize are those based on tweaks to chemistry or electromagnetic fields: telepathy in particular, and other abilities like telepresence. Precognition is problematic under the quantum mechanical rationale for powers, and is not recommended.

Next easiest is "anchoring" in the fabric of space in order to counter some of the major laws of physics. Specials can affect real world objects with the entire universe as their momentum and energy sink. Even the apparent gross violations of conservation of energy and momentum inherent in Javier Avilar's teleportations can be explained away. Super-strength and flight are also possible -- both as variations of telekinesis -- but GMs are strongly suggested to keep their power low: a few tons of capacity, or flying no faster than a run.

Most difficult of all for a Special is a power that manipulates large amounts of energy, such as pyrokinesis, or energy absorption. These depend on the raw capacity of the conduit into zero point space, either in or out, and should be supremely difficult.

Impossible are feats that can't be justified in terms of psychic abilities. It takes tortured logic to produce extra limbs or super-stretching from mental control of energy. Allow players to come up with rationalizations for their powers, but try to err on the side of realism.

Disadvantages

Specials are people too, and have the same potential disadvantages as other human beings. There are certain types of disadvantages that can be emphasized, though, because of their peculiar situation.

First of all, Specials are susceptible to mental problems. Many escaped ACHS apparently unscathed, but all suffered some damage to their brains. Varying degrees of mental illness of any type are justifiable.

Second, all Specials suffered the trauma of being punished for something they did not control -- being ill. Almost all had to deal with family or friends turning away from them, and police, military, or government actively trying to

imprison or kill them. There is also survivor's guilt: murder or imprisonment has cut the number of sane Specials by a third, and if one includes the mentally ill ones left behind, only 5% of all Specials have escaped. Players may want to investigate the psychology of refugees and trauma victims to better understand how their characters might be thinking after all this upheaval.

Backgrounds

Thanks to the breakouts from the American and European internment camps, the Specials on Sanctuary are largely European and American. There are many Specials from the industrialized nations of the Pacific Rim, though these are now imprisoned throughout Siberia and western China; Sanctuary has only a few of them, for now.

There are not many Specials from Africa, South Asia, or the Middle East, because the lack of available medical treatment in those countries kept people from surviving ACHS, even after a cure was discovered. There are exceptions, though, and some of them have remarkable stories to tell.

Opponents

The only individuals who are more than human in "Special" are the Specials themselves. This is one major reason for keeping power levels low. In rule systems that offer advancement, the characters will reach the point that there are no antagonists that can stop them without some improbably convoluted justifications. It's possible to work in a few Specials who've been turned by an Earth government, and there's always the option of putting some aliens into the mix on Sanctuary, but by and large Special characters will be up against normal people.

As such, normal people will try to level the playing field. They have numbers, and they have a vast technological society with a great communications network behind them. Every military and security analyst on Earth has been chewing on the problem of Specials for more than five years. The GM is encouraged to be as devious as possible, and to be prepared to pile on highly trained soldiers with top-of-the-line military equipment if the Specials are foolish enough to allow their opponents time to react. Books such as *Military Operations in Low Intensity Conflict* and part two of *Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Understanding the New Security Environment, Readings and Interpretations* are highly recommended for a GM lacking in inspiration as to how regular people could hinder Specials.

Adapting to Specific Rule Systems

GURPS: Use powers from *GURPS Psionics*, basing characters on 150 points (with 50 points in skills and 100 points in powers). Mixing with *GURPS Supers* is possible, but beware of powers that are too powerful or overtly break the laws of physics. Also beware of *justifications* for powers that are anything but "psionic."

If the GM decides to drop in an alien race or three, there are numerous options in *GURPS Traveller: Alien Races 4*, or for creative use of some of the "races" found in the various horror supplements. *GURPS: Aliens* is geared towards space opera and doesn't mesh easily, but the Memer and Serat, Markann, or a variation on the Traders would work.

GURPS: Special Ops is also handy for modeling the cutting-edge soldiers Earth's security forces will develop to deal with Specials.

Champions: Most characters should use the Mentalist template, though there are excuses for low-powered Bricks and Energy Projectors. A Low-Powered Campaign (150 base points and a maximum of 100 points of disadvantages) is recommended, and there is room to lower this even more.

Silver Age Sentinels: Use the game's definition of a Low-Powered Game for character creation, with sanction for increasing STR or INT past 24 if a reasonable justification can be provided. Some characters will be Psychic class, but players should be allowed to use the more flexible Adventurer class if they wish -- so long as they are using the Psychic *archetype* (see page 155 of the *Silver Age Sentinels d20* book).

As a fairly standard *d20 System* game, there's a wide variety of "modern" supplements that will be useful, notably *d20 Modern* itself. Aliens and alien technology can be culled from a variety of different games based on the system, and not just the science fiction ones. The author's "Special" campaign used *Call of Cthulhu d20's* Fungi From Yuggoth (with the serial numbers filed off) as the major non-humans of the Sanctuary Dyson Sphere.

Mutants and Masterminds: Begin characters at Power Level 5, and be careful when handing out Power Points. In particular, consider the "Other Rewards" on page 151 of the Core Book as options to keep advancement low.

As a heavily modified *d20 System*, it's more difficult to slide in elements from other books. As of this writing there are no supplements from *Mutants & Masterminds* publisher Green Ronin that would be particularly useful when implementing a "Special" campaign.

Iron Ref: Time Travel

Proxymate Causes

by Greg Porter

The cell phone rang while I was tending bar at Past Presence. The 'special' phone. It hadn't rang for two years.

It was the Pushers again.

I hadn't missed them. My leg still aches in the winter. I tell myself that the 6 mil I won in the lottery more than makes up for it.

*Pushing **anything** back in time required more energy than most 21st century cities consumed. And that was for little things like electrons and photons. Anything more than micrograms of matter was out of the question. But information was easy.*

So they said.

I smiled, and imagined the lights of some future New York City dimming every time the phone beeped.

I let it beep five times before answering . . .

Background information

It's the early 21st century. You're a child of the late 20th, no one special as far you could tell. To the Pushers, you're a 'cipher', which is a nice way of saying that you would have made no measureable difference in the course of history. Not only that, but you died young, *and* died in a way that was precisely recorded in a way that made it into the Pusher's records. By means of a tiny, precisely targeted pulse of energy from the future, you were made to flinch, duck or hesitate, and it saved your life. *Actually, their aim wasn't that good, and they were unsuccessful at saving hundreds of history's other red-headed stepchildren before they finally got lucky with you.* Once you had been pulled from the normal flow of history, the Pushers managed to get information to you on how to win the lottery, and with the winnings, pay for the construction of devices to intercept their broadcasts and forward them to your special 'phone'.

Once communication was established, you and several other ciphers did a job for the Pushers. *Not all of you survived.* The survivors each got winning lottery numbers. Multimillion jackpot numbers. *We may be in touch again,* they said.

Mission

The Pushers do not operate from *a* possible future. They operate from the *only* possible future. The character's actions will rewrite this future, but only within the extent of their mission parameters. As a result, the Pushers don't want to make changes to the past unless their present is so awful that *any* change would be for the better. This is the case, *again.*

The Pushers are engaged in temporal war with the Preservers, a fanatic but less temporally capable group. The Preservers feel that adversity, ruin and rebuilding are necessary for the evolution of humanity, and the situation the characters averted last time has thwarted that destiny. For the past two years, the Preservers have been setting up their own network of agents. These agents were responsible for smuggling a viral plague out of Africa, and spreading it via international air hubs. Immediate casualties were only in the millions, but it remained a pervasive AIDS-like bogeyman for several decades, until it mutated into a highly contagious form. The resulting chaos and billions of

casualties stripped civilization's whirring gears and left it firing on a fraction of its cylinders. The Pushers (or what is left of them) are desperate to alter this past at its earliest possible point.

The characters need to intercept Patient Zero and stop the release of the virus, or at worst, contain its spread.

All of the necessary information will have been burstcast into the character's phones, and can be downloaded to computers for easier viewing. The character closest to the best international airport will be where the other characters initially fly to. They only have a total of two days to prepare, get where they are going *and* get it done, so time is of the essence. If there is any special gear characters need, they either have to own it now, or do without. On the bright side, the characters are all multimillionaires, which means most "normal" adventuring gear is already in their private stash. A few vital pieces of gear are probably leftovers from their last adventure, and whoever has these items will be instructed to bring them. Among them are magnetic card programmers, and short-range jammers disguised as (functioning) electronic voice recorders. The latter item will fuzz most video cameras within several meters, or degrade the picture enough to ruin fine detail. Some things you *don't* want recorded for the future.

The first part of the mission is easy, but if someone gets careless, it can come back and bite them later, or even sabotage the main mission.

The Preservers don't have just one proxy in the past. Like the Pushers, they have several. The records of the future are only sparse regarding one of them. The rest can be traced. Even if they were ciphers like the characters, they still left minor footprints in time.

The first job of the characters is to phone in some anonymous terrorist threats or tips. They have names, flight numbers, and in some cases, passport information or photos. A few are also insiders at the airports, people with access to restricted areas, but only their names are available.

Threats or tips have to be credible enough to be real, and made to someone who can respond with speed and authority. This is easier said than done, since all of the Preserver agents originate *outside* of United States territory, and picking them up when they get here would be far too late.

Let the players stew on that. Casually mention that all US landlines are hooked to the 911 system and police can bypass caller ID blocks. Even unregistered cell phones can be tracked down to the nearest repeater, which in a city might be to within a block or two. And doesn't the NSA's unacknowledged Echelon system do location and voice analysis of *all* phone traffic and electronic communications? If Echelon can eavesdrop on terrorist cell phones halfway around the world, how hard would it be to track down one very important call, if they had a enough incentive to do so?

Maybe they can, maybe they can't. *But the players don't know.* This will chew up some of their irreplaceable time. If they're smart, some of them will be brainstorming a way to get authorities on the tail of the Preserver agents, while others try to acquire any last-second goods and book some overseas flights.

The last lead is the one the Pushers can't reliably tag. They call him Patient Zero. He is male, of Asian descent, of medium build and height. They have no name or picture. Either the information was lost to history, or he ditched all forms of ID before he was incapacitated by the disease. He arrived at a certain gate at Cairo International Airport in a three hour window (which covered several flights) and as far as they can tell, he never left.

The characters have a few edges. First, they have complete floor plans for Cairo International, including utility areas. Anyone who thinks to download this to a laptop and study it during the overseas flight will get a bonus for trying to find their way around. Second, the Pushers have a handful of codes for the magnetic stripe readers on airport security doors. There is no guarantee a *particular* code will work with a *specific* door, but the best of the codes has about a 50% chance on any door but those for the security offices. If the first code doesn't work, each other code is half the previous code's chance. Some credit cards can be re-magnetized as ersatz passcards before characters leave the USA. The last edge is the Pushers themselves. They can, with an error of several meters and several seconds, 'push' a sub-microgram quantity of positrons into the past. When and where this antimatter intersects our timeframe is not very precise, but the effects are like several kilograms of TNT going off (plus a nice burst of radiation). If a character uses

their special phone to leave 'voice mail for the future' and gives a precise enough location on the airport floor plan (another reason to study it), roll 1d6 three times. The first roll is how many seconds it will take for the effect to happen. The second roll is the direction of the scatter on a hex map, and the third is the scatter distance. Reroll distance results of '6' and add to the original distance error. The Pushers have positron reserves to pull this stunt off three times.

Now the bad stuff. Unless characters have exceptional streetwise talent, weapons are out of the question. And even if they could find some in Cairo, getting them back into the airport could be a problem. Even more so than normal, since if the characters successfully made their 'terrorist threats', there will be heightened worldwide alert levels.

Assume each character has a 1 in 6 chance of getting a pat-down search or pulled out of line for a search of carry-on luggage and personal possessions. Anything more dangerous than nail clippers gets them pulled from the adventure. They won't get released from security in time to get to Cairo before it's all over. Oh, and any nail clippers *will* be confiscated. Checked luggage will be screened for guns and explosives, and has a 1 in 6 chance of being hand-searched. Again, serious contraband means the character will get an unwelcome reception when they get off the plane in Cairo.

Last, characters will be seven or more hours jet-lagged, which may be good for minimal penalties on anything involving quick thinking.

Complications

Patient Zero isn't alone. *And he isn't Patient Zero.* The *real* Patient Zero is his anonymous accomplice in the luggage handling area (off-limits to airline patrons). The 'medical supplies' and equipment shipped by Patient Zero are actually viral cultures and a device that the agent in the luggage area is going to attach to the luggage handling machinery. This battery-powered pump will be labeled 'sterilizer spray' in English, and will randomly whir and pump out a mist that settles onto the main baggage conveyor. The Pushers simply *assumed* that their Patient Zero spread the virus through contact with numerous people at the airport, and that in the close confines of their outgoing flights, many of these people spread it through further contact. *In reality, they didn't catch the virus until they landed and picked up their luggage . . .*

Furthermore, the accomplice has over a period of months, smuggled in a pair of pistols, and by the time the characters encounter Patient Zero, each of them will have one. Patient Zero catches the virus from the luggage handler, who got some of the culture on his clothing, and then onto the smuggled pistol.

Doing it

Characters have to stake out the gate area where Patient Zero is supposed to show up, and identify him from all the possible candidates, so they may have to split up. Any potential Zero who is connecting to another flight probably isn't their man. Smart characters will remember that some of the other Preserver agents were airport insiders, and may go behind the scenes to snoop around. They will make the annoying discovery that the multilingual signage in the passenger areas does not extend to the service areas, whose signs are only in Arabic, and might as well be in hieroglyphs as far as most characters are concerned.

If confronted or shadowed in the terminal area, Patient Zero is at least as skilled as the characters, and may set up his own ambush in a restroom, report the characters to Security as doing something 'suspicious' and otherwise try to make their lives miserable while staying anonymous. However, he is not afraid to go out guns blazing if he thinks it will help his accomplice. The airport accomplice is not as skilled. It will take him a while after Patient Zero arrives to get the sprayer from Zero's luggage and get it to the best spot in the terminal. He will tend to panic if he feels in jeopardy. If the pump is in place, he will try to lead characters away from it, attempting to lose them in the angrily chirring maze of rollers, gears and conveyors. If not, he'll turn it on and toss it onto the nearest conveyor, and then either run or try to shoot the characters with his pistol.

Any sort of gunfire will bring submachinegun-toting guards in short order. They will tend to think they have exclusive authority for that sort of thing, and will open fire on anyone else with firearms.

Success?

From the Pusher viewpoint, there is no lag between the character's actions and the results. The Pushers cannot watch events unfold from the future. They can simply look at their current situation and make a judgement as to whether it is the situation they want. If it isn't, they can make contact with the characters and tell them that they've failed, or more likely, the characters will report in with "success!" and get the reply "wrong!". If they take out Patient Zero and the future is still a disaster, some quick thinking is in order. While the airport luggage handling machinery is contaminated (as well as several airport staff), no outgoing flights have landed yet, and there is still time to stop further contamination. But the characters have to figure out what is going on, stop it, and hopefully cover their butts at the same time.

Bad Case -- Characters stop Patient Zero, but the virus gets spread through infected luggage. The outbreak still happens, but lessened by stopping the other Preserver cells. *Is it enough to prevent the eventual mutation of the virus?* Characters who have contact with Patient Zero or the accomplice might be infected, and should probably come up with a story that will get them quarantined and dosed with anti-virals. Failure could be fatal, and the future won't miss them.

Good Case -- Characters stop Patient Zero, neutralize the accomplice, get the airport shut down and have all outgoing flights quarantined on landing (or better yet, returned to Cairo or diverted to isolated military airfields). And manage to stay reasonably anonymous by jamming video surveillance of their actions and having a plausible enough story to avoid getting charged with anything, though it would be a miracle if they manage to avoid being detained for a while.

*The Pushers, or 'my' Pusher, once said there were factions and policy disagreements in his organization. Some wanted ciphers to **stay** ciphers. Too much money, too much knowledge, could be dangerous to the future. He didn't say why he was telling me that. He didn't need to.*

*Six months later. The phone rang. **That** phone. I stopped at the corner to answer it. Dial tone. I never saw the car that ran the stoplight and slammed into four people crossing the street. Where **I** would have been if I hadn't answered the phone.*

Someone out there still likes me . . .

Pyramid Review

Cold, Hard World: The Real World Sourcebook (for *Dead Inside*)

Published by [Atomic Sock Monkey Press](#)

Written by Chad Underkoffler

Interior art by Chris Cooper, Scott Kane, & Chad Underkoffler

74-page PDF (2.6 MB download) from [RPGnow](#)

Chad Underkoffler wastes no time in returning to his praiseworthy *Dead Inside* game, providing extended coverage of the Real World and its role in a game "of loss and redemption." In *Dead Inside*, the author (rightly) spent the majority of his time developing the Spirit World. Playtesters encouraged the further development of the Real World, with an eye to extended storytelling and even Real-World campaigns. This led to a natural shift in tone for the Real World sourcebook. Underkoffler writes that "If the underlying concept of the core . . . book was 'grow,' the keyword of *Cold, Hard World* is 'conflict.'" Let's follow that theme through the book and see where it leads.

It's not as though the Spirit World is the only place to find the Dead Inside, Sensitives, Magi, or the other character types in the game. But the Real World is a . . . well, a cold and hard place, a place unwelcoming to spirit forces but not immune. The Real World is also populated by vast numbers of the peculiar and mostly soul-blind Average People. Part one of the book consolidates information on the Real World from the core rulebook, extends this to give the Real World a more fully realized role in the *Dead Inside* cosmology, and describes Average People and how they perceive the supernatural (if they notice it at all.) The chapter closes with the rules changes needed for exercising supernatural power in the Real World -- a difficult proposition even for the highly ranked being.

While this book focuses on the Real World, it isn't actually the Real World. So, chapter two gives us some new definitions of what's real and what's not in the Real World. The chapter focuses specifically on Places and Times of Power, those special locales and events where supernatural forces may be more easily expressed. Several specific places and events are sketched, along with more generic classes of locale and activity. Another section gives brief but thorough explorations of assorted social groups (human, supernatural, and in-between) which may play important parts in the player characters' lives. With all that backstory in place, the chapter then presents notable non-player characters, drawing together places, events and groups with unique personalities. The chapter closes with example "Things of Power," an assortment of the rare Enchanted Objects which actually work in the Real World.

The third chapter presents an assortment of campaign and adventure seeds, none fully elaborated but each amply clear for inclusion into one's own game. Each includes a situation set-up, a list of characters who might be involved, another list of possible scenes to be played, and a list of plot twists to keep life interesting. New random tables are provided to help the GM who takes inspiration from dice rolling. The fourth and final chapter explores major revisions to the *Dead Inside* cosmology, and how the game might be revised to include favorite fictional tropes or to alter the essential premises of the game worlds. Four overhauls are sketched, from one in which the Real World is preferable to the Spirit World, to another where one does not enter the Spirit World bodily, to another where the walls between Spirit World and Real World are blurred or removed entirely.

The Prose Descriptive Qualities rules engine really shows its strength in *Cold, Hard World*, allowing the author to press through his exposition while seamlessly integrating the necessary game data without distraction. The writing itself is easily up to the benchmark Underkoffler set himself with *Dead Inside*. Fans of Chad's work will find the usual assortment of Easter eggs and cultural sleight-of-hand: a vengeance-driven hero of the night, a scenario plot driven by the need to possess the "Maltese Amulet" and many more.

Previous reviews complained about the relative dearth of art in *Dead Inside*. *Cold, Hard World* improves in this score over the core book, but this is the consequence of being able to rely more on photo-illustrations of our real world, rather than artists' renderings from Spirit World. Underkoffler continues to break up the text further with interesting quotes from luminaries ranging from Samuel Beckett to Baron Munchausen. The layout, as before, is clean, clear, basic, and entirely appropriate for a book distributed by download. Another point which I cherish is its brevity. The author says what needs saying and moves on; he completes the entire lecture in 68 pages of text. This is a refreshing turn in an age where content tends to be driven by economy of print scale and targets of page numbers designed to serve the printing process rather than the topic.

One change from the core book which I sorely regretted was the absence of fiction vignettes to help illuminate the atmosphere and themes of the game. In *Dead Inside* they were a tremendous aid to comprehension. Perhaps it was thought that since the real world was so familiar, no such exposition was needed. Well, it may not have been needed, but it surely would have been welcome.

We return now to the game's espoused theme of "conflict." And the author was entirely correct. With the struggle to use one's spiritual powers in an unforgiving and distant world, with the people and groups vying for influence, control over places or events or each other, *Cold, Hard World* is definitely a place of beings locked in struggles of every sort. That's sort of like our real world, isn't it? But the real test for this book is: Does it add the desired layer of reality without sacrificing the sense of wonder and optimism which suffused *Dead Inside*? After all, it's supposed to be a game of redemption. On the other hand, no one said redemption would be easy. At bottom, this *Cold, Hard World* isn't half as cold or hard as it pretends, if you know where and how to look for the mystery. It's nice to have a directory like this and a guide like Chad Underkoffler around to show the way.

--*Bob Portnell*

Iron Ref: Western

The Treasure of the Golden Hills

By Aaron Rosenberg

This adventure is set in the northern hills of western Montana. They are known as the Golden Hills, though they are actually dirt-brown and occasionally scrub-green. Apparently, long ago, the area had another name, which meant something like "hills of gold," and the title stuck.

The small town of Hope nestles at the base of the southernmost hill. Hope, Montana is a typical cow town, with only one saloon, one real hotel (though several establishments have rooms for rent above their shops), and several stables and cattleyards. Hope's only real claim to fame is its proximity to the Golden Hills -- and to the treasure that lies buried among them.

Because, so the stories say, the Incans once lived among the Golden Hills. They built a magnificent temple here. When their civilization fell, the temple was abandoned, with all its treasures left behind. And the treasure remains hidden to this day.

Not that people don't look for it. But night comes early in Montana, and the Golden Hills get cold at night. Wolves and bears and other animals live among the Hills, and many of them will prey upon hapless travelers. It's not a safe place to go after dark, and even during the day it's best if you're well-armed and in a group. Even that isn't always enough to protect you -- especially if the Hill Demon finds you.

For years, residents of Hope have frightened their children with tales of the Hill Demon. "Teeth like axe blades," they whisper, "and eyes like fire, and claws bigger'n a Bowie knife 'n twice as sharp." Every strange sound, every odd sight, every disappearance in the Hills was the work of the Hill Demon. And the Demon's become more restless in recent years. People've heard it gnashing its teeth and scraping its claws, and grown men've run from the sound. The Hill Demon rules the Golden Hills, and the man who forgets that rarely lives long enough to regret it.

Starting the Adventure:

The characters can be residents of Hope or visitors. Residents are most likely cowpokes who work for the Tanner ranch, though they can work at one of the other establishments. Most of the people who pass through Hope are there either to sell cattle or to hunt for treasure -- or both. Often a cowboy will ride in with a herd and then, while waiting for the return trip, he'll wander into the hills to do a little treasure-hunting. Not all of them come back.

Either way, the characters have heard stories of the lost treasure. Not everyone believes the tales, of course. Some say they're just local legends, or lies designed to make Hope more interesting. But many do believe them. And, if the stories are true, that treasure is just too much to pass up.

The player-characters can be young or older, though they should not be children nor should they be infirm. No player-character will have much reputation or fortune. It's best if each player-character knows at least one other member of the group.

Important Men About Town:

The town of Hope has four major figures:

Hank Tanner: Mister Tanner is the owner and operator of the Tanner Ranch, the largest cattle ranch in western

Montana. Tanner is well-known throughout the state. He's a tough man, but fair, and he doesn't tolerate slacking, cheating, or lying. His cattle go for top-dollar, and they're worth every penny. Tanner himself is a tall, broad-shouldered man with close-cropped iron-gray hair and a thick handlebar mustache. He walks with a slight limp, and carries a wooden cane with a silver oxhead handle. His word is his bond, and few dare to cross him, though in business he doesn't object to haggling and actually respects a shrewd bargainer.

Sheriff Sean McCoy: Sheriff McCoy is the only law in Hope, though Tanner's word carries more weight. McCoy is a heavyset man, average height, with graying red hair and weather-beaten skin. He came to Hope decades ago and has never left. McCoy is also a fair man, and he and Tanner get along. Tanner leaves enforcing the law to McCoy, and everyone knows that crossing the sheriff means crossing Tanner as well. Consequently, McCoy has an easy job. He stops the village kids from playing pranks, prevents cowboys from driving herds through town (the cattle are taken around to the cattleyards), and puts together posses to go after any man foolish enough to try stealing cattle. But most of McCoy's time is spent corralling drunks at the saloon and breaking up the occasional fistfight.

Rodney "Blaze" Tanner: Blaze is Hank Tanner's son and heir, but everyone in town knows the real story. And anyone who sees Tanner and his small, blond wife knows that the red-haired Blaze is not their flesh-and-blood. Seventeen years ago, a young man stumbled into Hope with his wife and their one-year-old son. They were hungry and poor, and the townspeople took pity on them and gave the family food and shelter. Hank Tanner had noted their arrival, and went to see them. He and his wife had tried for years to have children, but couldn't succeed. So he offered to adopt this couple's boy. And, seeing how wealthy the Tanners were, and how much they wanted a child, the couple agreed. The Tanners got the boy, and the young couple got jobs and enough money to buy a small house. Over the years, they had several more children. The wife became the cook at the hotel. The husband became the town's deputy, and then its sheriff. But the McCoy's never forgot their first son, and never stopped feeling guilty for giving him up. Unfortunately, Blaze Tanner realized that early on, and learned how to use that guilt to his own ends. Young Blaze is the town bully -- as a strapping young man, he can take most men in a fight. He's good with a gun as well, as some luckless cowpokes have learned. And even when Blaze gets in trouble, his adopted father's money and his birth-father's badge can get him out again. Blaze likes to swagger around, insulting strangers, stealing their drinks and their women, until finally they lose their tempers. Then he beats them up or shoots them, or both, and if somehow they win his two fathers cover it up for him. It is sad that Tanner and McCoy, two honorable men, have committed dishonorable deeds for their son, but both men cannot think straight where Blaze is concerned, and he plays upon their weakness.

Professor Anthony Michaels: Known as "Perfesser Mike," this strange fellow is as unusual as he is useful. Mike first arrived in Hope ten years ago, and immediately found work as an itinerant blacksmith. Business was so good that he bought some land at the edge of town and set up a permanent shop. But Mike is more than a mere blacksmith. He is an inventor, and he is always working on some new device. Banging and rattling and sawing sounds can be heard from his workshop at all hours. A short, slight man, Mike seems to quiver with repressed energy, and his dark hair sticks out in all directions as if it couldn't contain his enthusiasm. His hands are always smudged and stained, and most of his clothes have holes in them. Although Mike is odd, he is respected by the townsfolk, and accepted as one of their own. He has never broken any laws, and gets along with both McCoy and Tanner -- both give him their business, and the rest of the town follows suit. And as for his inventions -- well, most of them are harmless.

Our Story Begins:

One morning a cowpoke stumbles back into town. His cloths are torn to shreds, and he is bleeding from a dozen slashes to arms, legs, torso, and face. His empty pistol hangs from his hand, and his eyes are wide with fright. People rush to help him. As his wounds are bandaged, the cowpoke begins speaking, softly, haltingly, so low that people have to lean in closely to catch his words:

"Stone . . . carving . . . can't read . . . treasure . . ."

That's all he says before passing out. But it's enough to send people into a fever-pitch of excitement, particularly that last word. Treasure! Could he have found the lost treasure of the Golden Hills? And only the Hill Demon could have carved him up so badly. Is the Demon guarding the treasure?

Blaze Tanner has heard about the treasure his whole life, and he wants it -- just because he wants to be the one who gets it. He'll happily bully or beat on anyone to get information, or to keep them from getting there first.

The treasure fascinates Mike, plus it could fund the rest of his experiments. He proudly tells the townsfolk that night that he's almost finished his Amazing Treasure Locator, and once it's done he'll be able to find the treasure in no time. This sends Blaze swaggering toward him, threatening that no one had better get to the treasure before he does, but McCoy calms him down.

Although the cowpoke is unconscious in a room at the hotel, he can still provide information. If the characters ask around, they learn that his name is Teddy Graham, and that he arrived two days ago. Which means he couldn't have gone more than two days from Hope itself!

Team Spirit:

The next morning, cowpokes and townsfolk alike prepare to search for treasure. Blaze has gathered several friends, all young toughs, and they're busy threatening everyone else to stay away. Mike has returned to his workshop, announcing that his device should be ready soon. Several of the men Graham rode in with have formed their own group, and say that if they find anything they'll split it with him.

Obviously, it would be ideal if the player-characters decided to form a group of their own. And, since each of them knows at least one other member of the group, this should be possible -- two of them who know each other start talking about it, each one brings in someone else they know, and so on. But perhaps the player-characters decide that this is all a wild-goose chase and they want no part of it. That's fine for now.

The Tablet:

It's only a few hours past noon when one of the townsfolk comes running back into town, giddy with excitement. They've found something! That sends even the most disillusioned running after him, back into the hills. They catch up to him at the top of one of the outer hills. And before them, set into the ground, is a square tablet. It is some sort of stone (marble, though most of the people here won't recognize that), and has been crafted -- its sides are smooth and even, its top perfectly level. And neat rows of symbols have been carved across the top. No one has ever seen a tablet like this before, and nothing in the region's history mentions it. But it is obviously old, and so most people assume it must be tied to the treasure somehow. But how? And, if those symbols are writing, what do they say?

The Secret of the Tablet:

The tablet was placed there by the Incans who once lived in these hills, and the carvings on its surface are in their long-lost language. The carving says "look upon the radiance of the sun, for its rays shall lead you to righteousness." The important thing about the tablet isn't its words but its placement. If you stand facing it at sunset, the sun's rays peek over the hilltops. Then the sun slides lower, and most of its light is blocked out -- except for a single ray, which slides through a notch carved into the hills. That ray creates a straight line directly to one of the other hills -- and, more specifically, to a spot at its base. This is the entrance to the lost Incan temple, and to the missing treasure.

The Secret of the Golden Hills:

The original name of the hills was not "hills of gold" but "mounds of gold." The Incans did built a fabulous city here, with many of their famed stepped pyramids. When they fled, the buildings were left vacant. Over the years, rain and wind deposited dirt and water upon the buildings, slowly coating them. The structures disappeared beneath soil and later even grass, but retained their overall shape. The Golden Hills are the lost Incan City. And the hill whose base is lit by the sun at sunset is the missing temple.

The Secret of the Hill Demon:

Professor Mike is a brilliant inventor. Crazy but brilliant. His Treasure Locator doesn't work, and never well, but many of his inventions do -- and sometimes they work too well. Shortly after settling in Hope, Mike decided to build a device to find the treasure. He reasoned that he'd need something to hunt for it, so he patterned his device after a natural hunter -- the wolf. He even used a dying wolf for the frame, and in true mad-scientist fashion he linked the wolf's brain to his machines. The result was a whirring, clanking mass of gears and cylinders that resembles a flayed wolf with razor blades sprouting from every angle. When Mike turned the device on, it bounded away into the Hills. He has never been able to catch it since. This is the Hill Demon. It still has the mind of a wolf, and wants to hunt, but has trouble controlling its metal limbs. The Hill Demon has actually been responsible for several deaths, and for injuring Graham, but it can hardly be blamed. It is, after all, a wild animal, and for the last ten years it has been in constant pain.

Possible Endings:

How you choose to end this adventure is up to you. Perhaps Blaze will threaten the characters, and go so far that even his fathers cannot protect him. Perhaps Professor Mike will find a way to capture and deactivate the Hill Demon, and can help the player-characters explore the temple. Perhaps the Incans took their gold after all, and left nothing behind but some loose jewelry and a few clay pots. Whether the characters get the treasure is less important than how they handle themselves. Defeating the town bully is a satisfying story in and of itself, and the treasure may simply be a backdrop. Or perhaps the characters find themselves in the roles of peacekeepers, as everyone else goes gold-crazy and the sheriff is overwhelmed. Or the gold may become secondary as the town decides that the Hill Demon has become too much of a threat and has to be hunted down for good. Ultimately, as long as the players have fun, your story will be a success.

Iron Ref: Fantasy

The Key

by Owen K.C. Stephens

The Key is a fantasy adventure designed for experienced heroes who believe in doing the right thing. The adventure is fairly straightforward, but its background and possible complications can generate numerous other adventures.

Our Cast of Characters

Aria Hauge: Half-elf daughter of Rowan and Elspeth Shay, step-daughter of Sedrick Hauge, since Elspeth married him. Aria is a young woman with flame-red hair, bright green eyes, and a tattoo in strange handwriting on her (always concealed) back. She doesn't know her true father isn't Sedrick.

Elspeth Hauge: Elven wife of Sedrick Hauge. Has a daughter, Aria, by her first husband Rowan Shay. A tall, wispy woman who, since her true love Rowan died, has been concerned only for her daughter's well-being. A scholar of great knowledge and skill, but not a spellcaster.

Rowan Shay: A human artificer with flame-red hair and bright green eyes, Aria's true father. Not a spellcaster, but a crafter of magical artifacts and machines. Well loved by the community. Sadly, dead.

Sedrick Hauge: A powerful human wizard lord. Known as a tough but fair man, but secretly willing to do anything to gain power. A grim man with thick, black hair, gray eyes, and thick features.

Adventure Background

Sedrick Hauge is a powerful wizard and minor noble of a border barony. He does a good job of protecting the border and providing for his people, and thus is left alone by his liege. Hauge has carefully nurtured his reputation as a strict but fair ruler, though, in truth, it's not at all accurate. Hauge is a power-hungry sadist, willing to do nearly anything to increase his arcane powers. He is also, however, an intelligent realist. Hauge knows that if his dark side is revealed, someone will come to depose him. He hides his less savory studies and works to keep his lands reasonably peaceful and quiet.

Among the learned men in Hauge's lands was the artificer Rowan Shay, who stumbled onto a new way to open gateways to the outer realms beyond the mortal coil. Rowan designed a machine of enchanted cylinders and clockworks that created an Eldritch Gateway to various planes of heaven, hell, and limbo. He built a few small scale models that produced tiny gates allowing numerous imps and spirits through. Frightened by the results, and unable to control the summoned creatures, Rowan destroyed all his models, keeping only one set of notes regarding their construction.

Hauge, hearing of Rowan's work, befriended the artificer and encouraged him learn how to control the gateways, lest some evil wizard discover a similar method and use it to wreak destruction. Moved by a feeling of responsibility, Rowan sought to design a key that would lock away access to the undesired realms reached by the gates. He shared much of his research with Hauge, who, over time, insinuated himself into the Shay family, and eventually became a trusted friend and ally.

Finally, Rowan discovered his key. He could modify the Gateway so it would link only to desired realms. Though this secret was too powerful and dangerous to use, he could not, in good conscience, destroy knowledge that might save his homeland some day. Rowan built a device that etched the secret lore onto his own soul in a language only he could

read. Upon his death, the lore would become an independent spirit and, powered by Rowan's own ghost, seek an innocent soul to attach itself to (becoming legible only to its new host). In this way, Rowan hoped to ensure the secret would never be lost, and never fall into the hands of the greedy or heartless.

Rowan informed Hauge that he had finished, and secreted, the last piece of a safe, working Eldritch Gateway, but the secret was too dangerous to share with the wizard. Though he hid it, Hauge was enraged. He used magics to search for Rowan's secret, but couldn't find it. He eventually decided he needed direct, personal access to Rowan's workshop, something that couldn't be arranged without Rowan raising a stink. Thus, Hauge used his contacts and spells to ruin Rowan financially. When Rowan had a daughter, Hauge managed to have her infected with a rare disease that required an expensive cure. Once Rowan sank ruinously into debt, Hauge had him killed.

This left Elspeth with no resources (not even the money to send to her far-off elven relatives for aid), a sick daughter, and massive debts. Hauge swooped in and offered to marry her. While Elspeth didn't love Hauge, she knew he could care for her and, more importantly, her infant daughter Aria. She agreed, but on the condition she would have sole authority over her daughter. Uninterested in Aria, Hauge agreed. Upon marrying Elspeth he moved all of Rowan's notes and works into his tower, and began construction of the Eldritch Gate. Though he did not immediately find the missing lore that would allow him to control what came through the gate, Hauge was sure it would turn up eventually. Rowan had said the lore was safe, and Hauge believed him.

What Hauge didn't realize was that the lore was etched onto Aria's back, the girl having received it upon her father's death (who is more innocent than a child?). Elspeth knew about the mark, but not exactly what it meant. She kept it a secret from Hauge, at first just out of instinct, and later out of fear he might take her daughter away to experiment on. Her relationship with Hauge never become more than a relationship of convenience, and he spent little time with either her or Aria. Elspeth tried to convince Hauge to treat Aria as his own daughter, hoping the girl, at least, could have a father figure, but that relationship was stillborn as well.

Years passed, and Hauge constructed the uncontrolled Gateway. He became convinced Elspeth knew Rowan's secret, and put her in his dungeon until she revealed it. At this, Aria fled his tower, hoping to find someone to help her mother. Hauge had cultivated the belief that Aria was mad as a result of her (well known) childhood illness, so no aid was forthcoming. Still, he scryed upon her so she could be eliminated as a potential threat -- and found she had the lore he sought! Hauge immediately sent agents out to find her, and offered a massive reward for her return.

Meanwhile, the Eldritch Gateway began to hum . . .

The Adventure Begins

As the heroes are resting at a roadside inn, a young girl with flame-red hair bursts in, obviously exhausted and panicked. The innkeeper and several patrons leap up and yell for her to stop, and move to apprehend her. The girl, Aria, tries to evade them while yelling that "they're almost here." The patrons explain the girl is obviously Aria Hauge, the mad, runaway daughter of the local lord Sedrick Hauge and a large reward is offered for her return. Aria, for her part, doesn't deny this but says it's not important right now -- horrible creatures are chasing her and they will surely attack the inn when they arrive.

In the middle of these explanations, the inn is attacked by undead -- dozens of them. The creatures are emaciated, foul, gibbering corpses that attack with claw and fist. They swarm through the door, jump through the windows, and even slide down the chimney. The undead attack everything alive, and when they manage to bring down a foe, they tear free enough of its clothing to search its back. Unless an undead gets hold of Aria it always abandons its target once it sees its back. An undead that sees Aria (or any other woman with red hair, if the GM wishes to add one), goes for her immediately.

Use undead of a power level well below that of the heroes, such that even with a lot of them the heroes have no trouble defeating them. The challenge here isn't to fight off the undead -- it's to prevent too many inn patrons from getting hurt or killed during the attack and to prevent Aria from being kidnaped. If the heroes aren't the sort to stop at an inn, this scene can be moved anywhere there are innocent bystanders. A bazaar, caravan camp, or even city street all work.

Once the fight is over, Aria assures the heroes that she's not mad, and that her father has imprisoned her mother. She doesn't know why, only that he has become increasingly distant in recent years, and claimed her mother was keeping secrets. The patrons want to claim Aria and return her for the reward, but can be convinced she's dangerous to have around (since the creatures were clearly looking for her).

If pressed about her back, Aria confesses it is marked with letters, and is willing to reveal them. No one can read the inscription but Aria (and even she needs a mirror), but the girl can describe what is written. It is a series of instructions on how to tune "planar rods" to introduce an element of control, but does not explain what a planar rod is, or why this is desirable. Aria doesn't volunteer any of this information if not asked.

The Plot Thickens

Hopefully, the heroes will wish to return help Aria recover her mother, or at least investigate. As long as they have Aria, new creatures (sent by Hauge) seek to recover her every few days. Additionally, if the heroes stay in or near Hauge's lands, they begin to hear of (and encounter) strange creatures from other realms (demons, fiends, and elemental creatures). The people blame Elspeth for the creatures, claiming she's an elven witch cursing the land for her first husband's death. In truth, things are coming out of the Eldritch Gateway, and Hauge can't stop them. So far he's kept their origins quite, but can't do so for much longer. He's so busy he isn't seen outside the tower much, and the rumor begins that Elspeth has imprisoned him.

Clearly whatever is going on is happening at Hauge's tower.

The Conclusion

Sedrick Hauge has exactly the sort of stronghold one would expect of a feudal lord who is also a powerful wizard -- a large stone tower surrounded by a moat and guarded by summoned and enchanted monsters. Hauge has a particular penchant for things that turn foes to stone -- basilisks, gorgons, and cockatrices. He has the magics needed to change such foes back, allowing him to question stoney prisoners if he feels the need. Hauge should have whatever other forces are needed to make a direct assault seem foolish, such as giants, men at arms, trolls, or even an allied dragon. Being a wizard himself Hauge has warded his tower against teleportation, planar travel, and entry by people transformed into the form of tiny animals.

The easiest way to get close to Hauge is to take Aria and claim to be returning her for the reward. This gets the heroes direct access to Hauge in his throne room, though it also means Aria is at risk during any confrontation with the wizard. Alternatively, if asked Aria explains she escaped through a secret passage she found as a child in the lowest basement of the tower. The passage is an escape tunnel Hauge believes to be secret which is unguarded (if he tells guards where it is, it isn't a secret).

The confrontation with Hauge is straightforward -- he fights to the death. The real problem is the Eldritch gate, which continues kicking out demons and other creatures randomly. The thing is extremely difficult to destroy, but can be controlled with the instruction inscribed on Aria. Of course this requires the cylinders built into it be removed to be tuned, and this causes creatures to begin popping out much more frequently. When the heroes go to restore the cylinders (or if they go to destroy it), the Gate produces powerful things to guard it, almost as if it was a thinking creature, requiring another battle.

Going through the lab that includes the Eldritch gate also reveals many of rowan's notes (though not all of them -- Hauge has his own ways of keeping secrets). There is enough to keep the gate from producing creatures, but not enough to control it. There is also a portrait of Elspeth and Rowan, revealing the close similarity between Rowan and Aria in hair and eye color. If asked (once she's rescued) Elspeth confesses to Aria's true heritage, and explains why she married Hauge.

Possible Developments

Even after the main threat has been dealt with, there are lots of places elements of this plot could go.

If the Eldritch Gateway hasn't been destroyed, the heroes must decide what to do with it. Without either Hauge or Rowen no one can really control it. It might be stuck on some particular plane of existence (opening new adventure possibilities), or it might randomly open to a new world on each full moon. It's bound to attract attention, and is too big to stick in a magical bag and take along.

Someone has to replace Hauge as ruler of his lands. The local king may offer the job to one of the heroes, or to Aria and Elspeth, or even to a relative of Hauge's. Depending on how this works out, the heroes could have new allies, enemies, responsibilities, or all of the above.

Whether or not she's the new Lady Hauge, something has to be done with Aria. She has a dangerous secret stuck on her skin, with no good way of removing it. Elspeth isn't powerful enough to protect her daughter from serious threats alone, and Aria has no idea how to use the information transcribed on her, even though she's the only one who can read it. Aria and Elspeth might become traveling companions of the heroes, or might ask them to take a message to far-off relatives of Elspeth's to ask for aid.

Hauge may have decided not to kill Rowan Shay, but fake his death with a combination of illusion and necromancy. Instead of moving to Aria upon her father's death, the lore is etched on her soul simply because it was part of her father when she was conceived. The GM could either drop hints to this effect in Hauge's tower, or have the heroes run across other arcane devices built by Rowan in future adventures.

Appendix Z

Roleplaying the Phone Book

by Eric Funk

"How many times have I told you not to call me on this wall? This is an unlisted wall!"

--President Scroob, *Spaceballs*

What is a phone book? In North America, one sees two main classes of phone book: Yellow Pages and White Pages. The White Pages are a classical alphabetical ascending index of the names of the inhabitants and businesses in the area. Yellow pages are a categorical index of businesses (pest control, pizza, plastics). These may be common knowledge to inhabitants of the area, but people from another age (TL<6 or TL>8) may not know of their existence. At the beginning or end of the book, one might find coupons for a variety of products and services; these may become valid or expire at any time of the year the phone book covers.

"The name Baggins is not safe."

--Gandalf, *Fellowship of the Ring*

Common Services

Unlisted -- This is a service, as the default is to publish all numbers. Buying this "feature" will prevent your number from being sold in an easy-to-use format to telemarketing companies. Characters with cell phone implants should not neglect this extra cost if the provider is not considerate! It may also be of use to secret headquarters as well as adventurers trying to be stealthy. In the United States, the new "[Do Not Call Registry](#)" may solve this in some universes.

911 -- This service was instituted in the early 1980s. Before that, one had to contact the operator, and then convince them that it was an emergency. The only way to contact the police directly involved looking their number up in the phone book.

411 -- This, and similar local numbers, connect a user to an operator who has a (sometimes digital) phone book. There may be a charge for this service and it cannot access unlisted numbers.

0 -- This generic operator assistance is most often used to help with international calls.

"Mr. Whitticam, there's no such thing as San Francisco!"

--panicking switchboard operator, *Auntie Mame*

Luck

Persons with the Luck advantage may try to flip through a telephone book and pick a name or company at "random." The GM can roll a reaction roll against the Universe (see pp. GB118-119) and applying the Luck power, if necessary. This will count as a "use" of the advantage. Possession of the Weirdness Magnet by any member of the party will cause even more unlikely events to occur. The pizza place may be ordinary, but the pizza that arrives may be delivered by a long-lost thought-dead cyborg-ninja ex-wife!

Internet Lookups

Many public service sites exist that allow persons to search for phone numbers over the Internet. Each database,

typically a few years out of date and funded by on-screen advertising, can search one country. Reverse lookups work like the above, but the search is done with the target's phone number to gain the name and address. At TL7 and TL8, studying the Computer Operation/TL skill to 1/2 point is needed to be able to find phone numbers and perform reverse lookups (name and address by phone number). No roll is needed. After TL8, any computer connected to the public networks can perform both the above searches upon voice request.

"If you wish to hear a duck quack, press 7." (beep) "Quack!" (click)

-- 1-800 number, *ND Brokers, Inc.*

Other Databases

Apart from income tax and driver's license databases, other effective databases may be the license plates bureau, and the phone company. Harder nuts to crack would be banks' customer info databases, and auto and home insurance companies. The city water works, electric company, satellite/cable television, and Internet providers could also have information on customers' names, numbers and addresses. More unusual places to look may include large charities, structured religious organizations, electronics chains, and Web stores.

"I'd call, but the phone system in first-century Palestine is terrible."

--Josephus, the genie, *Bernard and the Genie*

To the common man, the exact details of how a phone works may seem magical. In some anachronistic settings, there may actually be magical mirrors or horns that connect the two localities for a brief time. In contemporary campaigns that involve the supernatural, such as [GURPS Technomancer](#), and [GURPS In Nomine](#), telephones can be the subject and conduit of magical powers. Specific phone spells from the former include *Seek Number*, *Borrow Number*, *Wrong Number*, *Identify Caller*, *Magic Switchboard* (see pp. TM18-19). Spells that can work through a phone line include *Purify Signal* (TM17), *Delete Commercials* (TM18), *Volume Control* (TM28), *Radio Hearing* (to see cell phones, TM32), and *Machine Possession* (TM36). In *In Nomine*, it is an innate power of the Cherubim of Jean to be able to call any person they're attuned to without knowing the number, or materialize a cell phone next to them, the Ofanim can travel "by wire," and the Kyriotates can possess electronic devices! (see p. IN94)

Adventure Seeds

"Are you sure this line is clean?" "Of course I'm sure."

--Trinity and Cipher, *The Matrix*

- The book may be used as a list to be followed linearly by uncreative criminals (or in a complex pattern by slightly more creative ones). It may be used to find someone to pass a McGuffin to someone that can be easily found again.
- It may be that the villain forgot or was too frugal to buy the "unlisted number" feature for their cell phone.
- At a scene, there are phone book entries that are circled, marked, or cut out. They may be for a business, or a private resident. If the part in question is cut out, then in order to find out exactly what was taken, the PCs will need to hunt down an identical book of the same year. Particularly evil villains may have already defaced the library's copy!
- The villain makes a threatening call to the heroes, but forgets to use "Call Display blocking" -- the heroes can then see the phone number. If the villain had foresight, they will be using a pay phone. Either way, the team may have time while the opponent is talking.
- One urban myth encountered is that phone companies intentionally insert false entries in the book so that if it is copied, the company can prove that it was stolen. What if this information isn't gibberish, but part of secret messages? If dragons or other long-lived creatures abound, then it could be part of a long message chain.

Pyramid Links

- Find names for NPCs: "[What's in a Name?](#)" by Owen K.C. Stephens
- "[When Spacefleet Won't Return Your Phone Calls](#)" by Steven Marsh
- "[Character Communications](#)" by Giles Schildt
- "[Willful Weapons](#)" (This includes a telephone with a mind of its own . . .)

Other Links

- [Overseas Calling](#)
- [Infospace World Directories](#)

* * *

This article was inspired when someone on Pyramid said, "My roleplaying group was so good they could have roleplayed the phone book!"

American Ley Line: Route 66 (Part Two)

*"Now you go through St. Louie, and Joplin, Missouri
Oklahoma City looks oh so pretty
You'll see Amarillo, and Gallup, New Mexico
Flagstaff, Arizona, don't forget Winona
Kingman, Barstow, San Bernardino . . ."*
-- Bobby Troup, "Get Your Kicks on Route 66"

[Last week](#), we set out down Route 66, America's secret spine, its Mother Road of dreams and despair. Like the Highway itself, we began in Chicago and wound our way through the mystical landscape of the Midwest, through Illinois, across the Mississippi, and into Missouri. This week, our pilgrimage continues, through five more states, along the phantom ribbon of concrete that defined the freedom of the open road for three generations. As with last week's column, we won't be slowing down for every single Sign alongside the path -- it can't be done. Each Sign speaks to the driver who wants to see it; every town or mesa might be magical, if your headlights catch it just right. I can only mention the ones that reflect in my windshield, the ones that look like suitable shoulders to support a Suppressed connection. Let's roll.

*"There is a highway from coast to the coast,
New York to Los Angeles,
I'm a goin' down that road with troubles on my mind
I got them 66 Highway Blues. . . .
Sometimes I think I'll get me a gun,
Thirty eight or big forty fo',
But a number for a name and a big 99,
Is worse than 66 Highway Blues."*
-- Woody Guthrie, "Highway 66 Blues"

Route 66 enters Kansas through a desolated district known as "Hell's Half Acre" outside the lead-mining town of Galena. From this [blasted heath](#), it crosses over the "Rainbow Bridge" (built in 1923) outside Riverton, Kansas, and then swings south to meet the Black Dog Trail, named for the Osage Indian chief Black Dog. Black Dog was born, intriguingly enough, where Chief Pontiac (who gave his name to the Trail through Illinois that Route 66 followed) died; in Cahokia, Missouri. And so the spirit of the land, and of the trails across it, moved west in psychopompic progress. Black Dog's route (which follows Route 66 as far as Claremore, Oklahoma) crosses the site of Fort Blair, near Baxter Springs, where the Confederate raider William Quantrill massacred 87 men on October 6, 1863. Route 66 connects Baxter Springs to the also-haunted battlefield of Wilson's Creek, Missouri, where Quantrill also fought, and killed, in 1861. Victims of Quantrill haunt both battlefields, perhaps caught in the psychic undertow of the Black Dog Trail, where the Osage believed the dead walked to the afterlife. Here are more spooklights (near Quapaw, Oklahoma) and the town of Catoosa, Oklahoma is named for the Cherokee legends of the *Gi-tu-tzi*, the "shining people."

The wild hills along Route 66 played host to considerably darker sorts, as well. Not only legendary outlaws like Belle Starr (born on the future Mother Road in Carthage, Missouri) and Jesse James (reputed to have hidden out in Missouri's -- and Route 66's -- Meramec Caverns), but lesser owlhoots such as the Black-Yeager Gang, the Dalton Gang, and the Doolin Gang swarmed this corridor. Bonnie and Clyde killed a man in Commerce, Oklahoma (on the Highway) in 1934, and robbed a bank in Baxter Springs, Kansas (as did Jesse James, according to local lore). Pretty Boy Floyd held court at the Kentucky Club in Oklahoma City. But Route 66, as befits a road dedicated to the frontier, the liminal space where things change timelessly, also runs through the spot where the Old West is buried. Chandler, Oklahoma holds the grave of Bill Tilghman, the legendary lawman "born on the Fourth of July" (a proxy for America, sheriff as the tanist-substitute for the sacred king). He cleaned up another "Hell's Half Acre" (in Perry, Oklahoma, a ways off the Road) but was gunned down on Halloween Night, 1924 in the "last gunfight of the West" in Cromwell, Oklahoma as he grappled with a knot of [three persons](#), including a "rogue Federal agent." Rogue agent or sacred executioner, charging Route 66 with another slain king as it headed west, into the Red Lands of the Dead?

*"Eldorado fins, whitewalls and skirts
Rides just like a little bit of heaven here on earth
Well buddy when I die throw my body in the back
And drive me to the junkyard in my Cadillac."
-- Bruce Springsteen, "Cadillac Ranch"*

Route 66 runs through Shamrock (for luck) and then McLean, Texas (whose founder died on the [Titanic](#)) in ominously-named Gray County, past the Leaning Water Tower of Groom, and into the "Jericho Gap" right before Amarillo. This boggy stretch of black mud mired travelers on the Mother Road before its eventual paving in 1937, but its dangerous reputation continued for another thirty years. Amarillo itself, although plagued with UFO flaps in 1956-57 and 1965, is a placid backdrop to the real nexus on the Road's path, the "Cadillac Ranch" monumental sculpture constructed by the Ant Farm collective on May 28, 1974 (25 days after the Sears Tower was completed). Ten Cadillacs, from a 1949 Club Coupe to a 1963 Sedan, lie embedded in concrete at the same angle (51 degrees 50 minutes) as the slope of the Great Pyramid. This powerful transformer no doubt helps secure ley transmissions despite the almost complete obliteration of the Mother Road by I-40 in the Texas Panhandle; its vintage Caddy tailfins pull up the telluric energies from the road they rode over, and blast them into the emptiness Beyond.

*"The highway, oh, the highway. No place, in theory, is boring of itself. Boredom lies only with the traveler's limited perception and his failure to explore deeply enough."
-- William Least-Heat Moon, *Blue Highways**

Eastern New Mexico and the western Texas Panhandle past Amarillo are the Llano Estacado, the "staked plains," so-called (according to local lore) because Coronado had to drive stakes into the ground to navigate across the featureless prairie. Coronado was looking for the famed Seven Cities of Cibola (recalling the Seven Stars seen beneath the Masonic arch) and may well have traveled along the "one route by which this plain may be safely traversed," in the words of a later explorer, Captain Randolph Marcy of the U.S. Cavalry. Whether or not Coronado was trying to find a mystical ley nexus to cement El Camino Real or was just seeking [El Dorado](#), Route 66 likely parallels his march. From Tuumcari (from the ominous Comanche *tukamukaru*, "place of lying in wait"), Route 66 runs west to Santa Rosa, where U.S. 64 runs south to [Roswell](#). Just past Santa Rosa, Route 66 originally turned north to Santa Fe, passing another Civil War battlefield at Glorieta Pass, head-faking toward Los Alamos, and drawing off mojo from the Pecos and Santa Fe Trails (east and north of Santa Fe) and El Camino Real (west and south of Santa Fe). After 1937, the Highway simply arrowed west from Santa Rosa into Albuquerque, where the white lady who occasionally dogs the Mother Road reappears as [La Llorona](#).

West of Albuquerque, the ancient Acoma Pueblo (the oldest continuously-inhabited town in the United States) and the sacred mountain of the Navajo, Mount Taylor (which they call *Tso'dzil*, or "tongue mountain"), regard each other across the Road. Further on, the Malpais lava flows stretch beside the road, frozen giant's blood from Ye'iiitsoh, variously translated as "Big God" or "The Monster Who Sucks In People." The twin sons of Changing Woman, Monster-Slayer and Born-of-Water, killed this giant, inhuman mountain entity about 800 years ago, if the geological dating on the lava flows can be trusted. This ties in eerily well with the accepted date of the sudden disintegration and decline of the Anasazi -- whose Chaco Canyon road network (itself bizarrely, perhaps ritually, straight) intersects Route 66 right around Anaconda, New Mexico. Once more, the Mother Road sucks in the energies of the first Americans' sacred geography, and transmits them along its own route. That route crosses the Continental Divide, and then passes the intriguingly named Pyramid Rock and Rehoboth, New Mexico before reaching Gallup (the county seat of McKinley County -- and again we meet a slain king of America in the road). Here Route 666 once branched off and headed north for Cortez, Colorado (it's been U.S. 491 since May of 2003); the real Mother Road, however, heads resolutely west into Arizona.

*"It is because in Arizona the arresting framework, the very skeleton of the earth, is exposed that the scenery is so compelling and meaningful. Its bone structure is superb."
-- Josef Muench*

If New Mexico is thick with the spirits of "Those Who Came Before," then Arizona peels back even that stratum and lays the Highway across the bare bones of America. Route 66 passes through the Painted Desert and Petrified Forest,

gaining who knows what eldritch power from wood that has become stone. Just past Winslow, Arizona is Window Rock, which was Ni'alnii'gi, or "Earth's Center" to the Navajo. Just beyond this omphalos, a [Stone Fallen From Heaven](#) lies a mystic seven miles off the Road in a bowl of diamonds and cold iron -- Meteor Crater, which roadside promoters of the 1930s (delightfully) identified with the [Star of Bethlehem](#). (The Meteor Crater Observatory is now a ruin, in fine Gothick style.) Route 66 pours all this mystical juice past the [maneless mountain lions](#) of the bankrupt wild-animal park near Two Guns, through Canyon Diablo (perhaps acting like a resistor in an electrical current -- or as a capacitor for deadly orgone), and past an ancient Pueblo (or Anasazi?) ball court, first excavated in 1936.

The kachinas -- mysterious and powerful spirit entities of Hopi lore -- [look down](#) on Route 66 from atop the San Francisco Mountains, as it runs from Winona ("don't forget Winona") into Flagstaff, county seat of Coconino County. Against these stark mesas, the [commedia dell'arte](#) love triangle of Ignatz Mouse, Krazy Kat, and Offissa Pupp, from George Herriman's surreal *Krazy Kat* comic strip, unfolded during the years that Route 66 itself slowly emerged from the half-world of conception into hard-paved reality. Whether Krazy Kat and company were the commercial American versions of the "kachina dancers" whose similarly ritualized movements and masks stave off disaster among the Hopi must remain opaque to us -- although it is interesting to note, perhaps, that Krazy and Ignatz ended their dance in 1944. The next year, Robert Oppenheimer exploded the atom bomb and became "Death, the destroyer of worlds."

Looking back at the kachinas from the top of Mars Hill northwest of Flagstaff is the Lowell Observatory, founded here by Percival Lowell in 1894 because nowhere else on Earth would show him the phantom patterns of [Mars' canals](#) so clearly. In 1930, working at Lowell Observatory, Clyde Tombaugh discovered the planet Pluto and perhaps thereby opened a pinhole to the kingdom of the [dead](#) god. As the desert stretches west, the Highway pulls all these planetary energies down and channels them into its great ley conduit past Flagstaff, balanced between Sedona and the Grand Canyon, a veritable Hoover Dam of etheric power. Rumors of Egyptian ruins in the Canyon need not delay us (though we may come back to them another time), nor that of the UFO crash near Kingman, Arizona on May 20, 1953, nor even the Alchemical Wedding of the King and Queen of Hollywood, Clark Gable and Carole Lombard, in Kingman's Methodist church on March 29, 1939. Here, the terrain has become an unearthly [Waste Land](#), with the names floating over it but not touching it in Eliotesque anomie -- [Valentine](#), Antares (the eye of the heavenly Scorpion), Sitgraves, Kingman, Goldroad, finally Red Rock ("come into the shadow of this red rock") at the edge of the state. "And," as John Steinbeck wrote in *The Grapes of Wrath*, "66 goes on over the terrible desert." In two weeks, so shall we.

Coming Up In Part Three: That California Trip, Etc.

Pyramid Review

Researching Medicine (for CyberGeneration)

Published by [Firestorm Ink](#)

Written Jonathon Lavallee & Bryan Schmidt

Cover by Jason Seabuagh

Illustrated by Nick Bliss, Christine Mozarowski, Avy Price, Jason Seabuagh, & Anlina Sheng

52-page b&w softcover; \$12.00

Here is a curiosity: a supplement for a roleplaying game long thought dead, itself a sequel to an equally dead game. Back before we got gloom-and-doom all mopey style with *Vampire: the Masquerade*, there was R. Talsorian Games, Inc.'s *Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.*, the definitive RPG of that quintessential 1980's genre, cyberpunk. It projected an early 21st century polarized society of haves and have-nots, in which the armed and dangerous kicked out and up from within the shadows cast by the all pervasive corporate hegemony. Well-supported and popular, the last supplement was published in 1997, *Firestorm: Shockwave -- The Fourth Corporate War Book Two* being the second part of the trilogy detailing the Fourth Corporate War between the two big boys of the setting, Militech and Araska. Although the final page of *Firestorm: Shockwave* hinted at big events for the third and final part, *Firestorm: Aftershock* never appeared. Nor did *Cyberpunk 203X*, the third edition of the RPG that the *Firestorm* trilogy was supposed to lead into. Seven years on and fans of the game are still waiting for both . . .

What *did* appear was a sequel RPG, [CyberGeneration: The Final Battle for the Cyberpunk Future](#). Projecting the timeline of the game forward to 2027, passing the torch to the offspring of *Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.*'s Edgerunners. The USA has gone corporate big time, morphing into the ISA, the Incorporated States of America. New laws put an end to the Cyberpunk Movement, and only grew harsher after the outbreak of a new virus. The Carbon Plague is fatal to one in ten adults, but it changes the teenagers that contract it. They become one of the Evolved, able to harness the nanites left in their body by the Carbon Plague to a variety of effects. Hunted by the government, they organize themselves into youth gangs -- or Yogangs -- for survival in the fight against the ISA.

CyberGeneration, influenced by anime, was more of a Generation-X RPG. A much lighter game, it employed a stripped-down version of R. Talsorian Games, Inc.'s Interlock system. A modern comparison would be between Eden's UniSystem used in their *Witchcraft RPG* and that in its cinematic sibling, [Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game](#). Originally a supplement for *Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.*, it received a second edition, a scenario, *Bastille Day*, and three supplements in the *Documents of the Revolution* series: *EcoFront*, *Media Front*, and *Virtual Front*. Now, 10 years on, R. Talsorian Games, Inc. has licensed *CyberGeneration* out to a new Canadian publisher, Firestorm Ink. Their first supplement is the fourth in the *Documents of the Revolution* series, *Researching Medicine*.

As the title suggests, *Researching Medicine* explores the medical world in *CyberGeneration's* Post Cyberpunk Movement setting. It does this in a general manner, rather than looking at the specifics of the Carbon Plague. This includes a look at the role of the Med Tech character type from *Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.*, now trying to survive in the highly incorporated ISA. It adds a new Yogang, the MASHers, and a new Evolved type, the Medic. The MASHers are, of course, a riff upon the TV series *M*A*S*H*, as is their Yogang skill, "Meatball Surgery." This Yogang skill is developed slightly with three different specialties that aim to provide some differences between characters with the

skill. A nice addition, this is something that the publisher plans to do with future Yogang specific skills. The Evolved Medic's special ability, Sympathetic Healing, is well thought out, and -- pleasingly -- is only really effective over time. The book also includes an optional rule for handling Improvement Points, the game's equivalent of experience points. Intelligent, but not innovative, this option is unfortunately, lacking the promised chart that was supposed to support its use.

The adventure itself is an investigation into the disappearance of a fellow juve. Approached by a young man, the player characters are asked to look for his younger brother, Anthony, whom his parents are now denying ever existed. This comes in the wake of a growing number of kidnappings from the streets of Night City. The leads begin at Anthony's dojo, and take the player characters on a search of his parents' apartment, and into contact with several yogangs, including some MASHers, the goth Nightwalkers, and the ultra-violent Redfist Megas. The trail points towards Night City University, and what would they want with a young boy?

Thematically, *Researching Medicine* is about medical research and ethics, specifically that related to the Carbon Plague. How do you go about conducting experimental research into the nanovirus when there are no test subjects available? Although the climax of the adventure includes a gruesome scene involving the results of such unethical research, the writing never quite addresses the issues it suggests. There is at least room in the adventure for the GM to improvise and, thus, have the player characters come face to face with the issues themselves. To that end, it is all but mandatory that the player characters encounter and interact with, the villain of the piece, rather than just have it as an option as the adventure suggests. It is a pity that the stats for this character are not given. As such there is nothing wrong with the adventure, but it is underwritten and in need of some further development.

Traditionally, the first book from a new publisher receives some leeway for any lapses in its production values. It is an unfortunate truth that *Researching Medicine* needs such leeway. The book certainly needs another editorial pass, and small problems with the layout may prove to hinder a GM rather than help him in running it. As to the artwork, the less said of it, the better . . . except to note that if the best piece in this book is actually at the back in the ad for the publisher's next release, then perhaps, no artwork and a lesser page count is definitely better than, to be polite, disappointing artwork. None of it really feels suited to the setting or the genre, and is invariably poorly handled, such that it detracts greatly from the look of the book. Furthermore, the book's maps are too big and too generic feeling, again at odds with the setting and genre.

That *Researching Medicine* is aimed at long-time fans of *CyberGeneration* cannot be denied, especially considering that the game has figured little on the gaming shelves in the last 10 years. Being successful beyond this niche may prove something of a hurdle for the publisher, but fans at least will appreciate this new book, which is designed as a starting point back into what is now an old game, while also adding a small amount of source material. Hopefully, all of *Researching Medicine's* detracting physical production errors can be put down to first time teething problems, as otherwise, this is a reasonable little adventure that will work well in the hands of an experienced GM.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Cthulhu 500

Published by [Atlas Games](#)

Designed by Jeff Tidball

Art by Scott Reeves

Edited by Michelle Nephew

110 full-color cards, rules sheet; \$19.95

required but not included: six-sided die and lap counters

Attention, racing fans. Roll down your tailgates, break out the Space Mead, and get ready for high-speed thrills. Atlas Games is waving the green flag -- at least, it looks like a flag -- and the *Cthulhu 500* is underway.

The object of the game is to be the farthest ahead in the race when the checkered flag waves.

Players pick one of eight vehicles, each with a different set of statistics for how it performs on the track. One or two of them also have special abilities beyond these numbers. Vehicles get two cards each -- one is placed in the middle of the table to show its position in the race, and the other sits in front of its owner where everyone can see what kind of upgrades and crew it has.

The cars' order is determined at the start of the game, and their positions change throughout play. The lead car is placed at one end of the line, and whoever's bringing up the rear is at the other. The game is abstract: There's not a real track, so position is relative. Each vehicle wants to pass the one in front of him, and the car in front wants to "pass" the one at the back. If the lead car passes, his card goes to the end of the line, but a lap token is placed on the vehicle to show that he's lapped the competition. (Counters for the laps aren't included -- a couple dozen ought to do the job.) If every car manages to "pass" the rearmost, they all get a lap token, and now the car that's at the front of the row is in the lead. Since it's all relative, the players could all take their lap tokens off at that point. Of course, it never works that rhythmically in practice, but so long as everyone loses an equal number of tokens, order is maintained.

On your turn, you can take two actions, the passing attempts being one example. You and your opponent roll a six-sided die (also not included) and add bonuses like your driver's skill, the car's base Speed score, and the equipment attached. Faster cars can pass better, but usually have higher Complexity scores -- this will cost someone when they try to repair damage.

Playing an Action card allows you to get things done, like take a Dreamlands Shortcut, cast a spell against an opponent's pit crew, or fix a damaged vehicle without making a pit stop. You can add people to your pit crew like the High Priest of Mojocross, or get more work out of the slovenly zombies by putting Herbert West in charge. Other actions require that you make a pit stop.

In a pit stop, you can put one of your crew behind the wheel (some beings are better at driving than repair work, and vice versa). You may switch Tires (you'll go faster with the Rats in the Whitewalls). There are Mods to add -- some of these may be specialized like Sponsors (a la the Sponsor that Must not be Named -- though this is as much to avoid litigation as anything), but most are booster devices like the Crankcase of Charles Dexter Ward. You can also roll for your crew to repair damage. Pit stops may be a tradeoff, though. Every time you pull over, the car behind you can

attempt to shave off your lead with a free passing attempt (it costs them no actions, but dice must still be rolled).

Aside from free passing attempts, a player not currently taking his turn may use Reaction cards. These have conditions to which they may react, and typically this is something as straightforward as responding to someone's passing attempt or their announcement of a pit stop. Others require specific circumstances, like taking a Turn out of Space and Time that can only be used when someone discards a card.

When the deck has been exhausted once, the Checkered Flag card is shuffled in with the discards. When that card come up in the new deck, the game ends immediately and whoever's in the lead (has the most lap tokens and/or is furthest ahead in line) wins.

Computer generated images are always a gamble, one that rarely pays off. The graphics used here are, strangely, more effective than more traditional art would be. There are as many "Eww"s as "Ooo"s, and the surreal, sometimes Dali-like things staring back at you (many of which are smiling too pleasantly to settle anyone's mind) are entrancing. The cards feel a bit on the thin side, however, and a tougher stock might have been in order.

The game takes three to eight players, though it's a little on the slow side with only three. The cards tend to have a synergistic effect when more players can play off one another, and the deck gets drained faster. Even then, the game comes with many options for speeding up play or drawing things out, so players can get the length of game that makes them comfortable.

As a side note, if you aren't familiar with *Cults Across America*, the *Cthulhu 500* started as a little sliver of that game. Designer Jeff Tidball has carried that same mincing sense of humor and lighthearted approach to design into his card game. It's hard to appreciate just how cleverly the cards all work together until you see them in action. What seems like an unfair advantage for one vehicle or sponsor falls prey to another, less obvious game mechanic later on.

Cthulhu 500 has solid mechanics (in the rules, anyway . . . those things in the pit crew seem a little unstable), a terrific sense of humor, and a nifty concept that places it squarely in the winner's circle.

--Andy Vetromile

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Stormy Weather In Store

Irony: Incongruity between what is expected and what is actually true.

For example, let's say one lived for 24 years in Florida. Hypothetically speaking, mind you. And, in that time, he hasn't had any significant encounter with a hurricane in . . . oh, a couple of decades. And he moves to Pennsylvania. And within 60 days of his moving to Pennsylvania a downgraded dreg of a hurricane – let's call her Jeanne – drops enough water in that state to make my, er, *his* life slightly miserable.

Hypothetically speaking.

Strangely enough, something just like this happened to me on Tuesday. Apparently, when you build your state entirely out of granite, it doesn't drain worth squat. So when you get, say, eight inches of rain in an hour, and it's raining for 18 hours straight, you've got a recipe for problems. As a way of illustration, let's look at the numbers as they relate to my new Day Job:

Percentage of Employees Who Endured Some Problem Directly Tied to Storm 100%

Percentage of Employees Whose Cars Were Rendered Inoperable by Storm 66%

Percentage of Employees Whose Phone Systems Were Rendered Inoperable by Storm 33%

Number of Weeks Prior to the Storm Our Warehouse Had Its Roof Patched 2

Those of you who read [last week's column](#) will recall my travails in getting a truck across the state to load up various paperwork and file copies for our records (most of which is irreplaceable). This led directly to the most bitterly amusing episode of the Tuesday storms, when we looked from our offices into the warehouse and noticed the retrieved boxes getting supremely soggy from the inch of water on our warehouse floor.

I've woken up next to a harsh mistress, and her name tag says "Irony."

So, as I'm trying to figure out why the heck my brakes seem utterly locked (after performing like a champ during the storm itself) and trying to devise a plan for towing a car whose wheels will not turn, I find myself figuring out how to turn this week's gripefest into a column.

And that's when I realized how much possibility there is in using incidents that aren't normally associated with in an area. Let's face it: Hurricanes and Pennsylvania are not exactly synonymous. But it's possible. So are blizzards in Atlanta, floods in Death Valley, and earthquakes in Gotham City.

And when these conditions happen, everyone in the area gets absolutely dumbstruck as they try to deal with the new situation. Sure, everyone in South Florida has their hurricane preparedness kit (usually consisting of half a roll of tape and a dead D-cell). But there are no such preparations in Pennsylvania. And it results in some moron trying to drive past a set of road flares into a lake-like side street, little knowing that his brakes would lock 12 hours later.

I think, at their core, the best roleplaying game sessions are those that bring something different to the mix. It's good to [unexpected the expected](#). And an easy way to do that is to mix up expectations.

Of course, these unusual happenings aren't limited to the weather. Most locations and genres have their expected conventions and story ideas, but digging a bit deeper can turn up things that make the players go, "Whoa!"

For example, an adventure set in the Middle East (the parts that *aren't* war-torn) would be an obvious location for a terrorism-based plot. But what if the heroes stumble onto a plot to, say, kidnap the First Lady? She might have been out there as a top-secret morale boost for the military in a seemingly safe part of the world, and unsavory elements

discovered her presence. Presidential plots are common in Washington D.C., but they *aren't* in other parts of the world, even though they are feasible. (President Bush made a surprise visit to the front-line troops in Iraq last Thanksgiving, for example.)

Or envision a Space adventure where the heroes are assigned to deal with a crisis on a space station: They've lost contact with the station, and although it's a routine mission, the higher-ups are preparing for the worst -- which, of course, the PCs would probably expect. The heroes get a dossier, a map of the station, a list of personnel on the station, and so on. They take a transport to get there . . . and the entire adventure takes place on the way *to* the station: Their ship is assaulted by space pirates, a mysterious space anomaly needs to be dealt with, or the like. It's a typically elaborate gaming adventure, and the heroes *finally* resolve everything and get back on track to the space station . . . only to learn that, in fact, their original mission was entirely routine. ("Sorry; our Hypercom receiver and the Diagonster must have both failed. We're fine. Sooo . . . how're you?")

And, of course, the GM now has a fully detailed space station, ready to use in a future adventure. The fact that the heroes already have a history with it will make that future tale even better.

As a final example, consider a Fantasy game where the heroes are visiting a dwarven undermountain city. While typical adventures might revolve around retrieving a magic item or going further into the mysterious mountain, an unexpected – but still feasible – plot can be woven around a peasant rebellion . . . something usually associated with human kingdoms. How do the heroes react, especially since so many of the rules that cover similar situations in humanity's realm – such as fleeing or retreating to the castle on the hill – don't apply?

Sometimes good plots can stem from something that *can* happen in a place, even if it isn't *likely* to happen there. Opening your mind to the possibilities can make a familiar land seem alien again, and a story that would be hoary elsewhere look fresh.

Just remember: When your car won't move because its wheels are locked because of an unexpected hurricane, those are the brakes.

--*Steven Marsh*

Iron Ref 3: Valley of the Refs

Three competitors. Three minds of the roleplaying world, each representing a different gaming genre, have accepted the Iron Ref challenge.

Three secret ingredients. Selected by a special guest, three ingredients -- plot elements, story pieces, or other oddities -- are selected for the challengers to incorporate into their concoctions.

2,500 words. Each competitor has twenty-five hundred words -- and no more -- to devise a generic scenario in their genre incorporating all three secret ingredients.

24 hours. And they have one day to work their magic.

However, this competition has been even *more* grueling for our competitors! We've run three people through the gauntlet. Our first parts ran in August and September, and this is the end of the beginning. One winner will be chosen each week; 50% of the rating will be based on *your* ratings, and 50% will be based on a 1-5 rating of a group of three celebrity judges whose identities have not been revealed yet.

The winner for each of the three events will face off against each other, with the results of that cosmos-shaking climax scheduled to run the first week of November.

Who shall emerge, victorious, as the Iron Ref?

* * *

Our challengers, and their respective genres, are:

Greg Porter, a self-described "14th-Level Freelancer," author of many classic games, has stepped on a whole colony of butterflies in the Mesozoic era to represent the **Time Travel** genre.

Aaron Rosenberg, owner of [Clockworks Games](#) and creator of *Chosen*, *Spookshow*, and *Asylum*, has donned his 10-sider hat to represent the **Western** genre.

Owen K.C. Stephens, the local hero of *Pyramid* with [Icosahedron Adventures](#), will be tackling the **Fantasy** genre.

* * *

The secret ingredients were acquired from three wise men caught wandering a desert by **Kenneth Hite**, the mastermind behind [Suppressed Transmission](#), and designer of so many cool things that [Google](#) just throws its hands up in frustration.

Stop reading if you don't want to know the secret ingredients!

This competition's secret ingredients are:

- A whirring mass of gears and cylinders
- An inscription in an unknown language
- A red-headed stepchild

Fiddly Bits

The third Iron Ref competition was held from 2:15 A.M. Wednesday, July 21, Eastern Time until 2:15 AM Thursday, July 22, Eastern Time. We had planned to go midnight to midnight, as we did in our first competition, but e-mail problems conspired against our great competition. Nevertheless, our challengers compensated mightily for this inconvenience, and all was right with the event.

This is the third part of our third Iron Ref competition. Our first one was [February 2, 2001](#), and the second was [August 3, 2001](#).

The first part of this competition was [August 6, 2004](#). The second part was [September 3, 2004](#).

Without further adieu, then, here are the results of this competition:

Time Travel: [Proxymate Causes](#), by *Greg Porter*

Western: [The Treasure of the Golden Hills](#), by *Aaron Rosenberg*

Fantasy: [The Key](#), by *Owen K.C. Stephens*

Exploring the Unknown Sea

by Paul Drye

Almost all fantasy adventures take place on dry land. Some may take place under the water, but there's no doubt that most GMs are missing the boat on a major opportunity for adventure: the seas themselves. There are at least two settings on the ocean surface that are rarely touched: the magical oceans of the medieval mind and the more realistic explorations of the Late Middle Ages.

Way, Haul Away

Naturally, if you're going to get your adventuring group sailing the seas, you're going to have to get them on a boat first. A good ship to give the adventuring group is a caravel, a type of ship developed at the end of the Middle Ages for the purposes of exploration. Unlike earlier ships it could sail relatively well against the wind, and they were strongly built. While their exact arrangement varied over time, a typical caravel would be as follows:

The ship is about 70 feet long (not counting another 15 to 20 feet for the bowsprit, a mast sticking out the front at an angle), 25 feet wide, and has three masts besides the bowsprit. It weighs 70 tons. Depending on how fast one wanted to go, it has as many as five sails: square ones on the bowsprit and foremast; a large square sail on the mainmast plus a smaller one above the crow's nest; and a triangular ("lateen") sail on the small mast (the "mizzenmast") to aft. The square sails on the main and foremasts might be replaced by lateen sails if more maneuverability was needed. The whole ship is decked over, and two cabins are added on top, one at the front and one at the back. The triangular cabin at the front (the "forecastle," pronounced "foxel") is for high-placed crew and passengers, while the sterncastle is for the captain.

The tops of the castles were used for combat purposes, as in pre-gunpowder days a height advantage was critical to pouring crew-damaging arrows and ship-damaging heavy stone and metal objects down onto an opposing ship. In a world with magic this is probably less of an issue, as a wizard or sorcerer (especially one with fire spells) will be a devastating weapon. Piracy is difficult under these circumstances, as a pirate is loathe to destroy his opponent and its loot, while the victim has no such qualms. GMs will want to establish a reason why a flame-wielding guardian isn't on board every ship; possibilities include a shortage of available personnel, a sea god-enforced inability to use fire spells while on the open ocean, or specific spells known to pirate wizards or sailor-god clerics that counteract the threat -- fire-extinguishing spells, or spells that temporarily render wooden planks and cloth sails fireproof.

Belowdecks the ship was divided into two compartments, the hold to forward and steerage aft. The hold was used to carry cargo, up to forty tons, while many of the crew slept below the deck in steerage; this was not a comfortable experience, as caravels carried tons of rock for ballast and this left only about five feet of clearance between the wooden floor belowdecks and the underside of the deck above. GMs interested in historical accuracy should note that the stereotypical sailor's hammock was not introduced until the 1500s, after Columbus encountered them in the West Indies.

Also in steerage, as the name implies, were the tiller and compass used to steer the boat. The large wheel abovedecks for turning the ship was a later invention; in the 14th and 15th centuries, the tillerman was down in steerage and couldn't see where he was going. Fortunately this is not a problem on open ocean, and he could rely entirely on the compass and orders shouted from above. The ship could sail in water as shallow as one fathom (six feet, or about two meters).

Total crew complement would be 15 to 20, with an additional three or four officers.

The Gales They Did Roar

GURPS GMs can find information on winds and sailing ships on p. VE158-159, while **d20 System** gamers might want

to refer to the excellent *Seafarer's Handbook* from Fantasy Flight Games (though a realistic campaign will need to shear out some of the wilder flights of fancy). Whatever the system, though, certain points should be kept in mind when dealing with pre-Columbian sea-faring.

Speed of travel depends a great deal on wind speed and direction, and can range from nothing at all to 14 miles (about 12 nautical miles) per hour with a strong wind from behind. With square sails, a caravel had to sail with the wind contained in the 90 degree arc behind it, though with more lateen sails rigged it could handle winds that came from the side and still make progress. Lateen sails were unstable with the wind coming from directly behind, however, and the crew would switch to square-rigged sails if the winds were favorable.

Medieval ships, no matter how rigged, could not sail directly into the 180 degree arc from which the wind was coming (if this arc contained the direction one wanted to go, this was a "scant wind"). If this happened, the ship would tack -- sail at an angle to their destination to bring the wind to their side or behind them, then back again, zig-zagging towards landing. If the wind was coming from an arc centered on the direction they wished to travel -- the size of the arc depending on the type of ship but usually more than 90 degrees at this time -- no forward movement was possible. Even with a wind suitable for tacking, the maneuver was hard work requiring good timing by the captain and coordination on the part of the crew. Each time the ship changes course while tacking, it must "slam" across the wind, which leaves open the possibility of facing the wind too long and falling "in irons" -- the sails collapse while facing the wind, and the ship stops spinning towards the opposite tack. At this point, a Catch-22 exists: the ship needs headway (forward movement) to refill her sails, but she needs to refill her sails to get headway. Modern ships often have backup engines to use; adventurers have magic, prayer, and luck. Less competent sailors will want to use jibing instead, where the ship turns away from the wind through nearly 270 degrees to reach the second course. Though far less effective, it is much harder to lose all momentum this way.

GMs looking to up the level of realism a little should also realize that prevailing winds over any sufficiently large area (such as the Atlantic Ocean, or fantasy world equivalent) blow in one direction at mid- to high latitudes, in the opposite when one reaches the tropics, and are quite calm around the equator. Note that Columbus sailed across one of the wider portions of the Atlantic: he took advantage of the prevailing winds that blow from the coast of Africa to the Caribbean. Further north (between Ireland and Newfoundland, for example) the wind blows towards Europe, while the short hop from Sierra Leone and Recife, Brazil often has no wind at all. Modifiers to rolls for wind direction and strength are suggested, regardless of the game system used.

Bring Down The Sails

Having put the adventurers on a boat moved them out of sight of shore, there are two possibilities for what they might then find.

The Mystical Ocean

For most of the Middle Ages, the Atlantic was a nagging hole on the mental maps of Europeans. To fill it, they invented a wide variety of non-existent islands that were "out there somewhere," and populated them with things that reflected what dwelled in the pre-modern mind: demons and angels, strange people and even stranger animals. Imaginary places such as Frisland, Hy-Brasil, Estotiland, and Antilia filled the North Atlantic.

From an adventuring perspective, one feature of this phenomenon makes it easy to introduce the mystical ocean to a campaign: these places invariably have been visited in the past by dubious-looking old mariners who are now stuck on shore. Plot hooks are made easy by dropping one of these fellows into a seaside inn, and having him pass on miraculous stories and an inaccurate map or two. GMs are encouraged to investigate the names Nicolo and Antonio Zeno if they want some good models for this character.

Going on the Grand Tour: Adventures in a mystical ocean are traditionally very episodic, and lend themselves to a long series of short game sessions. Generally each island is small, and contains only one area of interest. These are usually related in some way or another to the deities of the game world, and examples might include:

- An island containing a rich castle or mansion, which at first seems like a wonderful place until it becomes apparent that the inhabitants are under some offended god's curse.
- An island of monstrous people -- no heads, for example, or no legs and walking around on strong arms and hands.
- An island tormented by some evil presence into becoming a volcano; ending the presence will restore it as a green and pleasant place.
- A small island that dives under water shortly after (or while!) the players visit it. This is traditionally because the "island" is actually the back of a very large whale, but GMs should remember that well-read players will probably be wise to this particular explanation.
- An island where wishes come true, with the usual pitfalls of this particular piece of magic.
- An island containing a magical garden which contains a very magical lake: its water cures any ill. Reaching this island can often be the goal of the adventure -- someone back on the mainland is dying, and a flask of miracle water is the only hope.

Besides island encounters, the GM can also throw in other artifacts of the medieval mind:

- Sea serpents
- Derelict ships mysteriously sailing themselves
- The titanic waterfall at the edge of the flat world
- Ocean water that starts boiling if the characters sail too far towards the equator or is as thick as maple syrup in the north.

Reading for Mystical Ocean Adventures

- *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis* ("The Voyage of St. Brendan"), in English translation at <http://www.o-r-g.org/~azaroth/university/brendan2/node3.html>. This account of a sea voyage to the west of Ireland was written at a time when the Atlantic was a great mystery to Europeans. Bizarre to modern eyes, it was taken as truth for a very long time after it appeared.
- *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, C.S. Lewis. While pitched at children, reading this short novel from an adult perspective reveals all sorts of fantastical elements in a mystical vein. Very much a modern take on St. Brendan.
- *The European Discovery of America: The North Voyages A.D. 500-1600*, Samuel Eliot Morison. Out of print but available in most libraries, Chapter II covers St. Brendan in some detail, while Chapter IV debunks a remarkably long list of proposed Atlantic islands and pre-Columbian voyagers to the New World, including such interesting characters as Earl Henry Sinclair. There is also some discussion of potential forgotten Portuguese exploration up the coast of North America prior to Columbus, the only voyages between the Vikings and the Spaniards that Morison (a heavyweight scholar on the Age of Exploration) takes seriously.

The Realistic Ocean

Most people, if they think of the issue at all, begin the Age of Exploration in 1492 with the voyages of Christopher Columbus. Some might think of the Scandinavian discovery of Newfoundland and Labrador in the 11th century, but generally the whole issue of oceanic exploration feels too late in time to be appropriate for a fantasy campaign.

In fact there was some movement on this front for a nearly two centuries before the famous voyage of the Niña, Pinta, and Santa Maria; for example, the Madeira Islands were discovered in the 1420s, and the Canary Islands no later than the 1340s. While small in comparison to what was brought into the European sphere from the sixteenth century onwards (and largely forgotten as a result), they're more than large enough and early enough to supply models for adventures in a world set in its own Middle Ages. Stick some small islands several hundred nautical miles off the coast of a campaign world's main continent, and you can use them in several ways:

The Straight Dungeon Crawl: This kind of adventure borrows as much from campy spy movies as history, by putting the headquarters of some shadowy organization on the islands, and gradually leading the players here for the climactic adventure. Worshippers of the Evil-Of-The-Month, hidden cabals dedicated to the overthrow of something-

or-other, "opposite races" (good goblins, evil elves) -- the possibilities are endless. If a campaign world has some sort of ancient, extinct civilization, this is the perfect place to put their last remaining outpost. In the real world, stories circulated that the Canary Islands were the tops of the mountains of Atlantis; a world with a similar legend could have some very interesting sites on its mid-ocean islands.

The "New Lands" Adventure: If there's a small, poor kingdom on the coast of the campaign world's large ocean, one motivation to head out and explore would be finding new lands to conquer. The adventurers are the second group to go to the islands -- they've been discovered recently, and now the king wants to add them to his kingdom. Out go the characters to tame the countryside. This was the motivation for both the Scandinavian discoveries of Iceland and Greenland as well as the Iberian colonization of the Canaries, Madeira, and the Azores, so the GM will want to consider which of the two to use as a model. The former produces adventures in icy, brooding lands full of forbidding cliffs and forests, while the latter puts the characters in an alien tropical or semi-tropical environment that's probably rich in valuables like gold, spices, and rare woods.

In either case, this is the ideal setting for high-powered characters who are in a position to be rewarded by their king. "Thank you for saving our kingdom, here's a noble title. One small catch about your new fief, though...."

The "New Lands" Adventure, One Generation On: Here the islands have been known for twenty years or so, and the necessary ground-breaking is already done. There's one small but thriving town on a good harbor, and sea trade is beginning to swell. Unfortunately, so are attacks by pirates, thieves' guilds warring over the new town, and the anger of those pesky natives. Plus any ancient evils in the land are bound to start coming awake with all the new activity bothering them. Lower level characters would do better here, as they'll have towns and other resources to fall back on like they would on the mainland.

The Trading Adventure: Played the wrong way, this isn't an adventure at all -- "Have the forty tons of grain in the hold moved at all since we left port? No? Well, keep an eye on it just in case...." But with the right cargo, things can get interesting. One useful possibility is livestock. Menageries were very fashionable in the courts of medieval kings, and the more dangerous and exotic an animal, the better. Even sticking to the non-monstrous, a giraffe or an fully-grown male elephant seal in the hold ought to be entertaining. GMs in search of even more spice are directed towards the opening scenes of "Jurassic Park," or a translation of "The Voyages of Sinbad the Sailor." And speaking of spice, turn the forty tons of grain into pepper or sugar and the mariners are sitting on a fortune -- every pirate, privateer, and other variety of high seas mountebank will be after it if some loose-lipped sailor passes on the secret while in his cups.

There's also the issue of getting there to pick up the cargo in the first place. Wherever "there" is, someone had to be the first to make the voyage. It might as well be the adventuring party.

Reading for the Realistic Ocean

- *The Voyage of the Matthew*, Peter Firstbrook. A profusely illustrated book about one of the earliest voyages to North America (John Cabot's English-run expedition in 1497), and the effort to recreate it in 1997 for a BBC/PBS joint venture. Widely and cheaply available in many bookstores' remainder bins.
- Discoverers Web -- <http://www.win.tue.nl/cs/fm/engels/discovery/>. As well as extensive material on the early part of the Age of Exploration, there's plenty of material here on earlier and later sea-faring for GMs not overly concerned with anachronism.

Putting It All Together: Auresta

In 908 the caravel "Three Sisters" was caught in a fierce gale while sailing from Finidel to Muileir, and was blown west-northwest for several days. When the storm ended she was well out into the Fiarnan Ocean, and as she traced her way back to shore she came across an island some 600 nautical miles from the coast. After filling her water casks there she was able to make a safe return to Finidel, where the story of their discovery soon spread. Two years later, King Ervil sent his first expedition to claim and tame Auresta, as the well-watered and forested island had come to be known.

At the head of the expedition were Lord Farnal Tallis and his wife the Lady Cian, a duo of adventurers newly added to the nobility, and granted the "Barony of Auresta" as their new lands. They quickly proved their worth by finding the island's lone inhabitant, the powerful dragon Nikebur. Tricking him into defeat, his hoard of golden and bejeweled items from a previously unknown civilization funded the construction of Edun Keep at the mouth of Siamis Bay. The port town of Uttarma soon sprung up around it, as more adventurers came to follow up on the discoveries of the Lord and Lady, the shipyards of Finidel started using the island's tall trees for ship masts, and fishermen began harvesting the bountiful surrounding seas.

In the twenty years since then settlement has spread up the island's largest river, the Cail (which runs through Uttarma), though most villages are small. The only other town with more than 500 people is Etha, about fifteen miles upstream from Uttarma where the Cail meets its main tributary, the Rhybra.

Siamis Bay itself is notable for the ancient statue carved into the promontory on its north side, which depicts an armored figure with a grief-stricken face, leaning on his sword with his head bowed. Ten times life size, the "Old King" (as Uttarmans call him), has been examined several times by hopeful adventurers, but so far no-one has discovered anything more dangerous than irate seabirds roosting in his various nooks and crannies.

Northwest of Auresta are two smaller islands, also included in the Barony. So far as anyone knows, Mareth and Maresis are uninhabited, but fishermen have begun noticing lights on the smaller of the two islands. Dubbed "Ghost Lamps" by the superstitious seamen, they are in fact the torches and lanterns of a pirate band who have set up on Maresis. Ships have begun to disappear, but this has started too recently for anyone in authority to find it odd yet.

The south of the island is very mountainous, and a half-dozen rivers come pouring out of them at speed -- several spectacular waterfalls shoot over the side of coastal cliffs directly into the ocean. The only notable settlement in Auresta not on the Cail river system is here: Engsea, at the head of Muirenn Harbor. A small fishing village, the inhabitants of Engsea make no small part of their living catering to adventurers heading for the cold, gray mountains of the interior.

Finidel's newest barony is growing fast, but there are still many places in it which have never felt the tread of a human foot. What remains to be found there will only reveal itself slowly.

More Questions than Answers

Bright Lights, Big Dungeon

By Chris Aylott

"It must be great to work in a bookstore. You have so much time to read!"

"It must be great to work in a game store. You get to play all the games!"

Those two lines always make me laugh on the outside while crying in my heart. Fact is, I spend more time balancing the books than reading them. I've got a great new demonstration copy of *Memoir '44* that's seen a bunch of plays . . . by everyone but me. And sometimes entire years go by where I don't get to hack one measly little orc.

I'm not complaining about this -- much -- just noting an unromantic reality of small business. Since I work while many of my friends play, I don't get as much playtime as I'd like. That goes double for the months since mid-June, which have mostly been spent taking care of the World's Greatest Baby.

It takes serious effort to me to carve out time for gaming . . . so how the heck did I end up running not one, not two, but *three* games of *The World's Largest Dungeon*?

Tell Me More of This Dungeon, Sage

For those of you who have been hiding in a *GURPS Fourth Edition* book, *The World's Largest Dungeon* is an 840-page monstrosity of a *Dungeons and Dragons* adventure from Alderac Entertainment Group. It's really 15 dungeons in one, covering levels one through 20 and just about every monster in the *Monster Manual*.

After 10 years selling hobby games and 20 playing them, I'm jaded. This book tripped my Igor reflex. It had to be mine, even if all I ever did with it was play target practice and try to drop all five pounds of it on the cat. I was really hoping to run the game, of course. I just wasn't sure I could find anyone who would want to play it.

I shouldn't have worried. I sprung the campaign on some long-time friends from college and they pounced on it. We're scattered across the continent (some of us haven't even seen each other since the early '90s), so we're playing by posting entries into a Live Journal. We've been playing for a month and it's just like old times. We affect a worldly air of parody -- the paladin was named Twinky McRighteouspants -- but I notice we're claiming all our pluses and trying to squeeze every last experience point out of each room.

That wasn't enough, though. Looking for more excuses to play, I convinced my wife and business partner Deb that I should grab the GM screen and run the game as a pickup game in the store. I figured three or four of our local teenagers would be interested, and that we'd accumulate more players over the first few sessions.

Sixteen players showed up for the first session, and I hastily divided the game into two groups, each running for two hours on Saturday afternoon. Come noon, I grab the WGB, take her downstairs to our game room, and plop her on my lap while I run the games, one after the other with occasional breaks for diapers and snacks.

I didn't expect that kind of crowd. (If you remember my column about our [charity book sale](#), you may suspect I'm not good at expectations. You're probably right.) I figured most of our teenagers are more interested in playing *Magic* and *Legend of the Five Rings* than roleplaying. They do love trading card games, but it turns out they're more than willing to put them down for the right game.

I'm not the only one engaging in irrational dungeoncrawling exuberance. Blogs and fan websites for *The World's*

Largest Dungeon are popping up all over the web. Threads are popping up on RPG bulletin boards as people compare notes on running the game or preparing characters to play in it. **World's Largest Dungeon** fandom may not be a mass movement, but it's caught the enthusiasm of some very talkative gamers.

So what's going on here?

A Few Words with the Dungeon's Master

World's Largest Dungeon line developer Jim Pinto says, "The online commentary has been awesome," noting that fans "really seem to be enjoying" the dungeon. He attributes the success of the book to relatively mundane reasons.

"Region A is solid," Jim says. "Michael Hammes did a great job . . . so [the fans'] initial reaction to the product is all his doing. We really did make a solid book. Even if the story isn't what people want, they have 1,612 encounters to draw on for the rest of their gaming lives. That's six cents per encounter, math geeks. And the dungeon crawler in everyone is excited to about the opportunity to claw through layer after layer of prison-infested mayhem."

Despite his confidence in the book, Pinto was "surprised and flattered" by the appearance of blogs and other net commentary on the dungeon. "I've never written a hit project [before]", he says. "The online commentary has been awesome . . . but I'm anxious to read reviews of Regions F, G, J, K, the heart of the dungeon. That'll be the real test."

The World's Largest Sandbox

James Beadle didn't expect much for the **World's Largest Dungeon**. He says he bought it because, "I'm part of the aging gamer demographic and as such I have disposable income." Beadle felt "it would be a collection of monsters and NPCs if nothing else," but was "pleasantly surprised" by the quality of the writing.

"Most dungeons are room-clearing experiences," he says. "Kill the monster, take the loot, trip the trap, et cetera. [**The World's Largest Dungeon**] has roleplaying in it. That appeals to me, and my players."

Beadle says he expected to use the book purely as reference material, "pulling an encounter here, an NPC there." But when he finally got his hands on the book and "saw the quality of the maps, the premise, the actual content," he decided to run it. This hasn't stopped him from making plenty of changes of his own, filling in empty rooms, increasing the variety of low-level encounters, and adding more roleplaying encounters to bring the storyline to the forefront.

The results appear to be a hit. Beadle and his regular gaming group ("The Sanguine Sentinels") started playing **The World's Largest Dungeon** a few weeks ago at their annual weekend game retreat. "We typically play a host of different board games and RPGs," Beadle says, but for this retreat "we played it for 28 hours and didn't touch anything else." The players then put a long-running **Dungeons & Dragons** campaign on hold to continue playing in **The World's Largest Dungeon**.

Beadle isn't sure why his players have responded so strongly to the game, but he thinks it might be the sheer challenge of the dungeon. "Each player gets two characters, then must play recruits from the dungeon itself -- in other words, monsters that join the party. If one character makes it to the end, the players win." At the time of the interview, Beadle's group of player characters had spent 15 game days in the dungeon and were near the end of Region A, with only three deaths in the party so far. He says he thinks they'll make it to the dungeon's exit, "but I think a lot of monsters are going to be in that ending group."

Mind if We Play Through?

Alex Russo is a typical gamer teenager. He started out in the hobby playing **Dungeons & Dragons** with some friends, shifted over to playing **Magic: the Gathering** and other card games, and has come back to the **d20 System** with a vengeance for this campaign. He's playing a lawful-evil necromancer named Prodius in one of my face-to-face

campaigns.

Russo says he was attracted to *The World's Largest Dungeon* because he was "curious to see how it turned out. A campaign as one big dungeon is easy to mess up, but if it can be done right it has great potential. Plus the book is *huge* and \$100!"

After two sessions, his party is about 20 rooms into the dungeon. So far the game is holding his interest, "but if the storyline doesn't start picking up soon it could get reeeal boring."

He's not sure if he or the rest of his group will make it all the way from beginning to exit. "As I said, the book is huge and some games no matter how good they just seem to lose interest after the first few months; maybe it's because the concept doesn't change and people like fresh stuff." If the party does make it through, however, he's confident he won't need more than his wizard. He says, "As long as the rest of the party can act as my own personal human shields until I reach a higher level, I'm set."

(Russo says the monster he most wants to fight is a nightshade. After a quick look ahead through the book, all I can say is that he may end up regretting that wish . . .)

After All, the Book's Only Slightly Shorter than Everest

When I talk with players and GMs about *The World's Largest Dungeon*, "it's huge!" is the theme that keeps cropping up. Each person has their own version of why they're playing, but "it's huge" seems to be at the heart of the challenge that players are posing for themselves. Can I climb this mountain? Can I beat this campaign, or run it to the finish so my players can beat it?

Perhaps each of us approaches the same challenge from a different angle. My angle seems to be the opportunity to give up control. For years I've run my own games, which always focused more on weaving together plot and character than on traps and tactics. It's strangely liberating to turn myself over to the imaginations of other writers, to focus on the challenge of executing their ideas.

Running this game is like being a musician playing a symphony instead of the composer of the symphony. Can I make it through this piece and keep it interesting from the first note to the last? When I play the piece for different groups, can I play it better each time? Are the little variations of each performance enough to keep the piece fresh for them and for me?

It's hard to tell if our individual excitement about the campaign is going to mean anything in the long term. This may just be another brief flash in the gaming pan, another Hot New Product to be discussed for a month and then forgotten. It's safe to say that many groups that start the dungeon will never finish it, because many groups have abandoned much shorter mega-modules. *Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil* was only 192 pages, only one quarter as large, and how many parties got bogged down in that campaign?

But this is also the month when *Dungeon Magazine* presented an article on "The Best 30 Adventures of All Time." I've only played through some of the adventures on the list, but I was amazed how many memories were brought back by flipping through the article, memories that were shared by other gamers of a certain age in the store at the time. I've already watched my two face-to-face groups compare their opponents and strategies with each other after the game; they're excited by shared experience.

Maybe that desire for shared experience drew Jim Pinto into playing the campaign he labored nine months to develop. He says it's "frustrating and exciting" seeing how his fellow employees respond to *The World's Largest Dungeon* in the Alderac house game. He doesn't know how long he'll be able to participate -- apparently he remembers too many details of the rooms -- but it's clear he's not ready to put his dungeon away just yet.

And me? I'm curious what'll happen when the World's Greatest Baby is old enough to play *Dungeons & Dragons* . . .

Maybe someday I can talk her into running the campaign for me . . .

Pyramid Review

d20 Future

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Written by Christopher Perkins, Rodney Thompson, & JD Wiker

Edited by Tammie Webb Ryan & Michelle Vuckovich

Art by Dave Johnson, Timothy II, Kalman Andrasofszky, Daniel Falconer, Langdon Foss, Grafikismik, Matthew Hatton, Karl Kersch, Stephan Martiniere, Warren Mahey, Christian Piccolo, Joel Thomas, Chris Trevas, Francis Tsai, & Ronald Wimberly

224-page full-color hardcover; \$34.95

Wizards of the Coast has now formed a troika of sorts with their roleplaying volumes. *Dungeons & Dragons* covers the fantasy genre and *d20 Modern* the contemporary, and now *d20 Future* is supposed to handle all your sci-fi needs. It's not really a core book, however, as you need *Modern* to use it to the fullest. It's not a standalone product, and the new material (including features like action points and wealth bonuses) means the *Player's Handbook* won't cover everything.

As thin as the setting may have been in *d20 Modern*, the background material here is almost nonexistent in spite of drawing a lot from other sci-fi works in Wizards of the Coast's and TSR's past. The bits they do have are mixed in with some character types. The campaigns chapter is preceded by new feats, high-tech skills, and advanced classes -- such as the xenophiles who seek all things alien, the space monkeys who clear planets for colonization, and the ambassadors to other stars. Some of them are even intriguing enough to start charging the creative batteries. But the rest are mixed into the settings chapter to give them a little context.

These are folks like the bughunter, the soldier who gets called in anytime the local fauna start munching on settlers; or the dimension ranger who travels among parallel worlds to keep an eye on developments, find solutions to twin problems, stop invasions, or just explore things one world over. Few of the classes come off so esoteric that the reader would really be at a loss to understand them without the accompanying world information, but perhaps the authors felt the need to bulk up an otherwise slim Settings chapter.

And that's a shame, too, because in the few paragraphs we get about each of these possible roleplaying arenas, we see some good ideas not getting fleshed out. They're doing their own work a disservice by not going into further detail about some of these. Sure, a couple are worked-over re-dos of things everyone else (including Wizards of the Coast) has already done, such as the "Star Law Officers" who uphold the law in the galaxy, but "From the Dark Heart of Space" is a nice horror and skiffy mix (a la movies like *Event Horizon*), and "Dimension X" actually has its heroes trying to stop the unmaking of parallel universes before it gets to their sphere. The writing here gives you a taste, and then stops.

Fans of some of the earlier efforts from Wizards of the Coast (or those works from when it was still TSR) will find nods to some old favorites such as *Star*Drive* and *Star Frontiers* (though nods only). The Klicks from the former are brought into line with the *3.5 Edition* rules, as are the Dralasites, Vrusk, and others from the latter game (although.

sadly, the evil and mysterious Sathar remain absent and mysterious). As little attention as cross-dimensional travel gets, time travel is hardly mentioned, and post-apocalypse roleplaying not only sees no mention of *Gamma World* (an official, licensed Wizards of the Coast product), what there is seems dry as dust.

After that, your background material is mostly progress levels (where the campaign is, technologywise) and some stuff on creating believable star systems. This second part isn't as extensive (or, ultimately, dull) as similar material from, say, the *Farscape RPG*, but then again it also seems to stop pretty suddenly.

The rest of the book is a series of how-tos on the hot topics of the far future. Mutations, cybernetics, vehicles, gear, starships, mecha . . . all this and more is included. Each of these components has its own system. There are Mutation Points for buying mutations, and the number of MPs from beneficial effects must balance with the points from drawbacks. Mecha have slots to be filled with gear, the number depending on the unit's size. Cybernetics are more limited . . . you can only have one more device than your Charisma bonus before you start losing your humanity (noted as negative levels). Robots come in several types like biodroids, bioreplicas, and biomorphs, the naming conventions of which make it hard to recall the differences, and each may have its own rules for building it or using it as a PC.

A lot of work went into the bits and pieces, but while reading the sections (the technology, particularly) it's hard not to get the feeling some of this could have been condensed, combined, or cross-referenced in some way to make it all more accessible and to make the creation processes part of a unified whole. In some ways the chapters feel more like a sci-fi checklist than a focused but expandable system for world-building.

The work of artistic visionaries such as James Holloway have been reinterpreted, and the book is full of sharp-looking starships, angular weapons, and colorfully drawn and painted alien races. Overall it looks much like its Modern counterpart.

d20 Future is more a toolbox for GMs looking to take their campaigns into the future (or off-planet, or into the world next door) than a cohesive look at gaming there with the *d20 System*. You have everything you need except guidance or a sense of wonder. The good news is you're not buying another iteration of the *d20 System* rules; the bad news is you still spend almost as much for a series of methodologies that lack dramatic fusion. Even dismissing a setting, *d20 Future* could still use an injection of the marvel that ought to characterize the future itself.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Pick

Spank the Monkey

Published by [Gigantoskop](#)

Designed by Peter Hansson

Illustrated by Peter Svärd

120-cards, six-page rules sheet; \$26

Just when you thought that nobody else could come up with another dodgy title for a game following on from [Roll Call 3: Country Matters](#), along comes one more contender for the "Least Tastefully Titled Game of 2004" award. Yet you have to admire the chutzpa, if not the gall of Swedish publisher, Gigantoskop. After all, they took their first game, checked with English speakers for the veracity of its title, and *still* decided to call it *Spank the Monkey*. Fortunately, the title is the only dubious thing about this game.

Designed for two to six players, the idea behind the game is very simple. A mischievous monkey has gotten loose in the junkyard where you work. With it currently scampering from one junk pile to the next, your boss is none too happy, and directs all of his employees to go capture the pernicious primate. To do that, you need to go grab whatever items of scrap you can find and build them up in a tower in order to reach the same level as the monkey, where you can give it a good spanking! And with the reward of every recyclable can in the yard and free time with the garbage compacter at stake, the race is on to deliver to get on up and deliver that stinging slap. If that means taking out the towers built by your rival employees, then so be it! Of course, it helps that their towers of trash are potentially as unstable as your own . . .

Spank the Monkey consists of a simple rules sheet and a deck of 120 cards, to which must be added a single six-sided die, and a token of some kind. The rules are clearly written and easy to understand, but it is the cards that are really eye-catching. Brightly done in full color, each is nicely illustrated in a cartoon style, and all are very attractive. The illustrations also have a slightly grimy look to them that adds greatly to the feel of the game.

The cards come in six different types. The first is the "Monkey Height" card, of which there is only one in the game. A token is placed on this card during the game to indicate how high the monkey's junk pile is from turn to turn. The most basic card type in the game is the red Junk card. It is marked with one or more dots that indicate how much each piece of junk adds to a player's tower, as well as with a number indicating its strength. This represents how difficult it is to destroy when attacked. Junk cards also have one or more descriptive qualifiers, including "Furniture," "Illegal," "Leisure," "Organic," "Machine," and so on. These determine how effective the other cards in the game will be when played to affect each individual piece of junk.

The card may also have special instructions, such as the "Merry-Go-Round," which forces every player to pass a card from their hand to the person on their right. Many other cards also move the monkey up and down its junk tower when played. In all cases, the instructions on all of the game's cards are very clear and obvious in their use.

The blue Reinforcement cards each strengthen an individual piece of junk in a player's tower when placed alongside its card. The orange Attack cards let players go on the offensive against a rival junk tower, while the attacked player can counter with the green Defense cards. The multi-colored Special cards have a variety of different effects, such as "Floodlight," which allows a player another turn immediately following his current one. Or "Helium Balloon," which will keep a junk tower standing even if the junkyard suffers from the effects of the "Earthquake" Special card, or if the tower suffers from a collision.

Some favorite cards include:

- The "Missile" Junk card, which -- though strong -- destroys everyone's tower when it is itself destroyed.
- The "Boomerang" Attack card, which cannot be discarded, and always returns to a player's hand if the attack fails; thus the only way to be rid of it, is to make a successful attack.
- The "Police Raid" Special card which forces all players to remove any Junk cards labeled Illegal from their towers.
- The "Gorilla" Special card, which turns the Monkey into a Gorilla when a player attempts to spank it, making it harder to be rid of.

The game starts with the token placed on the starting height for the Monkey on the "Monkey Height" card, the value of which is determined by the number of players. Each player receives a hand of five cards. A turn consists of five phases, beginning with the Draw phase in which a player refreshes his hand. In the Build phase, he adds a Junk card to his scrap tower, building a column of cards across the table. By placing a single Reinforcement card alongside its card, any piece of junk can be strengthened.

During the Attack phase, a player can make as many attacks on his rivals' piles of trash as he has Attack cards. These come in three varieties. Hand Attacks can only be made from atop a tower against a piece of junk at the same level in another tower. Throwing Attacks can be made at any piece of junk, whatever the level. Sneak Attacks vary from card to card and are all different. For example, the "Termites" Attack card will only attack the bottom piece of junk in a tower, and if successful, will continue chewing on the next piece of junk in subsequent turns until the defending player can fight off the infestation. Attacks are conducted by rolling the die to get equal to, or greater than the defending Junk card's strength, including bonuses from its Reinforcement card. Both Attack cards, and Defense cards will modify the roll.

Should a successful attack destroy a piece of junk in the middle of a tower, then the ones above it will come crashing down. There is the chance that this will destroy the items of junk as they collide into one another. If a player rolls badly enough, his whole junk tower can be destroyed!

If a tower reaches or surpasses the height of the monkey's junk tower, then its player can attempt to *Spank the Monkey*, and thus win the game. This requires nothing more than rolling against a simple chart included in the rules. The last phase lets a player discard one or two cards, which is useful if he wants to maintain a healthy flow of cards through his hands.

Many of the cards interact in clever ways. For example, while the "Chicken Wire" reinforcement works well with any piece of junk, it gives double the bonus when used to bolster the "Chicken Coop" Junk card. Likewise, the "Scythe" Attack card works better against Organic Junk cards. Some Junk cards provide excellent bonuses, but only as long as they remain at the top of a player's tower. Thus a player must decide if he wants to keep the benefit of the "Old Cannon," which allows an extra sneak attack (but has the chance of blowing up when used) each turn, or continue building his junk pile to reach the monkey.

There is a theory that any sentence or phrase can be improved with the addition or insertion of the word, "trousers." Another theory holds that it works better if the word in question, is "monkey." So any game with "monkey" in the title has got to be good, then. Well, yes -- and despite the dubious title, *Spank the Monkey* is a lot of fun to play. It is also easy to learn, and there is even the slightest of Green messages running through design and look of the game. With its high degree of interaction between the players' junk towers, that allows everyone to dish the scrap on their rivals, combined with a very attractive look, all work to make *Spank the Monkey* one game worth coming back to play again and again.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Pick

Hex-Hex

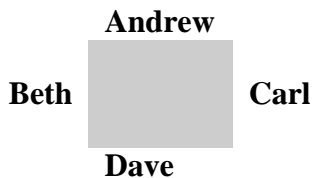
Published by [Smirk & Dagger Games](#)

Designed by Curt Covert

100 cards, full-color tokens, rules; \$18.95

Some games, such as *Uno*, don't have a terribly vindictive element. Oh, sure, effects might hamper another player, but it's not personal; you're just trying to accomplish your goal, and are chugging along, regardless of the other players' efforts. This is *not* the case with *Hex-Hex*, the new card game which combines the speed and accessibility of *Uno* with a vengeance and unpredictability that ensures no two games will look alike.

At the start of each hand of *Hex-Hex*, all players are dealt five cards each. One player then targets a hex at another player, who then uses a card to direct that hex to another . . . who then directs it to another. This repeats until one player cannot play any cards to direct the hex in front of him to someone else. At this point the hex "goes off," subtracting a point from that player and adding a point to the one who directed that spell in him. So, for example, the middle of a hand of *Hex-Hex* might look like this:



- Beth, who has been given the hex by Andrew, plays "Turn Aside Left," which sends the hex back to Andrew.
- Andrew plays "Boost Left/Right," which sends it left or right (Andrew's choice) and causes it to do another point of damage. Andrew decides to send it to Carl.
- Carl plays "Twain," which splits the hex in two, sending one left (to Dave) and right (to Andrew). (Each hex is boosted, and will thus cause more damage eventually.)
- Andrew casts "Deflect Across," which sends his hex to Dave. At the same time, Dave casts "Double Back," which would double his hex and send them both at the person who targeted him (Carl). Carl casts "Null," which cancels Dave's "Double Back." Dave, still dealing with the hex he couldn't "Double Back," casts "Called Shot," which lets him choose a target. He chooses Beth.
- Beth is down to her last card, so it's legal for her to play "Dismiss," which dispels the hex and gives her two points instead of taking one away. Dave can't do anything else with his cards, so the hex goes off, hurting him for two points and giving one point to Andrew (who most recently redirected the hex to him).

Most cards are fairly straightforward, such as "Turn Aside Right" or "Deflect Across." Many cards deflect the hex but have some other effect, such as "Twain" and "Cut to the Chase" (which gives the hex to someone else and forces everyone to discard randomly down to two cards). Other cards disrupt others' plans, such as "Detonate," which causes the hex to detonate immediately. Others can only be used when you don't have any other cards that can deflect the spell, and include "Reflection," which causes both the targeted player and the one who targeted him to receive damage.

Still others change the basic flavor of the game. One version of "Maddening Compulsion," for example, passes the hex to the player's right; that player *must* then use some means to move the card to *his* right, who must then move it to his right . . . and so on, until a player doesn't have a choice and the hex goes off. "Hex Sign" dispels a hex on the person playing the card, and everyone then engages in a game of rock-paper-scissors, where the other players gain or lose

points based on what they throw. And "Deception," which is played at the beginning of the hand, allows the player to play his cards face down; he can lie about which card he is playing, resulting in a loss of points for someone if he's challenged (either the deceiver if he was caught lying or the challenger if the player was telling the truth).

Since players do not get more cards in a hand, each hand is fast-paced and quick; you'll start with five possible cards in the beginning but get whittled down in possibilities. A hand will generally last no more than a few minutes, with a game consisting of as many hands as everyone agrees to -- generally enough so everyone gets to deal at least once. At the end of a game, the person with the most points wins. (In the event of a tie, tie-breaker hands are played until there is a victor.)

At the end of a game, the winner gets to "Lay Down the Law" -- he gets to make up a rule that will be used for subsequent games played in that session. For example, he might say that "Detonate" cards will detonate *all* hexes in play; or he might say that anyone who points a finger during the game loses a point. This is an intriguing aspect of the game, creating changes in strategies and interactions during a session. It adds a nice sense that previous games have an impact on the current game, and by the end of the evening a session of *Hex-Hex* might be a weird, chaotic mass of strange new rituals.

Hex-Hex is not without its flaws, however. First, it absolutely requires more than two players and generally works best with at least four. A two-player version of the game is worse than moot. (In theory, more than six people can play if two sets are combined.) Second, the speed of the game can also mean that it's possible some players may not get to play any cards in a hand. This is especially likely with five or more players. This is exacerbated by the third problem: The cards are printed on some of the stiffest cardstock known to man. Shuffling the oversized deck is a challenge . . . so much so that the company's FAQ recommends that the cards be side-shuffled (which would result in either a long process or a lousy shuffle).

Finally, the rules are not as clear as they should be, especially given the nature of the game. For example, "laying down the law" has almost no concrete rules, and nothing outside of common sense seems to keep someone from defining a rule that says, "I, Steven Marsh, will always start the game with 50 more points than the rest of you." Reading the website's FAQ is almost mandatory, and even so there are bound to be situations in the first few games that a group will need to sort out. Fortunately, there don't seem to be any game-breaking decisions that can be made, and a group that keeps its common sense and remains consistent in its interpretations should do fine.

In all, *Hex-Hex* is a remarkably fun, fast-paced game. Its emphasis on speed, unpredictability, and continuous play make it an ideal beer-and-pretzel game for those able to get together a bunch of friends to play.

--Steven Marsh

Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



The Omniscient Eye

How Can An Alien World Be Made Habitable?

Alien planets are great and all, but unless you have actual aliens, atmospheres can't vary too much. In a future without aliens, how could human-friendly planets be created?

--Paul Chapman

Terraforming is a great project for sci-fi roleplaying. It involves slamming comets into planets, blowing up volcanos, and infesting worlds with mutant organisms. What's not to like? Besides the epic scale in space, a terraforming project is going to take from decades to millenia, depending on the tech level and the size of the challenge, so you can, if you like, start with one set of PCs and end with another set that are the grandchildren of the first set, or even a descendant species.

Terraformable Planets

Some planets are easier to terraform than others. To terraform Jupiter would be . . . challenging. In *The Book of the New Sun*, Gene Wolf describes a Moon green with forests, but the air of such a moon would leak away in a few millenia; the Moon is at the low end of the size scale for terraformable bodies.

Pluto is even smaller and, if you got the temperature up high enough, the surface would first melt, then evaporate. Ice-worlds, like gas-giants, require the terraformers to have nearly magical technology.

The more earthlike a body is, the easier and faster it will be to terraform, and it makes sense to suppose that these are the orbs that starfarers will choose to terraform first. Nor are nearly-earthlike planets likely to be rare. Both Venus and Mars are close enough to make people dream of terraforming them, and those are two near-misses in one star system.

In this article, we'll assume the planet to be terraformed is a rocky body with a surface gravity between one third and twice Earth's.

Terraforming Methods

The main things terraformers want to do with a world are to adjust the temperature and the air mix. The list of methods and the time-spans given below assumes a more or less "normal" level of space-opera technology, the sort seen in the *Traveller RPG* -- no morphic field generators or nanotech bombs building ecosystems and cities in one exciting game session.

But terraforming takes so long that it's likely technology will change in the course of the project. You could start by crashing meteors into the planet and end by having your psionic über-computer adjust the atmosphere with planet-wide chemical telekinesis. Short of that . . .

To cool a planet quickly:

Kick up dust with asteroid or comet strikes, or shallow tectonic missiles (see below), or by bomb-stimulated vulcanism, if the planet has any volcanos. (However, vulcanism also introduces unwanted greenhouse gases. The planetologists will have to calculate which volcanos to bomb, how far down to place the bombs, and how big an explosion, to get a favorable balance of dust over carbon dioxide.) This trick starts cooling within weeks to months, but the cooling only lasts until the dust settles, which will be a year or so.

To cool a planet permanently:

Remove carbon dioxide by introducing carbon-fixing bacteria, plants, or other organisms. You want to start building coal beds, peat bogs, and layers of plankton shells and "coal reefs" built up in the seas. This would take years to centuries.

Carbon dioxide is the problem on Venus, but not on Mercury. Cooling a planet that is just too close to its sun is a much tougher challenge. Creating Saturn-like rings from pulverized asteroids would cast some shade and lower average planetary temperature. Such a project would take decades to centuries, depending on scale and tech level.

To heat a planet:

Add carbon dioxide from comets rich in dry ice, or by burning or metabolizing native carbon deposits, or by stimulating vulcanism. (However, vulcanism may introduce unwanted cooling dust cover in the short term. The planetologists will have to calculate again, as they did with cooling a planet quickly.) This would take years to centuries.

To heat a locality:

Put some large mirrors in synchronous orbit, angled to shine extra sunlight on the area. This takes effect almost immediately.

The size of the locality heated depends on how much mirror surface you put up and how much of the planet's surface the mirror-image of the sun is visible from. If the total angular cross-section of the mirrors is the same as the sun's and the mirrors are perfect, you can double the total sunlight to the area.

With enough mirrors, you can heat the whole planet, as on Komarre in the Vorkosigan stories of Lois McMaster Bujold. There, the time constraint is how long it takes to build a giant array of orbital mirrors.

Alternately, bomb open a crack in the planet's crust to expose magma or get near it, if the planet has a magma layer under a sufficiently thin crust. (The Moon and Mars do not.) This, however, will only produce comfortable heat in a thin zone along the edge of the exposed magma, and the result may cool and crust over in a few years.

A third alternative is sunlamps. These can be in orbit, in high-altitude aerostats, or on very high towers or beanstalks. They require maintenance, though, and a lot of power. However, any civilization that can travel between stars probably *has* lots of power.

To aerate a planet:

Add oxygen by cracking it out of native water or cometary ices, using oxygenating plants or bacteria. This would take decades to centuries.

To aerate a locality:

Dig a very deep canyon or crater, using tectonic missiles, then introduce the air mix, which might be manufactured from cometary ices. This would take effect immediately, but there would be mixing with the thin air up on the surface, so it had better be air you can tolerate.

The depth of the canyon is:

$$h = (KT/gm) \ln(P/Po)$$

where:

P = the air pressure at the bottom
Po = the air pressure on the surface
g = the local gravity
T = the temperature, in degrees Kelvin
K = the universal gas constant = 8.3 Joules/mol-degK
m = mean molecular weight of atmosphere (= 29 for Earthly air)

To irrigate a planet or a locality:

Add water from comets, or use tectonic missiles to carve canals connecting to an ocean or an ice cap. (Using an ice cap may entail heating the planet.) This would take years or decades.

Terraforming Equipment

Terraforming takes a lot of very large equipment.

Mass Bio-Reactors

These are factories for culturing and dispersing massive quantities of the transgenic bacteria used to raise oxygen levels, or raise or lower levels of carbon dioxide. Once dispersed, the bacteria will, ideally, begin multiplying exponentially, but conditions are never ideal, and it still helps to boost populations as much as possible. The bio-reactors can be housed in any suitably large vehicles: sea vessels, dirigibles, fleets of tanks with spray-cannons, etc.

Comets

Comets, as you see, are a vital tool in terraforming. Fortunately, there are plenty of them. The Solar System has an estimated trillion of them (10^{12}) in the Oort cloud, out beyond Pluto. The average Oort comet has a mass of 10^{14} kg and is thought to be about half water ice with the rest composed of frozen carbon dioxide, methane, and a little dust. It would take roughly ten million such comets to supply enough water to fill the oceans of Earth.

Comet Tugs

Comet tugs are ships consisting mostly of power plant and engine, which steer and accelerate comets toward their destinations. They may also be used to give a comet a (relatively) soft touchdown, if that is possible and desired. Depending on tech level, tugs might visit a comet every few years for decades or centuries, letting gravity and momentum do most of the work, or they might haul it across the star system in a matter of hours or days.

Comet Mining Stations

Different comets have different uses. "Wet" comets, rich in water ice, are for irrigation. "Dry" comets, rich in carbon dioxide and methane ice, are for warming. Mining stations, set up beside or on a comet, strip out undesirable veins of material, tailoring the comet to its task. They also break large comets up into smaller ones, to make them more manageable for the tugs.

Tectonic Bombs and Missiles

Terraformers sometimes need to stimulate vulcanism, produce several small earthquakes to avoid one big one, sculpt canyons, chisel tectonic plates, or tailor planetary magnetic fields. If your setting includes some form of hyperdrive, it is plausible for terraformers to do their landscaping with small hyperdrive drones, set to come out of hyperdrive at carefully specified points inside the planet, producing enormous subterranean explosions.

If your setting does not include a suitable form of hyperdrive, you'll have to get by with very large nuclear weapons positioned by tunneling, with as low a radiation yield as possible. Antimatter would be nice.

Breeding Stations

To supply needed biota, terraformers run ranches and farms to raise the desired plants and animals. These may be natural or gene-tailored for the new planet. The breeding stations themselves will usually be on the planet, though there will be a few "space arks" arriving early in the process, to set up the groundside stations. Building a planet's ecology isn't as spectacular as lobbing comets around, but it's a lot trickier. Beekeeping will be a surprisingly important skill . . .

Gaming Hooks

Gaming hooks are as easy to find as screwdrivers, in a terraforming campaign.

All you need is someone (either the PC party or their foes) who:

- Doesn't want that planet terraformed (possibly because they were living on it and liked it the way it was).
- Wants it terraformed *this* way instead of *that* way.
- Doesn't like someone on the planet being terraformed.

Then, imagine what this discontented party could do with comets, meteors, volcanos, and continent-sculpting missiles as weapons, in addition to all the usual possibilities of a spacefaring sci-fi setting.

But the adventure doesn't have to be about sabotage. A terraforming project has plenty of scope for innocent accidents, either in space or on a planet that was, by definition, hostile even before they started bombing the bejabbers out of it.

Then there's the biological side:

- The young, artificial ecology may lurch out of control, resulting in plagues of frogs, kudzu, molds, and the like, while desired species go extinct. PCs may have to rush in to rescue valuable foundation populations or exterminate pest species.
- Saboteurs can, of course, engineer such plagues and extinctions. The heroes can be sent to find and thwart them.
- And it may not be clear whether a given plague or extinction is accidental or deliberate. The PCs may be investigators, detecting in the breeding stations or roaming the half-formed wilderness for clues.
- Over-enthusiastic genetic engineers may feel your planet is the perfect environment for their newly-designed species and smuggle it in, hoping to get it entrenched before anyone notices. Or, of course, they could just be saboteurs. The GM can get awfully creative about the species -- anything from microbe to major carnivore to sapient race. PCs then have the double task of coping with the smuggled species and finding out who smuggled it.

Upkeep

Terraformed planets will generally not stay terraformed without upkeep. For example, the short story "Big Joe and the Nth Generation" by Walter M. Miller describes a terraformed Mars that is starting to run low on air because the artificial atmosphere is leaking away. (Unfortunately, the populace has lost most of its technology, and Earth can't help because it's now an asteroid belt. Now, *there's* a challenge for your PCs.)

The less like Earth a planet was to begin with, the faster it will revert, as a general rule. But, if the terraforming was done properly to begin with, reversion will take centuries, if not millenia, even if you're talking about air leaking off the Moon.

References

- "The Terraforming Information Pages" by Martyn Fogg at <http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~mfogg/>
- Planet-design sites and software:
 - [StarGen](#)
 - [Planet Designer](#) by John Bray
 - [Accrete](#)
- The "Mars" trilogy, *Red Mars*, *Green Mars*, and *Blue Mars*, by Kim Stanley Robinson
- *Habitable Planets for Man* by Stephen H. Dole

--Earl Wajenberg

Sages theorize that the Omniscient Eye might actually be composed of a panel of Experts chosen through mysterious and arcane means. Regardless, the Omniscient Eye is benevolent, and every other week it is willing to share its lore to all. Or, at least, to all with valid *Pyramid* subscriptions.

The Omniscient Eye seeks to answer questions that are tied to knowledge of the real world, providing information with a perspective that is of use to gamers. The Omniscient Eye does not concern itself with specific game systems or statistics.

Do you have a question for the Omniscient Eye? Feel free to send it to pyramidquestions@yahogroups.com, and the Omniscient Eye might answer it!

Never Tell Me The Odds!

What does a mechanic's Critical Failure look like?

Well, let's take a completely hypothetical example. Someone takes their 1991 Mitsubishi Galant (champagne-colored) to the mechanic, who makes a diagnostic roll. Said car may have been the victim of some flooding damage, when a killer hurricane (let's call her "Jeanne") chased the car's owner to another state.

Anyway, the mechanic informs the car's owner yesterday that the car needs to have a lug nut replaced on its front tire, but otherwise it's fine. "It's a good car," the mechanic says.

The next day, the mechanic has different news for the car's owner: "As it turns out, I hadn't noticed the large quantities of smoke coming out from the engine. There's no way it will pass the state's inspection standards, so you'll need to get a new engine or a new car."

In 24 hours, we went from "one nut" to "one engine."

And *that*, my friends, is a mechanic's Critical Failure.

Actually, it depends on the game system being run. For example, this past weekend I was a guest at a fairly local con called "[Southern Exposure](#)." It's called Southern Exposure because it's in the southern part of New Jersey. Apparently, being in the absolute top part of Florida for a decade would've qualified me as Nanook of the North. (As another aside, the geography of the northeastern United States is really taking some getting used to. It's weird to realize that I can drive 90 minutes and get to about eight other states, or drive for four hours and remain in the same one.)

Anyway, it was a fun time, especially because -- for the first time -- I successfully ran my adventure "[The Kensington Codex](#)" at a convention. Mind you, I've *tried* running this scenario at about six other conventions in the past, using a myriad of systems, all to no avail. But, despite the fact that no one had signed up ahead of time for the session, I managed to rope in four other people into having a seat. In fact, it wasn't until 20 minutes into character creation when it was revealed that two of the players were *Pyramid* subscribers (who, despite learning who I was, opted to stay).

Anyway, my game of choice this time was the *D6 System*, which had its origins in the classic *Star Wars RPG* from the 1980s. This was important, because I needed to convince one of the would-be players that this incarnation -- or at least his experience with it -- would be different. See, he'd played the *Star Wars RPG* once before at a convention, and had a *miserable* time. Why? Because he didn't like the system's critical failure system.

For those who aren't aware, the *D6 System* uses (unsurprisingly) a die pool system of six-siders, where one of the six dice is a "Wild Die." If the Wild Die comes up as a six, it's called a Critical Success, where it's added on to the total and rolled again. If it comes up a one, it's a Critical Failure, where Something Bad Happens.

Unfortunately, the GM who was running this event treated this Critical Failure as being equivalent to other games' Critical Failures, such as *GURPS*, *Rolemaster* or (unofficially) *Dungeons & Dragons*. The problem -- immediately obvious for one with any math training above the 5th grade -- is that the probabilities don't line up. In *GURPS*, a Critical Failure for most rolls only happens on a roll of 17 or 18 on three six-siders. This comes out to less than a 2% chance for most rolls. Most *Dungeons & Dragons* Critical Failure rules stem from a roll of 1 on a 20, making for a 5% chance.

But Critical Failures in *Star Wars* happen on a one-in-six chance, which is almost 17%. As such, since these Critical Failures were treated in the same way as their less common brethren, then *everything* went wrong, all the time. Exploding blasters, revealed hiding places, malfunctioning spaceships, twisted ankles . . . fate hated the heroes. The adventure got off-track almost immediately because of Critical Failures, and it never got anywhere close to the actual plot.

Now, those readers looking for advice, here it is:

Make sure the socks and clothes are rolled *tight* before being stuffed in the pillowcase. Otherwise, although it still won't leave a mark, the beating the errant GM receives won't be anywhere near as painful, and . . .

Oh, wait. That's not the kind of advice you wanted?

Err, it is?

Well, too bad. You'll need to get my forthcoming *Senseless Beatings d20* for more of those kind tips. For now, however, I'll content myself with offering more insight into the various "criticals" of game systems.

But first, I need to gloat a bit. I confess to having been a bit nervous before running the adventure, since I realized this marked the first time I'd done a full-blown GMing session in over a year and a half, and my first tabletop game in a couple of years. It's been a long dry spell, folks. *And* this also marked the first time I'd ever run the *D6 System* (which I treated with the same reverence as I do all RPGs -- namely, "roll the dice and see how pretty they look").

Anyway, even having never actually run the *D6 System*, I had a plan. Namely, any Critical Failures were merely an excuse for me to make things more interesting.

Example 1: Our heroes are trapped on a damaged plane. One hero needs to rescue another on the outside wing, and he's tied himself off with a makeshift rope. He makes his climbing roll, but has a Critical Failure on the Wild Die. I declare that he gets close to his companion . . . and feels the tug of his (too short) rope, *just* out of reach of his friend.

Example 2: Our hero is searching an archaeological dig for evidence. He makes his search roll with a Critical Failure on the Wild Die. I describe the scene:

"Okay; you're searching the pit, and you hear the snap of thin stone beneath your feet." "Uhh . . . okay. I search below my feet." "You find two halves of a stone tablet. It seems it was freshly broken."

At no point in the adventure did I fall back on the usual "jammed gun/exploding knee/self-mutilation" of the usual Critical Failures. In all, I tried to make things more exciting for the players, giving them opportunities to overcome new (minor) obstacles or bring more roleplaying or humor to the situation.

Thus, in the first example, the hero -- in true pulp tradition -- swung himself toward his friend, using the tautness of the rope to keep him steady as he got his legs in position for the other to grab onto. (You can't make these kind of scenes up . . .) Sadly, we never got to see what would've happened if the *other* hero -- who had noticed the too-short rope and was going to untie it -- had gotten to act, since the scene had resolved before then. But it was still cool.

And in the second scenario, the players used the opportunity to add humor to the game:

"I found this tablet. I think our enemy has been here; it seems freshly broken."

"Doesn't this footprint on the tablet look a lot like yours?"

"Uhh . . . yes. Clearly they're wearing the same kind of boots as I am. Keep an eye out for them; it could be a clue. Umm . . . I need to go translate this now."

I never used the event of Critical Failures to actively hose the players. Rather, I considered the example of adventure movies, which is how I often pace my adventures. And, in thinking about it, I realized that, on average, my reflections mirrored those of the system: Namely, that one in three times something "interesting" happens (good or bad). If the hero shoots his gun six times, four times will be the typical "bang, bang, pa-CHING!, twong" types that keep the scene going, one will be something interesting that works out in the hero's favor (such as winging the bad guy enough so that he falls off a railing), and one will work out against him or otherwise cause a complication (maybe a ricochet hits a gas tank, sending a slowly escalating pool of gas everywhere). Obviously this ratio doesn't hold for all movies, but it helped keep me focused.

However, this method only worked *because* I considered the math involved with Critical results. If I were running, say, **GURPS**, where Critical Failures are (on average) nine times less likely, then I'd probably beef up the results of each of those, and weave the other interesting complications into the more "mundane" rolls. And in a game such as **In Nomine**, where there's a less than 1% chance of *any* Critical result (good or bad), those rolls need to be treated even more seriously.

In any game, it pays to consider what a critical result means, and decide what the magnitude of those events will mean. A **Torg** "glory" result, for example, is designed to be achievable (with effort on the players' parts) about once every adventure or two. While this makes it rare, it's not as extreme as, say, an ordinary Marine with a knife being able to decapitate an all-powerful *Highlander*-style immortal in a one-on-one confrontation (as was suggested recently by a fan to our rules writer). After all, if something *that* rare and amazing is going to happen every other adventure, what do you do for an encore? Jump to the moon? Kick over a bus? Enjoy *The Haunting*? Without some sense of scale, these critical results -- which, really, are all about making the game more interesting -- become meaningless.

Regardless, turning something that happens 17% of the time into an excuse for an unending series of catastrophes is *not* the way to go. And if you do so, they'd be entirely justified in working you over with a cudgel. But don't worry -- at least one out of six times your beaters will knock themselves unconscious, accidentally swallow their blackjacks, sneeze and rip off their arms . . .

Which reminds me that I need to go deal with my car some more. Err . . . hypothetically, that is.

--*Steven Marsh*

Poor Bloody Infantry

for *Ogre/GEV*

by Karl Gallagher

1.0 Introduction

This article provides new rules for using infantry in *Ogre/GEV*, along with scenarios focused on infantry. Some of these rules require *Shockwave* and/or *Ogre Battlefields* to use. New counters are needed for some of the rules; you can print out the attached file on cardstock or make your own.

The following files are included for use with this article:

- [Counters](#)
- [Map for Citadel scenario \(7.0\)](#)
- [Map for Beachhead scenario \(10.0\)](#)

2.0 Missile Reload Packs

2.01 Heavy infantry may replace their one-shot missiles by reloading from a pack of replacements. Reload packs cost 2 VP, have D2, and can only move when carried by another unit. A reload pack takes up one squad's worth of space when being transported by a vehicle.

2.02 A heavy infantry squad may reload by spending a turn in a hex with a reload pack without moving or firing. If the squad, pack, or both are on a vehicle it must also not move or fire during reloading. A single pack holds six reloads (i.e., can reload one squad six times, 3 squads twice each, etc). Each reload pack must have its use tracked and be discarded when its six reloads are used up.

2.03 A reload pack may be put on or taken off a vehicle at the beginning of any movement phase if an infantry unit is present in the same hex.

2.04 A three-point infantry unit may carry a reload pack but may not fire while carrying it. Picking up the pack requires the unit to spend a turn without moving and firing in the same hex as the pack. A reload pack may be dropped at any time (i.e., if the infantry unit is overrun it may drop the pack and fight normally, but would have to pick it up again on the next turn to move with it). A reload pack dropped in a water hex is not lost (it has neutral buoyancy airbags). Enemy reload packs may not be captured, only destroyed.

3.0 Anti-Ogre Mines

3.01 An infantry squad may carry an Anti-Ogre Mine (AOM), a nuclear shaped charge device designed to be placed under the treads of an approaching Ogre in an attempt to disable it. An AOM costs 2 VP and is destroyed if the carrying squad is eliminated. An AOM may be transferred from one squad to another if they are stacked together at the beginning of the movement phase. The carrying squad should be identified secretly so the opponent can't tell who's carrying it until it's used.

3.02 When it's overrun by an Ogre, a squad may use an AOM instead of its regular attack. Roll one die to find the result:

- 1-3** no effect
- 4** 2d tread units destroyed
- 5** 4d tread units destroyed
- 6** 4d tread units destroyed and Ogre is stuck

3.03 The "stuck" result indicates critical subsystem damage to the Ogre, preventing it from moving until field repairs are made. Unsticking the Ogre in combat requires an engineer squad or equivalent unit. Roll one die each turn a squad is in the Ogre's hex without moving, firing, or being fired upon. On a "6" the Ogre can move again at the speed allowed by its remaining tread units.

4.0 Laying Smoke

4.01 Engineer squads may generate smoke clouds to provide cover from laser fire. In place of its regular attack the squad may place a smoke counter in its own hex. This counts as "firing" for other actions. Marine engineers may only do this when on the surface of the water.

4.011 In miniatures games, place black cotton or a felt disk in a 1" radius around the engineer figure. Laser fire is blocked by the actual shape of the smoke.

4.02 A laser may not fire into or through a hex containing smoke (exception-cruise missiles may be fired on). A smoke counter remains on the board until the start of the second friendly fire phase after it was laid.

5.0 Entrenchments

5.01 Engineer squads may create improvised cover for infantry in clear terrain. This is a combination of trenches, foxholes, bunkers, and other shelters. Note that these are deeper than 20th-century entrenchments; a battlesuit can jump out of an six-meter-deep hole to take a shot, and a lot of dirt is needed to shelter from nuclear explosions.

5.02 An engineer squad may create an entrenchment by remaining in a hex without moving or firing for three turns. More squads can speed this up, requiring a total of three engineer-turns.

5.03 An entrenchment in clear terrain doubles the defense strength of infantry in the hex. It has no effect on vehicles or movement. Entrenchments in other terrain have no effect.

5.04 Entrenchments may be included in the initial set-up at a cost of 2 VP each in hexes where infantry units may be set up at the beginning of the game.

6.0 Ogre Critical Hits

6.01 An Ogre has meters-thick BPC armor protecting its vitals, leaving only the weapons and treads vulnerable to attacks. A determined enemy can still mass firepower to try to penetrate that armor, aiming for weak points such as the linkage between the front and rear sections or the fusion plant cooling vents.

6.02 The defense strength against a critical hit depends on the size of the Ogre:

<i>Ogre Model</i>	<i>Defense</i>
Mk I	5
Mk II	11
Mk III	17
Ninja	20
Mk IV	22
Fencer	25
Mk V	27
Doppelsoldner	32
Mk VI	33

6.03 The effect of a critical hit is variable, since the core systems are so close together that a dozen centimeters can change which components are affected. If an "X" result is achieved, roll one die:

- 1 no effect
- 2 can't fire for 1d turns
- 3 can't move for 1d turns
- 4 can't fire until repaired
- 5 can't move until repaired
- 6 destroyed

6.04 An "XX" result on a critical hit attack destroys the Ogre (but leaves a hulk).

6.05 Field repairs may be attempted on the Ogre as in 3.03. If the engineers are working on a "can't fire" damage result the Ogre must not move while the engineers are working.

Scenarios

7.0 Citadel

Sun Tzu wrote "Take what the enemy holds dear and await attack." A Combine mechanized infantry force took that to heart, capturing a small city with an autofac critical to Paneuropean logistics on that front. While their GEV-PCs go for reinforcements the MI set up to hold the city. Cruise missile detonations would destroy the autofac, so the Paneuros have to dig them out the hard way.

7.01 Basic Setup. The GEV map is used. All hexes on or north of the road from 0104 to 2304 are town hexes, representing the city. The defender sets up with 30 points of infantry and a LHWZ anywhere in the city. The attacker enters from the southern edge with 20 armor units.

7.02 Special Rules. The attacker may not take any armor units with M1 or M2-this is a rapid reaction force and anything slow had to be left behind. He may exchange an armor unit for three points of infantry but they may only enter riding on vehicles. No cruise missiles may be used by either side.

7.03 Escape. Defending units may not escape. Attacking units may escape off the E, S, or W map edges.

7.04 Objectives and Victory Conditions. The attacker needs to recover the autofac to hold the line-the defender needs it to sustain a breakthrough. Whoever has units left in the city at the end of the game is the winner. If the winner has more than 1/3 of his original force left (in VPs) it's a decisive victory. The players may agree to a draw if neither player can make an effective attack.

7.05 Alternate Maps. This scenario may be played on other maps with the same forces. The set-up locations are:

Shockwave: city is road 0115 to 1822 and hexes to southwest. Enter from North.

G-3: city is road 0401 to 0422 and hexes to west. Enter from East.

S-3: city is road 0104 to 2304 and hexes to north. Enter from south.

7.06 Advanced Scenario. Defender has 45 infantry squads and a HWZ. Attacker has 35 armor units.

7.07 Ogre scenario. Defender has 40 infantry squads and a HWZ. Attacker has an Ogre Mk V.

8.0 Convoy

Few missions are as boring as escorting a supply convoy. Few are more exciting than attacking one.

8.01 Basic Setup. Defender has 10 trucks carrying cargo (may not be used to transport infantry), 8 armor units, and 6 infantry squads. Additional trucks may be taken to transport the infantry at no cost-those trucks will not count for victory points. The attacker has two options for his force:

1. 3 armor units, 12 infantry squads, set up on board
2. 10 armor units entering from off the board (no MHWZ allowed, an armor unit may be exchanged for 3 squads of infantry)

The defender enters on a road in column (i.e., the 2nd stack of units must expend 1 movement point before entering the board, the 3rd must expend 2, etc.) and secretly notes the road hex on the opposite side of the board that they will exit on. Some units may be held off-board to enter on a later turn, but all must enter through the same hex. The attacker then reveals whether he chose option 1 or 2 for his force. Option 1 units are set up on the board at least 5 hexes from any defending unit. Option 2 units enter from a map edge chosen by the defender. The attacker may move and fire normally on his first turn.

8.02 Special Rules. The attacker may be given an advantage by using the town and bridge destruction rules.

8.03 Escape. Attacking units may escape from any map edge. Defending units may escape from the entry and exit road hexes. Units which escape may not reenter the map.

8.04 Objectives and Victory Points. The attacker gets 10 VPs for every cargo truck destroyed. The defender gets 10 VPs for every truck that exits at the designated hex. Trucks that escape through the entry point or are stranded on the board count for no points. Count points for destroyed units normally.

8.05 Victory Levels. If one player has 0-15 VPs more than the other the game is a draw. 16-30 VPs more is a marginal victory. More than 30 VPs ahead is a decisive victory.

8.06 Alternate Maps. Map G-3 is best for this scenario, but S-3 or the GEV map may also be used.

8.07 Advanced Scenario. The defender has hovertrucks instead of trucks. The attacking force is doubled. Hovertrucks count for VPs if they exit the opposite map edge, not just the road hex.

8.08 Ogre Scenario. The defender has hovertrucks instead of trucks. The attacking force is an Ogre Mk IV entering from the side chosen by the defender. Hovertrucks count for VPs if they exit the opposite map edge, not just the road hex.

9.0 Forlorn Hope

The division of labor is clear-tanks attack, infantry defends. But when the armor failed the Combine faced a 200-mile retreat unless it could disrupt the Paneuropean offensive. So posts all along the line were stripped of their troops. If the infantry can break the Paneuro supply line High Command will release the reserve and cruise missiles. If not, well, there wasn't enough transport to get them to the Pyrenees line anyway.

9.01 Basic Set-up. The Shockwave map is used. The defender has 10 armor units, 8 infantry squads, and a 60 SP Strongpoint in hex 0811 (this is an ammo and fuel dump-defending units may not use it for shelter). Defending units must be set up within 8 hexes of the strongpoint. The attacker enters from the east edge with 48 points of infantry (squads may be exchanged for heavy weapons squads (at 2:1) or reload packs (at 1:1)).

9.02 Escape. Units may escape from any map edge.

9.03 Objectives and Victory Points. The strongpoint is a warehouse with the fuel and ammo needed to maintain the Paneuropean forces. The destruction of the building is the only factor that matters in deciding victory.

9.04 Victory Levels. If the attacker completely destroys the building and has more than six squads left he has a decisive victory. Destroying the building is a marginal attacker victory. If 30 or more points of damage is done to the building the game is a draw. If the building has less than 30 points of damage the game is a marginal defense victory. If the building is undamaged it's a decisive defense victory.

9.05 Alternate Maps. This scenario may be played on other maps with the same forces. The set-up locations are:

- GEV:** Strongpoint in 1408, attackers enter from west or south.
- G-2:** Strongpoint in 1610, attackers enter from west or south.
- G-3:** Strongpoint in 1210, attackers enter from east, west, or south.
- S-3:** Strongpoint in 0814, attackers enter from north or east.

9.06 Advanced Scenario. Double defending force. Attacker has 36 squads regular infantry, 12 squads heavy weapons infantry, six reload packs, and six GEV-PCs.

9.07 Ogre Scenario. Defender has an Ogre Mk III. Attacker has 48 points of infantry.

10.0 Beachhead

D-Day -- brutal, bloody, and complicated. While the fleet stands offshore protecting itself with lasers and smokescreens, the marines must lead the way to capture a port that more forces can be landed at.

10.01 Basic Setup. The GEV map is used, with all land other than the SE island treated as water hexes. The defender sets up on the island with 2 laser towers, 3 laser turrets, 30 points of infantry, 6 entrenchments, 12 armor units, a 60 SP strongpoint, 3 20 SP admin buildings, and 4 large revetments (each of which may be exchanged for 2 small revetments). The attacker may enter from the map edge from hex 0105 to 0701. Some attacking units may be held back to later turns. The attacker has 12 marine engineer squads, 60 points of other infantry, and 30 armor units. One landing craft is provided for every unit that needs one.

10.02 Special Rules. The attacker's regular infantry and armor units may enter the map riding landing craft (LC)-this is a D1, M1 unit that holds one armored unit (size 5 or smaller) or three infantry squads. Attacks are applied to the LC and its carried unit with the same die roll. If the LC is disabled by an attack the carried unit may still move or fire normally. If the LC is destroyed the carried unit is also destroyed, except for infantry which is placed swimming in the hex. An LC may not enter any terrain except water. If the LC is adjacent to a land hex at the beginning of the movement phase the carried unit may move onto the land hex normally. Carried infantry may dismount to swim at any time.

10.03 Escape. Defending units may escape from the south or east edges of the map. Attacking units may escape from the entry zone.

10.04 Objectives and Victory Conditions. The attacker needs to seize a landing point to bring in heavy units by ship. Victory levels are as follows:

Only attacking units are on the land and more than 1/3 of attacking force is left	decisive attacker victory
Only attacking units are on the land	marginal attacker victory
Both sides have units on land	draw
Only defending units are on land	marginal defender victory
Only defending units are on land and 2 lasers and 44 VP of defending units are still operational	decisive defender victory

10.05 Alternate Maps. This scenario may be played on other maps with the same forces. The set-up locations are:

- G-2:** Land is NE corner to stream, attacker enters from 0118 to 1123.
- G-3:** Land is NW corner to stream, attacker enters from 1101 to 2308.
- S-3:** Land is SW corner to stream, attacker enters from 1001 to 2306.

10.06 Advanced Scenario. Add to the basic set-up: The attacker uses armored landing craft (LCA) with D2, M2, and

may fire one cruise missile per turn from offboard. The defender may place 12 mines (see GEV 8.02) and 8 obstacles.

10.061 Obstacles. A maze of concrete blocks and steel beams may be placed in shallow water to render it impassable. An obstacle hex cannot be entered by landing craft or armor. Infantry and Ogres treat it as swamp. The location of an obstacle is recorded during set-up and revealed when an enemy unit comes within 3 hexes. Engineers can clear paths through the obstacle-three squad-turns without moving or firing in the hex will allow landing craft and Ogres to treat it as a normal water hex (infantry may still treat it as swamp).

10.07 Ogre Scenario. Add to the advanced set-up: The attacker gets an Ogre Mk V entering underwater (it won't fit on a landing craft). The defender may fire one cruise missile per turn from offboard.

Alternate Impudites: Another Take on the Takers

for *In Nomine*

by Eric A. Burns

The Impudites are a challenging Band of demons to play in *In Nomine*. Unlike all other celestials, they have penalties assigned to every use of their resonance. Their Band Attunements often do little more than give them break even chances to affect their targets with their resonance. Even their dissonance conditions are difficult -- if a Mercurian gains the Murderous Discord, ultimately Falling as a result, that same Discord will make an Impudite dissonant.

This is an alternate view of Impudites, which players and GMs may use in their games, along with alternate Band Attunements from the major Superiors where appropriate. These Impudites are even more charming and seductive, but are also all the more selfish . . . and dangerous.

Impudites

The Takers

The demon wheeled into the alley. The Malakim wouldn't be delayed by the traffic accident long. He needed cover and he needed it fast.

Up ahead was a dance club's back door. A bouncer stood outside, making sure gate crashers didn't slip in the back. Perfect. The Impudite smiled, running up to the man. "Hey," he said, pushing with the back of his soul into the bouncer's. "Can't you let a guy slip in? C'mon . . ."

The bouncer's scowl seemed to melt, and he smiled. "For you, man, anything," he said, opening the door. "You have a good time, now. And don't tell anyone, or we're both in trouble."

"Whatever," the demon thought, waving as he slipped through the door and into the mass of sweet humanity beyond. Let's see the blackwings find him now.

The most charming and apparently sympathetic of all demons, Impudites are also the most selfish of a self-centered lot. Everybody's best friend and closest confidant, Impudites surf through existence on the backs of others, taking and using what they want and making sure someone else pays the price. With enough time and effort, their "friends" will even offer up their very Essence to these charming takers.

Resonance

Where Mercurians can perceive the relationships that surround all beings, Impudites can force those relationships onto others. They have the ability to push their own symphony onto others, making their victims like or even love them, and willing to sacrifice everything for them. Impudites use this gift to get everything they want, from special favors and gifts to the very Essence that others usually hold so dear.

Dissonance

Even as an Impudite is so adept at convincing others to sacrifice on the Impudite's behalf, no Impudite is willing to inconvenience himself for others. Whenever an Impudite chooses to put another's interests before his own, he suffers dissonance. This doesn't mean Impudites can't be helpful, if their interests and another's coincides, but it's a sure bet no Impudite will ever do for another without having a personal agenda driving it.

Obviously, it's within an Impudite's best interests to obey his Superior, so he can help his fellow demons -- even to the point of inconvenience and sacrifice -- if ordered to from above. He can also be relatively subtle in his manipulations, so long as there is clearly greater reward than cost to his actions. For example, if an Impudite wants to sleep with a beautiful young activist, he can give money to a homeless man as a means of impressing her without suffering dissonance. (Though if his attempt to seduce the woman does fail, his earlier "generosity" will cause him delayed dissonance, making "investments" sometimes risky.)

Manner And Appearance

Impudites are the demons most close to humanity. They understand human beings, interacting smoothly and well with them. Even without their resonance, Impudites are warm, charming, and gregarious, getting to know everyone in a room and glad-handing their way into high society at any chance. Only Mercurians are so adept at interacting with humanity.

At the same time, Impudites are self-absorption and vanity incarnate. They can't stand to be anything less than the best looking, best dressed person in the room, and spend inordinate amounts of time on clothes, makeup, accessories, and everything that goes with them. Of course, someone else inevitably pays for all of these things -- after all, the Impudite is such a great guy, how could you not buy him a new suit? As social creatures, Impudites are typically surrounded by beautiful people, all of whom are lavish with the attention and praise the Impudite so craves.

In celestial form, an Impudite looks like his most recent vessel, with a slight (and very attractive) reddish cast to his skin. They have slender leather wings, immaculately kept, small red horns, and a dark halo that clings to their head, almost enthralling in its malevolence. In their own symphonies, they're the lead singer at the front of the stage, with all the hands of the audience reaching out to them.

Game Mechanics

An Impudite rolls against his resonance to Charm his victims. This is a normal resonance roll with no penalties. The victim resists with a Will roll, and if successfully resisted, an Impudite will not be able to resonate that victim for a number of hours equal to the Will roll's check digit.

The Charm is almost intoxicating, with a level of commitment, friendship and even love for the Impudite filling the victim. The victim really, really likes the Impudite, and continues to do so no matter what the Impudite does, short of physically harming the victim, for a number of hours equal to the Resonance's check digit.

The Impudite also can influence one social interaction with his successful resonance roll. After successfully Charming someone, the next socially based skill roll (such as Emote, Fast-Talk, Lying, Savoir-Faire or Seduction) made against the target receives the resonance roll's check digit as a bonus. If this skill roll fails, the victim is still Charmed unless the failed skill's check digit was 6, in which case the Charm is broken. If the Impudite needs something more from his victim, he must roll another resonance roll for each successive social skill roll made.

As a more sophisticated use of resonance (see the *Infernal Player's Guide* for details), an Impudite can attempt to actually Charm a person into subconsciously giving them their Essence. The victim must already be Charmed before attempting this more difficult task. The Impudite must make a resonance roll, at -2 for the difficulty, and at a further penalty equal to the victim's Celestial and Ethereal Forces. Finally, the Impudite must be in physical contact with the victim for the transfer to take place. If Impudite is successful, the victim voluntarily pushes his or her Essence into the Impudite, whose Essence total is increased by this amount (though never above their maximum Essence total). If the victim is not Symphonically Aware, they automatically give up all of their Essence, whether the Impudite can use it or not. (A normal human without Symphonic awareness typically has 1d6-4 Essence to spare.) If the victim is Symphonically aware (such as another demon, an angel, or a soldier), they give up a number of points of Essence equal to the resonance roll's check digit (or all the Essence they have if less than the check digit), whether the Impudite can use them or not. This process is entirely subconscious -- the victim won't even realize they've lost their Essence. If the difficult resonance roll to take Essence fails, the initial Charm is broken and another cannot be established for a

number of hours equal to the failed roll's check digit. If an Essence stealing attempt fails against a Symphonically aware target, the Charm is broken and the victim knows exactly what the Impudite tried to do.

Revised Band Attunements

These revised attunements replace those Impudite Band Attunements which are resonance or dissonance based (and therefore restricted) in the *In Nomine* main book and appropriate supplements. Any Superior or attunement not listed remains the same as in the source materials.

Alaemon: (*Restricted*) Alaemon's Takers are experts at infiltrating and escaping. They may add their Ethereal Forces to any resonance-enhanced skill roll to either talk their way into a restricted area or talk their way out of one. This includes talking their way out of prisons.

Andrealphus: (*Restricted*) Impudites of Lust may add their Corporeal Forces to any resonance enhanced skill roll to seduce or otherwise convince another to perform a specific sexual act with them.

Baal: Experts in the etiquette of combat and the duel of face, Impudites of the War may add their Celestial Forces to any roll made in an honorable duel by a given society's rules. This can be from the use of dueling pistols to fencing to a back alley street fight where a bar eggs the participants on.

Beleth: Charged with nightmares of humiliation and social embarrassment, Beleth's Takers can see a victim's social weaknesses with a glance. When confronted with this embarrassment publicly, their victims must make a Will roll or flee from all public areas in terror and humiliation.

Belial: (*Restricted*) Belial's Takers evoke the dark hunger for fire in men's souls. When in the presence of open flame, Impudites of Fire can use their resonance to captivate their victims into staring at and approaching the flames, ignoring all other stimuli, for a number of rounds equal to the roll's check digit. During this time, they may Charm essence from their victim, attack their victim, or even push him into the fire without breaking the effect. Dousing the flames breaks the captivation.

Fleurity: (*Restricted*) The overly social, overly friendly Takers of Drugs -- a title that is all too fitting, most of the time -- are also expert pushers. They may add their Celestial Forces to any resonance-enhanced skill roll when convincing someone to use drugs.

Haagenti: (*Restricted*) These overconsumers spur their victims into frenzies of conspicuous consumption. They may add their Celestial Forces to any attempt to use a resonance-enhanced social skill to convince a victim to buy, eat or otherwise consume something.

Kobal: As per *In Nomine* p.171, save that there is no benefit or penalty for the death of a human. This attunement is not partially restricted.

Malphas: (Partially restricted) As per *In Nomine* p.175.

Mammon: (*Restricted*) Mammon's Impudites may, with a successful resonance roll, convince their targets that they're getting a sweet deal and taking advantage of the Impudite -- no matter how completely the Impudite is ripping them off. The victim will remain convinced he has taken the Impudite in completely for a number of days equal to the check digit, even if confronted with evidence to the contrary.

Saminga: (*Restricted*) Saminga's darkly seductive Takers excel in sowing the seeds of the ultimate sacrifice. Impudites of Death may add their Celestial Forces to any resonance enhanced skill to convince their victim to commit suicide.

Vapula: (*Restricted*) The ultimate technology users, Vapulan Impudites can use their resonance to enhance skills "coaxing" performance or information out of technology, whether an attempt at hacking a computer with Computer Operation skill or pushing their automobile far past the limit with Driving skill, and everything in between.

Pyramid Review

Cryptic Alliances & Unknown Enemies (for Gamma World)

Published by [Sword & Sorcery](#)

Written by Owen K.C. Stephens, Alejandro Melchor, & Geoff Skellams

Edited by Ellen P. Kiley

Art by Steve Becker, Mike Chaney, Jeff Holt, & Jeff Rebner

128-page b&w softcover; \$22.99

Some game supplements suffer from a lack of direction, while others have a laser-like intensity in the treatment of their subject. *Cryptic Alliances & Unknown Enemies*, a *Gamma World* supplement from Sword & Sorcery, falls into the latter category.

The supposed thrust of the book is to increase the social factor in your games. It expands the community and alliance rules from *Gamma World*, and adds details about leadership. It takes these few subjects and explains the hell out of them.

Specific examples of the allegiances from the core rules sit next to new kinds of allegiances. External ones are those imposed on a person from without, as with brain implants and such, while those dedicated to an object have sworn fealty to some item, device, or place, like a benevolent computer system that spews survival advice. It also talks about allegiances to one's own self, and it stretches the device by talking about opposed "allegiances" -- which keeps things homogeneous in relation to the rulebook, but it comes off a bit forced. More important is the separation of advice on allegiances as part of the narrative and as a set of rules, which is one of that chapter's stronger features. It ends with descriptions of over a dozen of the titular cryptic alliances, which contains some old favorites mixed with clever newcomers.

Then there's leadership. If you didn't know how to lead before, you do now. There are various methods, different tactics taken by different heroes (how the Smart Hero leads vs. the Strong Hero's SOP), how your followers' allegiances figure into it, how equipment may give you the edge, what kind of crazy equipment you can find in the *Gamma World*, some new feats to improve your management style, new uses for old skills, a stack of modifiers for impressing others (like what happens if you look like the prophesied archangel), mutations . . . it just keeps going like a gun-toting Energizer Rabbit.

The remainder of the book delves deeply into communities. Using the rules from the core book, it discusses bigger towns, cities that grow up as a series of interconnected but distinct suburbs, more community feats and types (such as the underwater city), and some exceedingly obvious advice on meetings among community members. Do they go in quietly or openly? Do they wage war? What kinds of war can one wage?

Although the drawings for the book are good work -- all showing some of that grit that'll get under your nails in the bleak, dog-eat-mutated-dog world of the future -- the otherwise unremarkable, utilitarian layout suffers one negative, even debilitating hit: Chapter Two. The pages here try for a weathered, dusty look, which includes tiny little splotches (the same rough background page is used over and over). These have the most unfortunate, disconcerting effect of confusing the reader. One moment a dollop of discoloration looks like it hyphenates a word, then a double take shows it for what it is. Another word is obfuscated against the ink, while some little streaks look like commas or periods.

Why this trick of shadow is so consistently off-putting is a mystery, but the problem persists throughout the chapter.

Why the cryptic alliances get equal billing with one's enemies in the title isn't clear. There *are* enemies to be sure, but they're hardly the gist of the book, so the name is at best inaccurate and at worst disappointing. It feels as though it's a collection of semi-related essays under a single, somewhat misleading banner. It's a lot like the wiring in your house -- you can see how it all fits together, you're just not sure how it's supposed to get the job done. If it's all about the social side of interactions, why not more about love? Romance is mentioned, but it certainly isn't served up by the crateful like war is, a painful irony considering the introduction says it wants to place as much emphasis on the former as most other books do the latter.

The language used is a bit too lofty to allow an easy read, but it's intelligent and not inaccessible. Sometimes you'll be amazed at just how much information the writers can impart on a single, seemingly mundane rule or subject; at other times you'll wonder why they expounded for so long on something without managing to say much about it that's new or helpful. Carefully straddling the fence between page turner and page filler, *Cryptic Alliances & Unknown Enemies* may only appeal to a limited audience. But when it actually attends its self-professed mission statement, it shows some insight into social aspects of roleplaying that, while they haven't been ignored by the rest of the industry, certainly haven't seen this much innovation or concentration.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Shadows of Europe (for Shadowrun)

Published by [FanPro](#)

Written by Audun Myhra Bergwitz, Lars Blumenstein, Rob Boyle, Mikael Brodu, Elissa Carey, Dag Fossmo, Alistair Fraser, Anders Hølsted, Nathaniel Jouen, Steve Kenson, Maciej Kowalski, Stephan Meijerhof, João Nunes, Costán Sequeiros, Peter Taylor, Florian Weiss, & Tobias Wolter

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Cartography by Mikael Brodu

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It is fair to say that the *Shadowrun RPG* gives much of its attention to the various nations of North America. Europe has received relatively little coverage; just three countries have been detailed in English, with the *London Sourcebook* covering the United Kingdom of the Sixth World, the *Germany Sourcebook* covering that country, and *Tír na nÓg* exploring the now-Elven-dominated united Ireland. German fans were also able to read a further sourcebook, *Deutschland in Den Schatten Zwei*, plus the campaign, *Shockwellen*. Both of these were official supplements, while *Walzer, Punks and Schwarzes*, and the French language *Shadowrun France* and *Chrom & Dioxin*, were all regarded as being semi-official. Despite the semi-official status of the last three, they -- together with the other supplements listed above -- all serve as the basis for the latest *Shadowrun* supplement, *Shadows of Europe*.

This is the Old World counterpart to last year's *Shadows of North America*, detailing Europe after the passing of Halley's Comet in 2063. Despite having fewer setting supplements to draw upon, the contents of *Shadows of Europe* still tie into a number of other supplements -- most obviously *Year of the Comet*, but also *Threats 2*, *Target: Wastelands*, *State of the Art: 2063*, *Threats 2*, and *Dragons of the Sixth World*. The latter is particularly important because of the number of dragons found in Europe, most notably Lowfyr, head of the Saeder-Krupp Corporation. This is in addition to the usual panoply of supplements required for a *Shadowrun* game.

More accurately, it should be called "Shadows of Western Europe," since it covers only two nations in the East, Poland and the Czech Republic. It does devote two pages to the Baltic States, Belarus, the Ukraine, Hungary, Slovakia, the Balkan states, and the Federal Republic of Hellas (Greece), but this is just not enough. A second supplement is needed to cover all of these countries as well as Russia, the belligerent in the Euro Wars of the 2030s. This series of wars, dominated by Russia's attempted resource grabs in Finland and Poland and the Great Jihad that saw an invasion of Southern Europe, is among a number of events singular to Europe. The others include the schism in the Catholic Church over the status of meta-humans, the North-South divide between organized crime with the Mafia running the South and the Russian Vory the North, and the reformation of an old dream.

The old European Union was officially defunct by the Crash of '29. Yet during the opening months of 2063, many of its original members had signed on as founder states of the New European Economic Community. Of course, like so much of the Sixth World, the NEEC is heavily influenced by corporate affairs and it has four of its council seats taken by corporations. The new, sleeker, more streamlined NEEC is one more focal point for shadowrunning, this one political in nature and primarily centered on the independent Brussels Euro City. All of this is covered in the book's first chapter, "Crossing the Pond," along with descriptions of Europe's leading corporations (including several new ones) and its Awakened elements. North America is of course, dominated by Amerindian traditions, but Druids and Wiccans are far more common in Europe. These are discussed as are the Fey.

Once the introduction to Europe and the NEEC is out of the way, *Shadows of Europe* gets down to a nation-by-nation description. This is organized alphabetically and covers the Allied German States, Austria, the Czech Republic, France, the Italian Confederation, Poland, Portugal, the Scandinavian Union, Spain and Euskal Herria (the independent Basque nation), Switzerland, Tír na nÓg, the United Kingdom, and the United Netherlands. Most are accompanied by a map -- actually an expanded section taken from the one given in the first chapter -- that provides a little more detail, though more would have been nice. Unlike *Shadows of North America*, none of the flags for the nations it covers is given. This is not only a shame, but also odd given that the logos of various new corporations are included.

Besides the maps, every chapter includes a short timeline of the country and a table of providing its socio-economic breakdown. This table lists population make-up, per capita income, the estimated number of SINless, the percentage of those living below the poverty level, corporate affiliation, level of education, languages spoken, and the currencies in use and their conversion rates with the Nuyen. Finally, it gives the degree of coverage and promised response time of the various emergency medical organizations across Europe.

Besides the effect of the continent's major events upon its history, each country has its own problems. For example, Spain is torn over whether a meta-human can be its king, and Poland is a Russian-dominated military dictatorship facing guerilla resistance. In the United Kingdom, the New Druidic Movement has its own problems with a protest movement lead by a charismatic man identified only as Pendragon, and a Druidic conflict over England's ley lines that has resulted in the appearance of a strange island in the English Channel. (Hopefully, this Arthurian theme will not be carried too far, as it is perhaps too obvious and could be described as the gaming equivalent of chintz.) Each country has a different feel, and hopefully a GM will be able to impart much of this flavor to his players.

The last 20 or so pages are devoted to information pertaining to the game rather than the setting. Country by country, it tells you what is really going on, though only briefly, with the information tying into earlier chapters. For the most part, it leaves the exact truth up to the GM to decide, so that he is not handcuffed by the "official" canon.

The presentation for *Shadows of Europe* is the same as other *Shadowrun* supplements. While still a series of documents posted to the "Shadowlands BBS," there is less conjecture and commentary included than in previous books. Further, the Shadowlands BBS' sysop has turned to the sysop of a European BBS to gather a number of experts to each comment upon his or her own home nation. Although this gives rise to a series of disparate voices, care has been taken to examine how the events of last 60 years have affected each nation. This gives the book a coherent feel, and is a pleasing testament to the organizational abilities of both the writing team *and* the editors -- Rob Boyle, Elissa Carey, Jack Graham, Rik Hakala, and Michelle Lyons.

Physically, the book is reasonably well done, but does suffer from a number of printing errors. Most of the artwork is decent enough, but some of it is too cartoon-like in comparison with other *Shadowrun* books. One major omission is the lack of an index, which given the size of the book and the wealth of material contained, does not make it user-friendly.

With so little actual game information contained within its pages, *Shadows of Europe* presents a hefty dose of setting information. Where it is weakest is in its updating of the three countries that have had their own supplements -- Germany, Tír na nÓg, and the United Kingdom. The updates feel like mere tweaks, but if the GM lacks the supplements these chapters update, and many *Shadowrun 3* GMs do, then the information is still very welcome. As is that given for the other 11 countries, which adds to both the setting and describes opportunities aplenty for adventure.

Begun as an online "Eurosource" fan project, *Shadows of Europe* has been several years in the making, but it has been worth the wait. Hopefully, FanPro will follow it up a companion volume on the rest of the continent, and possibly a campaign to take advantage of its contents. Until then, for the *Shadowrun* fan *Shadows of Europe* adds and develops somewhere new to play, but more importantly for the European fan, it lets them play at home.

--*Matthew Pook*

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



American Ley Line: Route 66 (Part Three)

*"Kingman, Barstow, San Bernardino
Won't you get hip to this kindly tip
When you make that California trip
Get your kicks on Route 66."*

-- Bobby Troup, "Get Your Kicks on Route 66"

Two weeks ago, we [continued](#) to trace the ghostly pattern of Route 66 from Joplin, Missouri to Kingman, Arizona. America's Mother Road, Route 66 remains archetypally alive in a way that I-40 has yet to attain. It's that "aliveness," that quality of Something Else Here, that we're mapping, and that you can possibly use in your own games. This week, we reach the ocean, and the end, and look back to see where we've been. As before, there are too many roadside seductions, too many possible map readings, to get to them all even in three columns. Over the thrum of the tires and the roar of the air conditioner, I point out a few sights as we blast across the West and into the morning; I make a few hesitant connections by dashboard light as the AM transmission crackles in, Suppressed by the heat and the distance, and by the very intensity of its occult Signal. Stand on it.

"And 66 goes on over the terrible desert, where the distance shimmers and the black center mountains hang unbearably in the distance. At last there's Barstow, and more desert until at last the mountains rise up again, the good mountains, and 66 winds through them. Then suddenly a pass, and below the beautiful valley, below orchards and vineyards and little houses, and in the distance a city. And, oh, my God, it's over."

-- John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*

Route 66 crosses the Colorado River at Topock, Arizona (sadly some 20 miles north of Lake Havasu, with London Bridge at the north end and a 135-foot intaglio geoglyph of a serpent at the south end) and swings north to Needles. Here, in Tom Joad's "murder country," it gathers steam for its tear across the Mojave Desert. Here, it passes the oldest living things in North America -- the Joshua trees -- pulling who knows what sustenance up from the UFO-haunted desert. It skirts an extinct volcano in Amboy, runs through Bagdad, then hits the ghost town of Calico (which still has a few ghosts in its abandoned stores and saloons) and then turns southwest at Barstow past a pair of geoglyphs (a skull and a turtle, death and the world). Here it follows the Mormon Trail, pioneered by Jedediah Smith, passing the Victorville fane of yet another American king -- 33rd degree Freemason Roy Rogers, "King of the Cowboys."

At San Bernardino, the old mission dedicated to St. Bernardine of Siena, the patron saint of advertising, the Road leaves the [Waste Land](#) and enters the suburbs. Perhaps appropriately, it passes below another [significant arch](#), or in this case, two of them -- the first McDonald's ever opened, in San Bernardino, on the Road at 14th and E. The Golden Arches lead the way to the American Paradise, Southern California, and refract all along the Highway. Ray Kroc's first franchised McDonald's is at the other end of 66, in Des Plaines, Illinois; America's largest McDonald's is at the fulcrum of the Road -- actually in a bridge across it -- in Vinita, Oklahoma.

Running the length of the Inland Empire, Route 66 strikes the haunted Aztec Motel in Monrovia, with its echoes of human sacrifice and lost rituals. (There is also an Aztec Motel in Albuquerque, and one in Seligman, Arizona.) Farther west, our Rosicrucian hearts gladden to find [Arcadia!](#) Home of the Santa Anita Racetrack (where the rites of Poseidon and Pelops no doubt play out), this is the second Arcadia along the Road -- Arcadia, Oklahoma was founded in 1889 and features an acoustically perfect Round Barn, no doubt useful for overall-clad Templars. In Arcadia, the Highway passes under the eye of (a fancy way of putting "five miles to the south of") Mount Wilson Observatory, built in 1908 at the instigation of a "little elf" who appeared to the astronomer George Ellery Hale. The 100-inch mirror at Mount Wilson, as it happens, was poured of green glass in 1917 -- another [green glass grail](#), manifested by the will of an emerald alien. (Hale's previous observatory, the Yerkes Observatory, is at Williams Bay, Wisconsin; well off the Road -- but associated with the University of Chicago, and significant for all that.) Just a little farther along the Road, still in the San Gabriel foothills, is Devil's Gate, where the rocket scientist and alchemist John Whiteside Parsons tested solid fuel rockets for CalTech. Parsons also went into the Waste Land -- the Mojave Desert -- along the Road to perform magickal rituals, including the Babalon Working of 1946. Between his Pasadena lair and his Mojave pentagrams, the

connections spiral off too thick and fast for us to stop. Likewise, we pass the Huntington Museum in Pasadena with its copy of the [Dead Sea Scrolls](#), collection of [Shakespearean](#) folios, and early works of [American cartography](#) and exploration -- nothing to see here, surely. The Road pours into [Los Angeles](#), down Broadway (four blocks from the ghost-built Bradbury Building) and onto Sunset Boulevard, Santa Monica Boulevard, and the end in sight of the Pacific Ocean at Olympic.

*"Jesus lived his life in a cheap hotel
On the edge of Route 66 yeah he lived a dark and
Twisted life and he came right back just to do it
Again"*
-- Rob Zombie, "Supercharger Heaven"

Let's go back and take another look at the Road, this time as a sacred pilgrimage route. (66, kabbalistically, equates to A-L-L-H, or "Allah.") Pilgrim roads are, of course, some of the earliest and most resilient; the Highway itself lies atop the old Mormon Trail through Arizona and California. This stretch of Route 66 (all the way to the Llano Estacado in Texas) was surveyed, and its first wagon road built, by Lieutenant Edward F. Beale of the U.S. Navy commanding a train of 77 (!) camels especially imported from Turkey along with a drover, one Hadji Ali. ("Hi Jolly," as his American teamsters called him, is buried in Quartzsite, Arizona beneath a pyramid surmounted by a copper camel -- not, sadly, on the Road, but one can't have everything.) In the *Zohar*, camels paced out the borders of Eden; in the West, perhaps they pace out the Sacred Way to the [Big Rock Candy Mountain](#).

Sacred imagery runs all along the Road, from the Black Madonna in Eureka, Missouri (and the connections between "eureka!" and gnosis we shall leave for the interested reader to tease out) to the "Holy Grail" in Flagstaff, Arizona (the eyepiece of the telescope that discovered Pluto). Percival Lowell saw this, when he recast himself as an anchorite, a "hermit" monk of astronomy, saying "Astronomy now demands bodily abstraction of its devotee . . . To see into the beyond requires purity . . . Only in places above and aloof from men can he profitably pursue his search." These words appear in the inscription on Lowell's tomb, on Mars Hill in Flagstaff. The astronomers (of Flagstaff and Mt. Wilson alike) are the [Grigori](#), the Watchers from the ivory towers of these American [Irems](#). But the Road is not about contemplation alone; it is about travel. As the anthropologist Victor W. Turner says, "If mysticism is an interior pilgrimage, pilgrimage is exteriorized mysticism." Or, in American: Go West, young man.

"The famous old American highway 'Route 66' was laid out by Freemasons with the apparent intention of sending masses of automobile riders into a self-processing occult 'trip.'"
-- Michael A. Hoffman II, *Secret Societies and Psychological Warfare*

Route 66 is thus an initiatory journey, perhaps explicitly from the Crown (here understood as the [mystical kingdom of America](#)) to Understanding (66 also being the mystic number of the path from Kether to Chokmah). Beginning with the "fountain fed by four springs" of Buckingham's Eden in the city of the (reborn) phoenix, we progress through the arch into peril and danger, enter death's chariot outside Amarillo, see the Ancient Ones and then the bones of the Waste Land in the western desert where the Egyptians knew the dead dwelt. After the perilous journey, we arrive in the Blessed Land Behind The Sunset, [Brendan](#)'s paradise of apples and pure water -- or oranges and Coca-Cola.

One can mark the stages in many ways: for example, there are twelve cities mentioned by name in "Get Your Kicks On Route 66." (Nat "King" Cole, he of the intriguing nickname, who first recorded Bobby Troup's classic hymn to the highway, was a Freemason. Just thought you'd like to know.) That equals the twelve signs of the zodiac, much as Robert Graves has assigned them to the Twelve Labors of Heracles or the twelve incidents on the voyage of the Argonauts. Just running through them in an ad hoc way, we begin at Chicago, the slaughterhouse city of the Bulls (Taurus); proceed to St. Louis from whence the "hidden twin" of Route 66, [Lewis and Clark](#)'s hieratic voyage, departs (or which is "twinned" by Cahokia across the river, Gemini either way); and so forth until you get to the Los Angeles Rams (Aries). (Or you could go backward through the zodiac to the upstart St. Louis Rams for Aries.) Some of them can be made to work out pretty well: there's another "[white lady](#)" haunting the Amarillo Natatorium nightclub (Virgo), and Flagstaff makes a dandy metaphorical cave of Chiron, with its connotations of astronomy and withdrawal (Sagittarius).

"It was a continuous carnival. . . . Around every curve was something amazing. Not only scenery, but . . . all the neon signs . . . come-ons to get your dollar. Python pits and freak shows where you'd pay 50 cents to see 'The world's most amazing snakes!' or 'the half woman-half man.'"

-- David Knudson, executive director of the National Historic Route 66 Federation

In general, this is the kind of thing where it will be up to you to add elements from your own game (or do more research than I did) to really hammer stuff home. Pull up elements from your reading and [illuminate](#) them -- for example, the quote above nicely combines snakes, the mystical androgyne, Carnival, and the Mother Road. Double the incidence of incidents, and parallel the 24 books of the *Odyssey*. Or cut it back: you can perform the same trick with the seven planets or the seven Sufi latifah (as we saw with Sinbad's initiatory journey) for seven states along the Road; just leave out Kansas or consider whichever state you start from "Earth." You can draw an interesting parallel to Coronado's Seven Cities of Cibola, too, or lift an idea from Greg Stolze's *To Go* and assign a chakra to each of seven waypoints and recast Route 66 as the channel for America's kundalini. I'd recommend Chicago, St. Louis, Oklahoma City, Los Alamos/Albuquerque, Flagstaff, the Mojave, and Los Angeles for a nice spread, but much of the fun of this is coming up with your own tortured parallels and inflicting them on the players.

"Thus, the Gestapo's 'SS,' as well as Her Majesty's 'Secret Service,' Britain's 'MI6,' and the American military's 'Special Services,' all code for '66' as in 'Phillips 66' and 'Route 66 -- America's highway.' Historic accounts link all of these to Rockefeller and/or Royal Family involvements."

-- Leonard Horowitz, "Kissinger and Vaccinations"

A final thought, a tentative shading of a secret history of the Highway for your consideration, to contrast with the overt history covered in [Part One](#) of this odyssey. One notes with some interest the emergence of the "Good Roads Association," begun by the Greenback-Populist currency-reformer Jacob Coxey in 1892 to lobby for road-building as a farm economy panacea (and after the Depression of 1893, as a jobs program). Coxey's allies included such interesting folk as Colonel Albert Augustus Pope, the owner of the largest bicycle manufacturing firm in America and himself the founder of the League of American Wheelmen (66, kabbalistically, can equal G-L-G-L, *galgal*, or "wheel"), and the fanatical and Ignatius Donnelly, the fiery Populist crusader, [Atlantis](#) theorist, and [Baconian](#) devotee. A kind of steampunk ley-line knowledge corpus develops almost invisibly, from gears and chains, to ciphers and maps, to the economic alchemy of Free Silver. The most interesting of Coxey's Associators was the fanatical [California Theosophist](#) agitator Carl Browne. Browne combined the male and female spirit, having absorbed his wife's ghost after her death, a mystical androgyne "born on the Fourth of July" in a log cabin, no less -- a possible candidate for [True King of America](#)? Browne met Coxey at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893 (where [H.H. Holmes](#) was carrying out his own dark coronation), and converted Coxey to Theosophy, proposing a march on Washington -- a mystical pilgrimage -- beginning on Easter Sunday, 1894 and arriving at the Capitol on May Day. Capitol police arrested Coxey and Browne and "Coxey's Army" faded away. Where, precisely, might the threads might run between the Theosophical Good Roads Association, the Rosicrucian [NYMZA society](#) secretly building airships in California and Texas, and the 1896-1897 appearances of the [Mysterious Airship](#) above Chicago, Los Angeles, and St. Louis, among other places along the future Mother Road? What was the Good Roads group to the government-approved Masonic Road builders a generation later? A shadow organization? A parent faction? A Discordian rival? Who knows? Get on the Road, follow wherever it leads, and get *your* kicks on Route 66.

A Brief Look at Dice and Rules

I'm a bit busy this week, mostly because of my efforts to research buying a new -- cheap -- car, after receiving a settlement from my insurance company that could be used to buy a fair-condition beta Black Lotus for *Magic: The Gathering*. As a result, my column isn't the full-blown affair that it would normally be. The Ewoks are already celebrating, no doubt.

Anyway, [last week's column](#) -- where I talk about critical failures and successes -- seems to be popular with folks, so I thought I'd expand a bit on the ideas behind that.

Over on the [message boards](#), some ideas were tossed around to adapt the idea of the "wild die" Critical Success/Failure to *GURPS*. (To recap, in the *D6 System* one of the dice in the dice pool is a Wild Die, where a 6 can represent Something Good happening and a 1 can represent Something Bad.) Probably the most interesting aspect of this system is that it makes it possible for a roll to succeed, and still technically be a "Critical Failure." This was exemplified in the example about how one hero in the "[Kensington Codex](#)" adventure made his search roll to find a clue . . . and ended up breaking the clue he was hoping to find. (This isn't used to hose the players, but rather make the game more interesting.)

Anyway, the easiest way I thought of to adapt the idea to *GURPS* was to designate one of the dice in any roll as a Wild Die, and use the idea there, only inverted. Thus a "1" would indicate a Critical Success, while a "6" would indicate a Critical Failure. Of course, the existence of a Critical Success or Failure wouldn't actually make the roll more likely to succeed or fail . . . although having one of three dice be a 6 where rolling high is bad obviously skews things in favor of the failure regardless.

To make the chances of a success or failure more likely to coincide with a Critical Success or Failure, I also proposed that having the Wild Die would subtract one on a 1 and add 1 on a 6. This would make success or failure more likely -- and the bell curve of all rolls more variable -- without mandating success or failure on one die. Roger Burton West was good enough to calculate the odds of this variable system for *GURPS*:

Rolled Total	Number of permutations (out of 216)	Chance to roll exactly this	Chance to roll this or less	Chance to roll less this or greater
2	1	0.5	0.5%	100.0%
3	2	0.9	1.4%	99.5%
4	4	1.9	3.2%	98.6%
5	7	3.2	6.5%	96.8%
6	11	5.1	11.6%	93.5%
7	16	7.4	19.0%	88.4%
8	19	8.8	27.8%	81.0%
9	23	10.6	38.4%	72.2%
10	25	11.6	50.0%	61.6%
11	25	11.6	61.6%	50.0%
12	23	10.6	72.2%	38.4%
13	19	8.8	81.0%	27.8%
14	16	7.4	88.4%	19.0%
15	11	5.1	93.5%	11.6%
16	7	3.2	96.8%	6.5%
17	4	1.9	98.6%	3.2%
18	2	0.9	99.5%	1.4%
19	1	0.5	100.0%	0.5%

This flattens a bit the curve over the usual system, making the extreme results slightly more common (and creating two otherwise impossible results -- 2 and 19).

Anyway, the discussion on the boards sparked a reminiscence of the classic article "[Dice of Destiny](#)," where various dice of a roll are designated with attributes. Thus on a three-die **GURPS** roll, one die might be designated "accuracy," one might be "power," and another might be "style." The results of the dice can give an indication as to how you did; on a successful roll, rolling well on the "power" die but less well on the other two would indicate that you almost failed, but were able to brute-force your way through the situation. It's an interesting article, and one I can recommend for food for thought.

Basically, the discussion brought to mind two points, one of which I might share with you now. (But if your browser "Back" button still works, then I might not.)

I'm pretty sure I've said it before, but I love rule tinkering. I don't believe I'm alone in this, either. Although I generally believe that the game system should be fairly transparent, I also realize that a roleplaying game is still a *game* . . . and, as such, should have game-like elements. (What, exactly, those are, I'm not certain of . . . although I think it'd make a good future column.)

For my games, I don't generally believe in One True System, and am constantly looking for new ideas that are interesting, pretty easy, and fun. And these ideas aren't necessarily confined to one game. For example, White Wolf's pre-reboot Storyteller system has a "Willpower" system, rated between 1 and 10; supernaturals have between 5 and 8 points on average, while 2 is a common rating for most normal people (of which there are about a dozen in the World of Darkness). Among other uses, a player can use Willpower point for one automatic success level; used by itself, this signifies a marginal success. In other words, through sheer force of will someone can muddle through a moderately difficult task. (Since a marginal success isn't good enough to solve, say, the Theory of Everything, the system avoids most obvious exploitations.) Willpower points recover fairly slowly, and often only when the character does something that's affirming to its philosophy and outlook on life. Anyway, the point is that this system can be stolen for almost any game that has a [degree of success](#). Sure, it would make the players more able to do moderately difficult tasks with assured success, but the Bad Guys would have access to the same points, so it should all balance out.

In any well-rounded RPG library, there are bound to be lots of beloved rulebooks and supplements that have lots of little bits which can be adapted to another game without too much effort. Most general effects -- task resolution, skills, actions, and the like -- have analogs between systems. And of course -- not to state the obvious -- books within the same system but different games can still be used; introducing a planet of "magicians" (aliens with strange abilities) to a *d20 Future* setting is trivial for anyone with a *Dungeons & Dragons Player's Handbook*. Likewise introducing a vampiric antagonist (or protagonist) to an *Adventure!* game is simple if you also have a copy of *Vampire* lying around. As another example, *Fading Suns* has a system of linked attributes; thus one's Faith attribute and Ego attribute are linked, so that they cannot exceed a total when added together, nor can the character's dominant attribute ever be eclipsed by the other. To swipe this idea for **GURPS**, what if a fantasy world had a Faith attribute linked to Health (HT)? The two together could not add up to above some threshold (say, 18 or 20). In this world, someone could not be both extremely healthy and extremely pious, and wondrous miracles (if tied to a Faith system) could only be performed by the frail.

An RPG is, ultimately, nothing more than a collection of rules. The rules used are up to the GM and players. And although it's necessary to play by the book, sometimes the book in question can be a different one from your shelf.

* * *

For those of you who are unaware, long-time SJ Games' Managing Editor Andrew Hackard is leaving the company in a few days to pursue greener pastures (which, as I understand it, entail editing math textbooks and *not* fielding questions about release dates and comp copies).

Andrew and I have been with SJ Games for almost the same amount of time, which is a bunch of years now. (Which of us has been there longer is a matter of debate, since I've never set foot in the Austin offices.) He advanced at the company from Promotional Writer to Managing Editor, in a process that I envision to be similar to the cutthroat promotion system of the "Mirror, Mirror" universe. As the Managing Editor, he became *my* editor, responsible for smacking me around when I richly deserved it. We finally met -- for the first time -- at GenCon a few months ago. While I don't *think* the trauma of this encounter served as impetus for his departure, the possibility cannot be ruled out.

Anyway, if I were the sort of person who used my column for entirely self-centered means, I would go on and on about how I respect and appreciate Andrew, how valuable I've found his uncredited and behind-the-scenes contributions to *Pyramid*, and how much I consider him a friend. In such a column, I would go on and on about how he was quick to respond to my troubles, have ideas bounced off him, and be available for general ranting and raving.

But I'm not the kind of person who would use his column to wish Andrew the best, and thank him for everything. Which is good, because I'm not sure I would know what to say.

--*Steven Marsh*

Second-String Supers

by [Chad Underkoffler](#)

Illustrations by Scott Kane

Map by Chad Underkoffler

Genre: Four-color Super-heroes

Style: Animated

Fidelity: Low

Theme(s): Filling Some Big Shoes; Rising to Meet Challenges; Claiming Own Identity

The mighty hero *Dragon Knight* has joined the *Justice Alliance*, and will be concentrating on world-wide problems. Who will protect the citizens of Drakesville during his absences? Why, the PCs, of course: A team of substitutes who, while individually less powerful than he, may together be able to meet the challenge.

What Everybody Knows

Supers in History

Aside from the heroes of myth, and scattered rumors throughout history, the first *verifiable* superhumans were recorded only after WWI. In the years between the World Wars, the amazing exploits of these new "super-heroes" and "super-villains" began to fill the papers, radio broadcasts, and newsreels. Their deeds -- noble and dastardly, on the battlefield and the home front -- have made the world as it is today.

Super-Technology: Not Ready For Prime Time

Super-technology indicates a device that operates according to methods imperfectly-understood by conventional science. Indeed, the super-intellects responsible for creating such devices are incapable of successfully communicating the information needed to recreate their death-rays and jet-packs to other scientists and engineers. This has led many people to consider a gadgeteer's gadgets as just another form of superpower (often over the assertions of the gadgeteer, who will angrily state that any fool can see how his devices follow perfectly rational scientific principles).

The Klein Effect -- discovered in 1959 -- states that the capability of a super-technology device is inversely-related to the number of similar devices in operation. However, sometimes this is inversely-proportional (if you make duplicates of Captain Armor's battlesuit, all such battlesuits built to that specification become weaker; no more than a dozen, usually), and sometimes this is all-or-nothing (only one of Captain Armor's battlesuits can operate at a time).

Research continues, but meanwhile, super-inventors can make an excellent living as craftsmen turning out "limited runs" of useful devices like power-neutralizers, unbreakable restraints, and superpower analyzers for local industry, research facilities, and law enforcement. Of course, a different design needs to be worked out for *each run* of an item type; all have to be handcrafted by the super-inventor himself; and the larger the run, the weaker each item in the set becomes.

Supers Today

The earliest superhumans' powers were usually limited to a single power far beyond human capabilities or a small related set of powers only mildly beyond human capabilities. Over the passage of decades, however, superhumans have become more super: the strongest super of the WWII era could probably lift a tank, while the strongest super today can probably lift a battleship. Furthermore, there were far fewer superhumans then compared to now: only ten

verified superhumans existed in 1945, compared to the two hundred verified superhumans today. Superhumans are seen as a cross between natural disasters, miracles, volunteer activists, and celebrities. A small handful has traded on their fame or notoriety to make a buck, of course. They have their supporters and detractors. But for the most part, they're just there.

Aliens & You

Aliens exist. At least once every three years or so, some alien (or aliens) touch down and cause trouble. Generally, the superhumans drive them off. By all accounts, interstellar travel and communication isn't easy, so while the people of Earth know for a fact extraterrestrial life exists, they don't know much about these life forms, usually haven't been able to find out more, and haven't been able to take steps to stop these strange visitors from showing up. Most folks just shrug their shoulders and say, "So what?" -- but a powerful minority has become quite xenophobic.

Drakesville, Drakesville, It's a Helluva Town. . .

General Info

Drakesville is a vaguely-located East Coast city. Once a powerful industrial center, the weakening dollar and foreign competition twenty years ago caused it to slide into decay and crime. Now, boosted by cutting-edge communications industries (and the efforts of its small population of civic-minded supers, most notably the Dragon Knight), Drakesville is beginning to climb out of its two decade slump.

As protector of the city from threats without and within, the Dragon Knight enjoys not merely the support of the Drakesville police department, but also mild idolization from the citizenry (though he does have his strident critics).

map



Map Legend

1. North End
2. Stillmill
3. Old Wharf
4. Bayside
5. Center City
6. Bankhouse
7. Governor's Point

8. Fairmarket.
 9. South End
 10. Stock Isle
-
- A. Lookout Point
 - B. The Jetty
 - C. Franklin Inlet

Neighborhoods (& Their Crimes)

Bankhouse: This is the banking and financial sector of town, home to the First National Bank, the Drakesville Stock Market, and the headquarters a few rising telecom corporations. (Usually white-collar crimes like insider trading, corporate espionage, and computer/telecom hacking; blue-collar crimes involve rare muggings and bank robberies.)

Bayside: This is the artists' colony of Drakesville: the theater district, the small galleries, the jazz clubs, plenty of alternative lifestyles -- everything you need for a funky little neighborhood. Cool, man. (Muggings, burglaries, drugs, prostitution, and hate crimes.)

Center City: This neighborhood is a mix of older single-family homes (mostly successful supervisors of Stillmill and returning GIs after WWII) and mom-and-pop businesses. While many of the latter are still boarded up, new proprietors and franchisers are moving in to these abandoned storefronts and reviving the area. (Low-end burglaries, robberies, domestic abuse, muggings.)

Fairmarket: The renowned shopping district of Drakesville, this is where you go for the haute couture, the snazzy furnishings, and the overpriced jewelry. The Diamond Exchange is located here, as is the City Arena sports multiplex - - home of the Drakesville athletic teams: the *Ducks* (football), *Dukes* (baseball), the *Dragons* (basketball), and the *Dogs* (soccer).

Governor's Point: The heart of the local government is located on Governor's Point: City Hall, Police Headquarters, the DMV, and the law courts. Additionally, the neighborhood is also home to numerous high-art museums, concert halls, and parks. (Espionage, bribery, graft, corruption.)

The Jetty: A commercial structure of vast proportions that juts into the Bay. Built by Herbert Enterprises, the Jetty is a prototype arcology. Within its geodesic walls are apartments, restaurants, and a gigantic shopping mall (open to the public). Rent on the square footage within is quite expensive, however. A vast field of solar panels on the roof of the structure and an experimental "tide-wheel" below help supplement the Jetty's power needs; there is an entire level dedicated to hydroponic farming research, and two levels of "industrial park" for manufacturing and research. It is a safe, secure, clean neighborhood, cared for by the watchful eyes of Herbert Enterprises. (Officially, there is no crime on the Jetty; unofficially, the private security force does run a tight ship, with only minor shoplifting and purse-snatching happening. But rumors persist that the biggest crimes are being covered up by their corporate masters. . .).

North End: Longtime neighborhood of the factory workers of Stillmill. Around the turn of the Twentieth Century, the North End received a vast influx of immigrants from all over Europe; around 1980, it received another injection of immigrants from Asia. In between the two periods, this neighborhood was known as "Murdertown": when the industry of Stillmill withered, crime bloomed. While safer today, many visitors to the area are nervous and paranoid. . . perhaps rightly so. (Drugs, gang warfare, prostitution, violent crimes, car-jackings, domestic abuse, robberies, riots, etc.)

Old Wharf: When the factories of Stillmill stopped working, the Old Wharf neighborhood began to collapse into corruption and disuse. The shipping companies, import/export, seedy dive bars, and warehouses -- both in-use and abandoned -- almost all have a connection to the criminal underworld. However, as the heart of industry begins to pump once more, the life's blood of commerce is beginning to weakly trickle again. (Violent crimes, gang warfare, water accidents, and smuggling.)

South End: The ritzy suburb of town for over one hundred and fifty years, the houses of South End are huge and

expensive. They -- and their moneyed inhabitants -- are a sitting target for a certain class of criminal. Additionally, where vast wealth congregates, many dark impulses become palatable. . . so long as no one finds out. (Burglary, kidnapping, murder, various types of abuse and assault, drug use, and so forth.)

Stillmill: The manufacturing center of Drakesville, the industrial plants and assembly lines of Stillmill (corruption of "steel mill") turned out not only refined materials but also finished goods. When the markets dried up, many plants were shut down and their machinery left to rust. A number of old factories have been purchased by foreign investors, while others have been repurposed and renovated as shopping centers, offices, apartment units, and so forth. And a few new companies have taken over old plants, and started the mills rolling again. (Theft, sabotage, industrial accidents, espionage.)

Stock Isle: This island is the site of Drakesville's maximum security facility for criminals -- the Joshua Crippen Prison (also called "the Crypts"). As one of the few institutions in the region capable of long-term superhuman restraint, it often accepts super-prisoners from other jurisdictions. Because of this substantial population of superhumans in one place, it also boasts one of the state's most thorough superhuman observation and testing facilities (real research is done on the mainland, however), as well as top-notch psychiatric wards. (Jailbreaks, guard corruption, illicit experimentation, etc.)

What Everybody Doesn't Know

Do You Believe in Magic?

Super-powers just seem to work, somehow. Some folks call it psionics, others call it parapsysics, still others just call it magic, but superpowers tend come from a mystical source(s). About the only real step forward in superpower research has been the initial formulation of the Klein Effect (see above), and that's because the researchers had physical components -- super-technology devices -- to play with.

Supers in History: Redux

To an observer from a parallel dimension, this universe's timeline is exceptionally odd. The existence of superhumans has had remarkably *little* effect on the main threads of how "it actually turned out": the Bomb was dropped; disasters have happened; leaders have been assassinated. While some minor perturbations have happened -- a few lives saved here or lost there -- for the most part, the day-to-day events of this universe match "real history."

Part of this has to do with the numbers of superhumans: probably less than 300 known and unknown world-wide, of varying power levels. Also, the magical nature of superpowers (see above) means that the negative effects of super-villainy are countered by the positive effects of super-heroism, and vice-versa. Furthermore, the Klein Effect (see above) limits the widespread effects of super-technology.

Indeed, the strongest consequences superhumans have had on the world mostly involve fashion and style, a few esoteric fields of pure scientific research, and exceptionally subtle social effects.

Aliens: The Truth, Out There

Mars wants mana! Whatever it is in the air or water or land or collective unconscious of Earth's inhabitants that gives rise to superpowers, a number of extraterrestrial races want it, **bad**. That's why all those tinpot alien warlords make raids in the Sol System every couple years, despite the difficulties of interstellar travel.

Indeed, the greatest threat to Earth would be if the different alien races joined together in an extra-solar military alliance to steal our precious mystical fluids. Which, coincidentally enough, they have. Luckily, the Justice Alliance has had good interstellar intel, and has swelled their ranks with Earth's best and brightest to draw the line as far away from Earth as possible. This is why the Second-String Heroes have been called up, whether they know it or not.

PC Opportunities

PCs in this Campaign in a Box are other super-types (or at least "action-adventure types") that the Dragon Knight has recruited to keep Drakesville safe while he focuses on his work with the Justice Alliance. Players should consider the guidelines below when coming up with their characters.

Who?: Who is your character? This is the basic question of character generation, of course. Some interesting options can be spun off from the central conceit of the campaign. PCs could be grown sidekicks, heroes inspired by the Dragon Knight, heroes who *inspired* the Dragon Knight, reformed villains, or the children/inheritors of the Dragon Knight's superpowered friends and enemies.

What?: What sort of hero is the character? This question goes further than simply deciding if a PC is a Blaster or a Brick, though that is a part of this step. Remember that the PCs are less powerful than the Dragon Knight by definition in this Campaign in a Box. One interesting and fairly balanced way to reflect this is to have experience and superpowers as inversely proportional to one another. That is, if a character has a lot of powers (or even just a single very strong one), then they shouldn't have had much of a superhero career prior to the start of the campaign. If a character has tremendous experience, then they shouldn't have many (or even any) abilities that greatly exceed human maximum. Thus, a superhero with minor powers (or a single moderate one) probably has a moderate amount of experience.

This can really work well to help "balance" super-normals with the superpowered: the super-normals have the experience, knowledge, contacts, and respect, while the superpowered have the sheer oomph! to get things done. This means that a decent super team could be constructed of an aging (but still scrappy) pulp hero, a minor-league heroine with a decent adventuring career, and a kid with major league talent but no real track record.

When?: Directly related to *What?* are two *When?*s: 1) when did the PC first start super-heroing?; and 2) when did the PC first meet the Dragon Knight?

Where?: PCs should pick one of the districts from the Map above to be their turf. While the big boys like the Dragon Knight protect entire cities, lesser heroes patrol a single neighborhood. While they won't know the other parts of town like they do their own area, hopefully one of their team-mates will. Thus, it's probably not a great idea to have multiple PCs hail from the same neighborhood, but this can still work and provide opportunities for "like the back of my hand"/"fish out of water" scenes.

Why?: Each player should work with the GM (and possibly the other players) to determine exactly why the Dragon Knight asked the PC to help pick up his slack. What is the connection between the characters? This question will be tied up closely with *Who?* and *When?*, with a side-order of *What?*, and maybe even some *Where?* for dessert.

NPC Backgrounds

Each character below has their most important *strengths* (generally positive qualities, abilities, skills, or effects) and *weaknesses* (generally negative qualities, abilities, skills, or effects) detailed. In descending order, the ranks are Master, Expert, Good, Average, and Poor. Depending upon the conception of what a character is like, any quality can be a strength or a weakness.

For example, suppose a character has "Spoiled Brat" as a quality. If it's ranked Average or above, it's a strength: the character always gets his own way, can wield undue influence by threatening to sic their Mommy or Daddy on others, might possess lots of cash or gadgets, and people may fawn over them, making life easy. But if the character has "Spoiled Brat (Poor)," this is a weakness: the character has led a pampered and sheltered life, rubs people the wrong way, and expects everyone to bend over backward to fulfill his most minor needs.

Since many game mechanics provide prose "benchmarks" to understand stat or skill levels, the ranked qualities below should be easily adaptable into any desired system. (Also see [the PDQ System](#) from [Atomic Sock Monkey Games](#).)

Major NPCs

Julius Alameda aka Ratburglar: Bitten by one of the mystical Giant Rats of Sumatra when burgling a rich eccentric's menagerie, Alameda became a wererat. This has made him even better at being a sneaky little bastard. He specializes in stealing the rarest and most well-protected treasures, both for himself and as a contractor for others.

Ratburglar!

He's an Expert Burglar and possesses Good Cunning and Wealth in addition to his Powers (see below). Unfortunately, he's a Compulsive Thief (Poor) and has a Napoleon Complex (Poor); these weaknesses have been exacerbated by his lycanthropy. Though his original stomping grounds were in California, he's come to Drakesville after learning that the Dragon Knight's flown the coop. He's also been having a series of odd dreams involving "the Rat God."



Powers: (Elements marked with an asterisk are only available in ratman or giant rat form). King Wererat (Good), which includes limited Shapeshifting and Size Alteration* (Human/Ratman/Giant Rat/Rat), Super-Agility and Super-Strength*, Claws*, Super-Gnawing*, Collapsible Skeleton*, Prehensile Whip-Tail*, Nightvision, Immunity to Poison & Disease, Regeneration (reduced vs. wounds done with silver weapons), and Rat Communication & Control. Usually in his 4 foot "ratman" shape when on the job, but even so he wears a black leather outfit, web belt full of tools, a black cap, and a mask. (Yes, a mask. Over his ratty face. What?)

Isaac Leonard aka the Orange Ogre: As a professional wrestler, Isaac "the Ogre" Leonard took one too many folding chairs across the skull that fateful night. Something in his concussed brain reacted powerfully, causing him to grow permanently huge (he's now 7' 2" tall and weighs over 400 pounds) and *orange*. Furthermore, his mind has been affected: "kayfabe" has bled into reality and meshed with superhumanity.

The Orange Ogre



The Orange Ogre is convinced on some level that he's been assigned to be a heel: whenever he's in public and in costume, he acts like a super-villain. Out of costume, he's actually a likeable and agreeable guy, gentle and docile, even when incarcerated in the Crypts. . . until he goes to "work" -- which generally happens ever 30 to 90 days. Interestingly, Leonard believes that if he ever beats the Dragon Knight in a fair fight, the "head office" will let him undergo a "face turn" and become a good guy. Unfortunately, he's never been able to beat the hero fairly. (However, one time the Dragon Knight took a dive and caused Leonard's personality to immediately shift to face. . . until he discovered the deception and suffered another heel turn.)

Leonard is an Expert Wrestler, a Good Gambler, and a Good Carouser, but suffers from Delusions (Poor) as noted above, and has a Freakish Appearance (Poor). He is currently at-large.

Powers: Super-Strength, Super-Leaping, and Invulnerability are all at Expert rank.

Doctor Arthur Vrobo aka Doktor Vrobotik: Arthur Vrobo, one of the world's greatest scientists, worked for Herbert Enterprises for many years. Indeed, a substantial amount of the technology behind the Jetty (see above) is based on his designs. He is the sort of intellect that offhandedly whips up a telepathically-controlled robot to help him with an unrelated experiment. Vrobo merrily worked in the company's laboratories during the day, and at night repaired to a private workshop for his own projects. Indeed, the contract he had with Zeb Herbert was very clear that Vrobo would always and forever retain the rights and patents to his personal work: 9 out of 10 lawyers would swear that the agreement was ironclad.



Well, "ironclad" only if the party of the first part *and* the party of the second part both stick to the terms of the contract. Unfortunately, Vrobo discovered that the party of the second part -- Herbert -- was a bit looser in his interpretations of the agreement, to the point of having the scientist's private lab and residence within the Jetty extensively bugged. Just as Vrobo ripped a camera out of his wall, his paranoia crystallizing into anger, a tremendous explosion rocked the Jetty! Shards of flying debris cut his face and throat deeply, and knocked the scientist out. Luckily, the Jetty's emergency response squad got him to the internal hospital in time to save his life -- but not his voice: the damage to Vrobo's larynx was too extensive to repair.

After a horrifically-misunderstood visiting hour meeting with Herbert, Vrobo became convinced that Herbert had always fully intended to steal his work and bump him off. Terrified at being in his enemy's power, the scientist fled the hospital that night. But as he was no fool, Vrobo stopped by his ruined quarters and broke into company labs for equipment and gear. Doktor Vrobotik now wages a war against Herbert Enterprises using his remarkable mind, seeking to wipe it, its works, and its founder from the face of the Earth. Woe to any who get in his way!

Vrobo is a Master Scientist, a Good Engineer, and an Average Athlete, but is Insanely Paranoid (Poor), an Irrational Hatred of Zeb Herbert & Herbert Enterprises (Poor), and is Mute (Poor) without his Cyber-Throat.

Powers: Expert Super-Intellect, Expert Gadgeteer (4 random super-tech gadgets), Good Telepathic Robot Thugs (1 to 6 at all times; each has at least one Superpower at Good rank), Good Cyber-Throat (allows him to talk to any electronic device and command temporary obedience from it; also provides -- badly, for unknown reasons -- synthesized vocal capability).

Supporting Character NPCs

- **Captain Kaye Artaud:** Captain Artaud is in charge of the Drakesville Police Department's Superhuman Crimes Division. She has forged a decent working relationship with the Dragon Knight, though there are strong elements of rivalry: she believes that her SCD officers could handle at least three-quarters of the problems that the hero does. She'll be slighted by the presence of any Second-Stringers that the Dragon Knight recruits, and will be wary in dealing with them until they prove themselves. . . and if they cross the line, she'll have no compunctions about bringing them in.
- **The Dragon Knight:** A suit of mystical armor grants the Dragon Knight his amazing powers, and hides his identity as well. He has helped defend and strengthen Drakesville for the last eight years, and the populace generally reveres him. (Unknown to any but his closest associates, the Dragon Knight is secretly Abner Jones, an archeology professor at Drakesville University.) *Powers:* Abner himself is an Expert Archeologist, a Good Athlete, and a Good Occultist; unfortunately, he's Arrogant (Poor). The dragon-armor grants him Expert Super-Strength and Invulnerability; Good Metal Wings (useful for Flight and as a form of Weaponry), and Master Mystic Flame-Breath (which he's used for several attack and magical stunts in the past). The dragon-armor is only Average ranked Invulnerability against magical attacks.
- **Galsworthy the Great:** A fortune-telling con-man who was granted true sorcerous might during "the Djinni Event," Galsworthy has in recent years been part of the Dragon Knight's resources when dealing with magical situations. Unknown to anyone but the Dragon Knight and Galsworthy, the former grifter is destined to be the

mentor of Earth's next "Absolute Adept" -- guardian of the world against all Unspeakable Horrors From Beyond Space. Therefore, out of a strict sense of self-preservation, Galsworthy has begun studying all forms of magic like a madman, in order to be the best damn teacher he can be. *Powers*: Galsworthy is an Expert Con-Man and Mage, a Good Occultist, and possesses an Average Physique. Additionally, he possesses a Grand Destiny (Poor), which more often than not puts him in dangerous (or just plain weird) situations somehow related to his future charge; he resents this, but no matter what he does or how he resists, the day is coming when he will have to pass on his knowledge.

- **Zebediah Herbert**: Skinny, dapper, insanely wealthy -- Zeb Herbert is the toast of the town. His company, Herbert Enterprises, is the largest employer and corporate tax-payer in Drakesville, and he himself is a major philanthropist, donating to hundreds of charities city- and nation-wide. He's also a cold-hearted snake in the boardroom: utterly ruthless, he seeks to maximize his long-term personal power through any means necessary. Surprisingly, what is good for Zeb Herbert tends to be good for some of people in Drakesville. . . or at least those that "count" (i.e., the rich). Those that his machinations are bad for must wait for his philanthropic largesse. (Whether he's a "super-villain in a power tie" or not is left up to the individual GM.)
- **Professor Hypnos**: Minor super-villain, incarcerated in the Crypts after a foolish attempt to gather a harem of Drakesville's top supermodels. With his counselor's help, Hypnos is well on his way to being rehabilitated, and has big plans for starting an expensive "self-help salon" (weight loss, smoking cessation, assertiveness training, memory retrieval) when he gets out on parole. *Powers*: Professor Marvin Hypnos is an Expert at Hypnotic Mind Control, though his commands usually wear off within a week (the more extreme his commands, the shorter the duration). He is also an Average rank Telepath, but no one else knows this. Hypnos believes that if the superhuman specialists detect his power, he will *never* be let out on parole; call this a Poor Secret.
- **The Justice Alliance**: The Earth's premiere super-team. Made up of a dozen of the globe's mightiest heroes, they protect the world against the most powerful arch-villains, whether they be from this planet or beyond. Members include Hyperwoman; Fu Dawg; Justice Jackaroo; Belisarius, the Absolute Adept; Croatoan; and now, the Dragon Knight.
- **The Philatelist**: Gwendolyn Price terrorized Drakesville for weeks as the mysterious Philatelist with her stamp- and mail-based puzzles, before being captured by the Dragon Knight. Mostly interested in stealing rare stamp and postal paraphernalia, she's a looney-tunes thief, given to pre-bragging about her crimes. Currently at large. *Powers*: The Philatelist has one of the weirdest superpowers ever recorded: Good rank "Stamp & Mail Schticks." She can literally do *anything* if it is related to stamps, stamp-collecting, or the mail system. She's pulled rocket launchers out of mailboxes, mailed herself out of prison in a #10 business envelope, caused all the stamps in 100 yards to burst into flame, and so forth. Her biggest weaknesses are her Poor Need to Challenge Heroes through Puzzles & Riddles and her Poor Reliance on Consuming Stamps to energize her abilities. (Heroes beware: rare or valuable stamps give her a massive power-boost!)
- **Red X**: This mercenary is a super-speedster, and possibly the Dragon Knight's most deadly foe. He is a thug, bodyguard, and assassin for hire, and he don't come cheap. While not a particularly brilliant foe, he is exceptionally organized and practical. *Powers*: Red X possesses Super-Speed at Good rank normally, but can push himself to Expert or Master levels for brief periods. Exerting himself like this involves a price: he must spend time utterly motionless afterwards -- and equal period for Expert boosting, and double the amount for Master boosting. Needless to say, Red X tries to stay under his speed limit, unless he is in danger or the money is too damn good to refuse. He is also Expert in Karate.

Possible Episodes

Some ideas for single-session adventures or "episodes" are provided below; the overall campaign can be further constructed as a television season (or entire series) as the players and GM see fit. The *Pilot Episode* should come first, of course, bringing the PCs together and starting the show off with a bang. *Episodes A, B, and C* should happen early in the campaign and focus on the theme of Filling the Really Big Shoes of the Dragon Knight, though they can happen in any order. *Episodes X, Y, and Z* should happen late in the campaign, and focus on the theme of the PCs Claiming their Own Identity. The remaining episodes are modular, and can be fit into the early, middle, or late bits of the campaign. No Final Episode is provided, as some groups may wish to run a "seasonal" campaign versus a "complete series" campaign; however, promotion to the first-string heroes of the Justice Alliance and the intergalactic conflict works well as a campaign finale. (See below, *Supers & Adventure Plotting*.)

Each Episode below contains the *Villain of the Week*, a short *Synopsis* of the plot's major points, some *Neat Ideas* to insert or not, and *Possible Outcomes*; however, actual construction of each adventure is left up to the individual GM.

Pilot Episode: "Come Together"

Villain of the Week: None.

Synopsis: The Dragon Knight assembles the PCs to guard Drakesville in his absence. He presents them with the foundations of a secret headquarters (access to a secluded location, information resources, communications links with the police), and has arranged meetings with Galsworthy the Great and Captain Artaud, but is called away on Justice Alliance priority alert before he can introduce the PCs to his allies. Then, a disaster strikes -- a building fire, an earthquake, a tidal wave, a gigantic accident -- and the PCs must leap into the fray.

Neat Ideas: The Dragon Knight never explains the intergalactic situation. PCs may already have ties to Supporting Cast allies or enemies.

Possible Outcomes: The PCs miss their meeting with one of the Dragon Knight's allies, possibly antagonizing him or her. The media focuses on the PCs dealing with the disaster, and comparing their efforts (negatively) to the Dragon Knight's. The PCs' new secret HQ gets trashed in the chaos.

Episode A: "I Smell a Rat. . ."

Villain of the Week: Ratburglar.

Synopsis: Ratburglar is in town to collect the two ruby Eyes of the Rat-God, which will increase his powers dramatically!

Neat Ideas: Robbing a museum for an Eye. Robbing an occult library for the energizing spell. One of the Eyes is not known as such, but under a different name: "the Heart of Fire." A supercharged Ratburglar, creating giant servitors composed entirely of squirming rats -- or mutating normal rats into ratmen like him. Or maybe the Rat-God himself is brought to Earth to wreak havoc.

Possible Outcomes: A more powerful Ratburglar or a Ratburglar angry at the PCs, either at large or incarcerated. A new pair of magical artifacts -- the Eyes -- out there for anyone to use. Refugee ratmen roaming the sewers

Episode B: "Squared Circle"

Villain of the Week: the Orange Ogre.

Synopsis: The Ogre challenges the toughest PC hero to a throw-down; if the hero refuses, the heel smashes up the city.

Neat Ideas: An official decree from the Mayor (or Captain Artaud) orders the PCs against a match, but demands that they catch the Ogre. Gambling dens run odds on the official fight (and possibly unofficial clashes). Perhaps some of the citizenry want to see the PCs go down, for trying to take the Dragon Knight's place as the city's protector. The adulation or disparagement of the media.

Possible Outcomes: Possible minor face-turn for the Ogre. Massive property damage. A change in the way the city views the PCs. Ogre incarcerated.

Episode C: "I, Vrobot!"

Villain of the Week: Doktor Vrobotik.

Synopsis: The Mad Doktor is collecting high-tech to build a Giant Super-Vrobot (GSV). Once completed, he stomps from Stillmill to Fairmarket -- to destroy the Jetty!

Neat Ideas: The expertise or history of a PC is vital in figuring out or stopping the menace. Damage caused by the GSV permits several criminals from holding facilities nears the courthouse or the police dock to escape before being transferred to the Crypts. Zeb Herbert demanding that the PCs stop the GSV without damaging it, so Herbert Enterprise can study it!

Possible Outcomes: Massive property damage. The support or antagonism of Zeb Herbert. Escaped criminals. Incarcerated or escaped Doktor. New super-tech on the market, auctioned off to the highest bidder!

Episode X: "Attack of the Cyber-Rats"

Villain of the Week: Ratburglar and Doktor Vrobotik.

Synopsis: Micro-miniaturized technology being stolen from top labs by Ratburglar, whose escapes are being covered by vrobots! The villains have teamed up to create a tiny cyborg-rat army which they will use to take over the Jetty from the inside, and hold Zeb Herbert for a substantial ransom.

Neat Ideas: Sneaking into the Jetty past both the Jetty defenses *and* the cyber-rat invader patrols. Swarms of laser-mounted, chrome-armored rodents.

Possible Outcomes: Minor property damage. The support or antagonism of Zeb Herbert. Renegade cyber-rats roaming the streets and sewers.

Episode Y: "Orange You Glad I'm Here?"

Villain of the Week: Ratburglar and the Orange Ogre.

Synopsis: The Orange Ogre stops the Ratburglar in the middle of a crime! Now what?

Neat Ideas: Actual face-turn for the Ogre; media accolades for the new hero on the block. Fake face-turn, as part of a plot cooked up by the pair.

Possible Outcomes: Both of the villains in prison, both escaped, or one of each.

Episode Z: "A Draconic Opponent"

Villain of the Week: Dragon Knight? (The Orange Ogre and Doktor Vrobotik.)

Synopsis: The Dragon Knight is smashing up downtown. . . until the Orange Ogre appears to stop him! What's going on?

Neat Ideas: Vrobotic duplicate of the hero made by the Mad Doktor for the Ogre as a sparring partner, nothing more. Maybe part of a plan by someone else to face-turn the Ogre for once and for all (Herbert? Why?). Or maybe it's a devious plot by the Mad Doktor, using the Dragon Knight vrobot to sic the Ogre on specific Herbert Enterprises holdings.

Possible Outcomes: Massive property damage. A possible face Ogre at the end, or an even darker heel. Bad publicity for the Dragon Knight; good publicity for the heroes -- if they can stop the vrobot.

Episode: "Glass, Darkly"

Villain of the Week: Evil mirror-versions of the Heroes.

Synopsis: Galsworthy the Great comes into possession of the Mirror Rorrim, which promptly makes evil duplicates of the PCs. The PCs must defeat themselves and help Galsworthy figure out how to turn the damned thing off.

Neat Ideas: Many people see the fights between the heroes and their villainous mirror-versions and could catch clues to their identities and weaknesses. Good names being dragged through the mud. Secret, dark desires acted upon. Mystery whether PC is being mind-controlled, or is a mirror-duplicate. Transportation into the "Mirror Zone" -- where the heroes are villains and the villains are heroes.

Possible Outcomes: Escaped evil-versions of heroes left out there.

Episode: "Return to Sender"

Villain of the Week: The Philatelist.

Synopsis: After somehow getting the drop on the heroes, the crazy criminal uses a magical stamp to mail them to a fictional otherworld (Oz, Wonderland, the Shire, Discworld, Toontown, etc.). The PCs must figure out a way to co-opt the power of the magical stamp in order to navigate the Postal Dimensions to return home.

Neat Ideas: Use of the powers found in otherworlds to control the stamp may be necessary to get a fresh pick-up, or maybe simply writing a new address on the envelope will work (but it should take at least 2 tries/worlds to get home).

Possible Outcomes: The Philatelist escapes or gets thrown back in the booby hatch. Super-tech, magical artifacts, or intriguing information might be brought back from the otherworlds.

Episode: "Behind the Lines"

Villain of the Week: Aliens (with special guest star: the Dragon Knight)!

Synopsis: One of the alien saucers breaks through the Justice Alliance's defenses and heads for Drakesville. The Dragon Knight returns to quietly locate and capture the invaders from space alone.

Neat Ideas: The Dragon Knight being really close-lipped before spilling the beans about the intergalactic war. Friction between the old hero and the new heroes. Stealthy operations. The Dragon Knight has a war-wound, making him less effective. Keeping the media distracted.

Possible Outcomes: Alien-tech! Blowing the secret of aliens wanting to invade us and subsequent chaos. The Dragon Knight could die from his injuries!

Advice, Opportunities, & Pitfalls

Supers & Adventure Plotting

While other "Campaign in a Box" installments have talked a bit about running superhero games (see [Hyperworld vs. the Invadroids](#) and [The Flint Age](#)), there's another aspect of superhero comic books and cartoons that still needs to be addressed: *adventure plotting*.

The typical plot of a Silver Age comic book (as well as many published today) or modern animated-style cartoon show, follows roughly this outline:

1. Villain does (or prepares to do) something.
2. Hero finds out about #1 (before or after the fact).
3. Hero does research, sets alarms, maps patrol routes, etc.
4. Villain does something else; this time Hero is alerted, and races to the scene.

5. Hero-Villain confrontation.
6. Villain escapes (with or without his target), but has left a clue of some sort in word or deed.
7. Either:
 - Repeat steps #3 through #6 (at least once, but sometimes multiple times); or
 - Villain captures Hero and puts him in a [Deathtrap](#).
8. Whereupon Hero finally susses out the problem, lays just the right trap, the stars come right, digs down deep inside to triumph, whatever, and. . .
9. . . . the Villain is captured.

In systems using Drama Points, [Cinematic Points!](#), Karma, or other Luck-type mechanisms, the solution is easy: a Villain starts with a substantial but finite amount of Luck, which they burn to get away from -- or get the drop on -- the Hero. After all, most Villains are of equal or even lesser power/capability than the Hero, otherwise, they wouldn't need to escape, they'd just beat the tar out of the Hero. The sudden, unheralded appearance of escape routes, backpack helicopters, smoke bombs, or innocent victims who need to be saved from a teetering safe are all implementations of these mechanics in action.

Frankly, systems lacking a wide-ranging Luck-type system have a tougher row to hoe in emulating this sort of genre convention. When using such systems, GMs often have to fiat (or even railroad) Villain escapes, which can lead to player frustration.

The simplest fix here is to **talk to the players**. Make sure all of them are *completely* up to speed on the genre conventions -- the secret identities, sidekicks, deathtraps, crusading reporters, secret headquarters, cops more-or-less accepting the Hero's activities, last minute rescues by the first-string hero cavalry -- that are in use, and understand any specific differences the GM is operating under ("we'll have deathtraps and secret identities, but no sidekicks and the cops hate superheroes" or even "while most Villains in this campaign will take the time to tie you up and deliver their Evil Bwah-ha-ha Monologue, Captain Silence is definitely *not* one of those types: he always shoots to kill, then shoots the corpse for good measure").

STYLE: Animated

"Refusing to put their hero in a completely contemporary world. . . Bruce and Eric fashioned a Gotham City that was stylish but dangerous. It could be identified as twentieth-century America, but it was impossible to pinpoint it to an exact decade. Batman would often be shown working at his super-sophisticated Batcomputer, but televisions would only broadcast in black and white. Likewise, Batman might fly the futuristic Batwing, but Bruce Wayne would drive a Cord. Tommy guns, VCRs, lasers, and zeppelins all happily coexist in Batman's technologically unified world. Bruce and Eric did not want the series to visually date itself, as many cartoons do when they try to hard to ground themselves in contemporary culture. Instead, they looked back over 60 years, took what had endured, and made it their own."

The above quote from *Batman: Animated* sums up the "dark deco" aesthetic of the various recent animated Batman projects, whose design influence reached into the popular Superman and Justice League cartoons and is still in use today as the basic "DCU Animated" style. Many of its elements can be adapted for gaming to lend an "animated" spin to a four-color supers campaign.

- Adventures should be planned as single episode mini-movies (read: sessions), with the occasional cliffhanging two-parter. (See above for *Possible Episodes*.)
- GMs need to think of ways to encourage PC characterization and interplay through action. This means that once the GM and players have a handle on the basic nature of a character, the character should be thrown into situations where this personality can be directly expressed through physical tasks and dialogue with other characters.
- GMs should develop possible scenes visually, looking for what would be cool, cinematic, and slick. However, this doesn't mean they should go hog-wild with the description: far from it. The hallmark of the animated style is "limited detail for maximum motion." GMs -- and eventually players -- shouldn't be looking for an exhaustive

catalog of what they see and what they do: all should be looking for ways to express things in a descriptive shorthand -- the quick sketch, bold stroke, or snappy phrase that sums up so much, but leaves plenty for the mind to fill in on its own.

- Characters and situations should be played with flair, and as straight-faced or hard-edged as possible, despite their melodramatic and cinematic style. However, there is a thin line between this sort of melodrama and what's known as camp. Books have been written on what makes camp campy; I offer as a possible definition that "characters and situations played with *inappropriate seriousness* in the face of *absurdity* for the purposes of *comedy*" is camp. The differences between animated style and camp are highlighted by the italics in the previous sentence; take those elements out, and your game should stay on the right side of the fence. . . unless you *want* to camp it up. After all, that can be fun, too.
- The session should build to at least one incredibly visual action sequence to look forward to; a big "set piece" that makes it all worthwhile. A pulse-pounding race along the rooftops, an escape from plummeting airplane, or -- yes -- even a flashy combat sequence in a rusting factory all fit the bill.

Other Resources

- Paul Dini & Chip Kidd, [Batman: Animated](#)
- [DVD Review: Batman: the Animated Series: Volume 1](#)
- [Professional wrestling slang](#)
- [Fleischer Superman Cartoons](#)
- Alan Saunders, ["The Sumatran Devil"](#)

Jenner-1

A Plague On Both Your Houses

by Paul Drye

Christopher Columbus was a satisfied man when his ships made anchor in the Bahamas on October 12th, 1492. While the small size of the islands suggested he was in the outlying portion of Asia, the handsome stone houses, fine horses, and odd triangular coins of the natives gave him every reason to believe he'd reached his destination. Several rounds of charades and a local guide later, he was sailing south to a long, large island he had no doubt was Cipangu.

He ended up in Cuba, not Japan, of course, but this wasn't apparent to the Great Navigator, as language barriers and preconceptions led him to believe he'd made the voyage he expected. The kingdom he'd reached was actually Hotzhetsi, but their word for "city" -- Tzemanzhu -- came up during more attempts at communication, and was sufficiently close in pronunciation to what Columbus wanted to hear. He proclaimed his discovery of Cipangu in a letter to the Ferdinand and Isabella, which he sent to Madrid along with "Cipangan" goods and a half-dozen willing natives upon his fleet's return to Palos, Spain in February.

Columbus never realized his mistake for, like several members of his crew, he died of a fever a few weeks later. It was a follow-up expedition under Martin Alonso Pinzon that discovered the greatest of the American civilizations, Eoh'medah at the mouth of the Mississippi River. After another month, one of Pinzon's ships returned to Spain with another half-dozen New Worlders, while the rest of his expedition continued their exploration of this vast, rich land. For two years, an increasing number of ships went back and forth between Europe and America, carrying men and cargo in ever greater volumes.

By the middle of 1495, it became apparent that something was wrong on both sides of the Atlantic.

Decay and Evil Days

The current year is 1519, and both Europe and America are in complete chaos. In the Homeline, the Hispanic colonization of the Americas turned the New World into a charnel house. Diseases bred in the urban environments of Europe and Asia ripped through the naive immune systems of Native Americans, killing millions. It is believed that in this timeline, dubbed Jenner-1 by Infinity Unlimited, a proto-Cheyenne genius domesticated one of the last American horses about 8000 BC rather than spearing and eating it. Most of the other American megafauna were extinct already, but with the example of the horse in front of them the Native Americans of Jenner-1 also managed to tame the South American glyptodont (see the entry for *Doedicurus*, p. 68 of *GURPS Dinosaurs*) as a gigantic, armored substitute for the plough and cart ox, as well as the familiar llamas and ducks of Homeline.

Armed with three useful species of burden, the Americas followed much the same technological arc as Europe, and had progressed into the Iron Age by 1 AD. Though behind the Old World due to a smaller population and fewer food crops, the Americans nevertheless produced an impressive urban civilization by 1492, one about equivalent to the early Roman era on the other side of the Atlantic. When Columbus and Pinzon opened up the New World, Europe gave the Americas smallpox, measles, and influenza as they did on Homeline. But the Americas returned cachexy, tetter rot, and the calenture to Europe.

If anything, the plagues in America were worse than on Homeline, as the higher population kept the new diseases from burning out quickly: in 1519 the American civilizations are dead, along with more than 150 million people. Perhaps 20 million are left, and that figure is shrinking every day. Europe has done better, but only in comparison. Two-thirds of a population of 80 million have died -- this is about twice the mortality rate of the Black Death. It is enough to have brought Europe to the very brink, and its population continues to dwindle as well.

In Spain and France, the epidemics have been worse they are in the Americas. There are about 1.5 million people left in Iberia and France taken together; cities and towns are abandoned by all but diehards who can't or won't leave, and now survive only because they rarely see another person. A few small villages in out of the way locations -- up in the Pyrenees, for example, or the Massif Central -- have managed to carry on.

In all cases, distrust of other people is what has kept the survivors in France and Spain alive, and it is dangerous to travel anywhere in the region. The two countries are reverting to wilderness, but if a human being is encountered he will be mad, diseased, motivated to kill for his own protection, or any combination of the three.

Germany has lost 75% of its population, though the consequences are not as bad as they could be because the many tiny states of the region are largely self-supporting and don't need the large-scale trade and government that other parts of Europe have come to rely upon. The situation is certainly desperate. but Germany has not become a wasteland like France and Spain. There are even signs that Germany is beginning to come together, as a religious zealot from Wittenburg has shot to prominence in the last ten years, preaching against indulgences and papal power, and pointing to the plagues as evidence of God's displeasure. Johann Tetzel, a former indulgence peddler himself now fired with the fanaticism of the newly converted, has brought more spiritual and temporal control to himself that most popes could ever dream. Whether his new "Recusantism" movement will expand beyond the boundaries of Germany remains to be seen.

In the British Isles, Henry VII -- the man who ended the Wars of the Roses -- died of calenture in 1501, leaving the throne to his eldest son Arthur, who then died six months later. His younger brother (Henry VIII on Homeline) and eldest sister had predeceased him by a week, so the ruler of England was five year old Mary Tudor (aunt of the more famous person of the same name on Homeline). England collapsed into civil war again, despite being less affected by the epidemics than almost any other European country. One person in three in all of the British Isles has died, no worse than during the Black Plague and the country survived that. However, Scotland got off better than England, and the border country is periodically invaded by the Scots and James IV. Mary is now an adult, but unmarried and in thrall to the various factions in the new civil war.

Similarly, the Ottoman Empire has fallen into chaos. Sultan Beyazid died of cachexy in 1499 during his campaign to take the Morea from the stricken Venetians. Jenner-1's Selim I was rendered sterile by a mild case of calenture, and no Suleyman the Magnificent was born to his wives -- or any other children. Selim ruled for three years and, as he had killed his brothers and sisters on accession like he did on Homeline, there was no clear line of succession to the throne when he died. The Balkans have been in constant turmoil, trying to break free, but the Hungarian enemy to the north has been laid low as well and is in no position to intervene. Unfortunately for the rest of Eurasia, the Empire's trading routes have been the primary gateway to India and China for the epidemics.

Scandinavia, Poland, and the Russias have receded beyond the horizon as far as Western Europe is concerned. While the plagues have no doubt hit them as well, no-one has any clear idea what is happening there any more.

By all rights, Italy should be as badly ravaged as Spain and France. The country is urban, and heavily populated, and does not have the cold, wet winters that give the north of Europe some protection. However, while the epidemics have been bad, society in the peninsula is still holding on by a thread. Partly this is because Italy, like Germany, has few large states, and people are used to working from local resources. There are fewer area-wide social structures to collapse, such as governments, though the end of most trading has ended Italy's prosperity too. What makes the most difference, though, is the Accademia dei Unicorni.

Men of Hope

Southern Europe's future rests on the work of a very few people who have devoted their lives to stopping the plagues. Leonardo da Vinci made the connection between the voyages to Cipangu and the epidemics, and discovered that the transfusion of a small amount of blood from a Cipangan horse to a man would confer immunity to calenture (the blood carried along a less virulent strain of the virus that caused the infection, though Leonardo did not know this, nor is it known now). This has been the only one of the new diseases to be cured -- and there were not enough Cipangan horses to stop it cold -- but Italian mortality has been relatively low because Leonardo's experiments have led to

treatments for Old World killers. The Great Man himself discovered the immunization for smallpox using matter from cows, while his young German disciple Theophrastus has recently determined that a measure of resistance to the plague and typhus may be obtained by fumigation: seal a house as completely as possible and burn a large quantity of coal in the fireplace. The more buildings in an area treated this way, the better. Even water has come under examination, and Baldassare Peruzzi has determined that certain water causes disease, leading to the virtual elimination of cholera. The new diseases still burn bright, but many people are still alive because the old ones are fading away instead of taking their own toll on top.

Leonardo remains the head of what is now a formal organization, the Accademia dei Unicorni. He is an old man, though, haunted by the death of every last one of his peers, and many of his disciples. In Homeline he died in 1519; ironically on Jenner-1 he is still healthy, though fading as he pushes 70. For game statistics, refer to *GURPS Who's Who 1*, p. 60, for a slightly younger version of da Vinci. Jenner-1's da Vinci has left behind art for medicine: reduce his Artist to 18 and Sculpting to 10, while giving him Physician-19 and Diagnosis-19. As he ages, Theophrastus is taking on more of the duties of his master; his statistics can be found in Who's Who 1 on page 64. That version of the man is fourteen years older than Jenner-1's, so most of his skills (except for his finely honed Diagnosis, Herbalist, and Physician skills) are pitched at a lower level.

Both men coordinate the Accademia's work full-time from Leonardo's boyhood farmhouse in Anchiano, a rural region west of Florence about a third of the way to Pisa and Lucca. Unless one travels there specifically, they are unlikely to be encountered, though the two sometimes perform experiments in the surrounding countryside.

The "Unicorno" characters are most likely to encounter is Baldassare Peruzzi. In Homeline he was an architect with a sideline in hydrological engineering; here he is much more interested in water and water supplies, and spends all his time wandering Western Europe setting up clean wells or diverting creeks for villages. For his efforts, he is one of the few outsiders tolerated in the small communities of France and Spain. Many of his clients -- he works for room and board -- think he is a magician of some sort, but in their desperation they simply don't care.

Peruzzi's assistant is a young man, about sixteen, though it is difficult to tell much about him -- he is a survivor of tetter rot, and is mute and horribly disfigured as a result. He is, however, learned, and communicates in Latin, Italian or French with a wax tablet and stylus he carries everywhere. The apprentice answers to the name "Giro," but otherwise refuses to offer more information about himself. His master probably knows more, but will only add that he came from Parma after that city was wiped out by the plagues.

Everywhere he goes, Peruzzi carries the half-finished architectural plans and sketches of a building. Late at night when he is not working, he shows them to people he has befriended. Characters with Architecture skill may recognize them as the Villa Farnesina, an actual building in Rome on Homeline. Peruzzi was its architect there; it does not look, as if it ever be built on Jenner-1.

Baldassare Peruzzi

107 points

Age 38, 5'8", 150 lbs. A short, thin man with black, slightly curly hair, and dark, weathered skin, dressed usually in rough brown and gray "outdoor" clothes.

ST: 10 [0] **DX:** 10 [0] **IQ:** 13 [30] **HT:** 10 [0]

Speed: 5 **Move:** 4

Dodge: 4 **Parry:** 4

Advantages: Ally Group (Accademia dei Unicorni, Group, 12-) [20]; Literacy [10], Reputation +2 (Among villagers of southern France: helpful wizard) [5].

Disadvantages: Broad-Minded [-1]; Dependent (Giro, 75 points) [0]; Sense of Duty (sick people) [-10]

Quirks: Always following creeks to their source; Carries plans of the Villa Farnesina everywhere [-2].

Skills: Architecture/TL4-16 [8]; Area Knowledge (Southern France/Northern Italy)-13 [1]; Area Knowledge (North of France)-12 [1/2]; Area Knowledge (Catalonia)-12 [1/2]; Diagnosis/TL4-13 [4]; Engineer (Hydrology)/TL4-17 [12]; Geology-16 [10]; Mechanic/TL4-15 [6]; Physician/TL4-12 [2]; Riding (Horse)-10 [2]; Short Sword-10 [2]; Stealth-11 [4]; Survival (Southern France/Northern Italy)-13 [2].

Languages: Italian-14 (Native) [0]; Catalanian-12[1]; French-12 [1]; Latin-12 [1].

The Scourges

Any traveler to Jenner-1 should be aware of the three diseases that have been imported to Europe from the Americas (the diseases affecting the New World are all known and curable by Homeline science).

Cachexy: Cachexy is a wasting disease caused by bacterial infection. Unlike calenture and tetter rot, it can be treated using antibiotics in combination with rehydration therapy (the drinking of salted and sugared water). Neither technique is known to the natives of Jenner-1, but Infinity Unlimited's scientists have discovered the combination.

A cachexy victim loses blood circulation to the arms and legs, causing the muscles there to waste away; ever-expanding blue and black patches on the extremities and rapid weight loss are the primary symptoms. This kidneys are overloaded as they work frantically to clear the muscle cells from the body. Death comes in two to three weeks due to kidney failure. A victim must make a roll against HT-3 every 24 hours, with a loss of either 1 point of ST or 1 point of DX on failure. When both ST and DX reach 0, the patient dies. Mortality is 100% without treatment -- there is no known way to recover lost attributes without it. Allowing cachexy to take hold in a victim causes permanent damage that can only be partially regained even with antibiotic treatment: only half (rounded down) of the lost values can be regained through exercise.

Calenture: This disease is the most straightforward of the three, though the most deadly unless one has taken advantage of da Vinci immunization procedure, or something more advanced. A viral infection, calenture causes an extremely high fever, which eventually kills the victim by overheating. Over the course of five days the body temperature rises 1 degree Fahrenheit every 18 hours or so (one Celsius every 32 hours). A roll against HT-5 is needed to prevent the increase, and a failure decreases HT by 1 as well as causing a one degree increase in body temperature. If HT reaches zero, the patient dies; if a temperature of 106 degrees Fahrenheit is reached, however, and HT is not zero, each following roll will allow the fever to break on a success. That victim will survive, and recover.

Aspirin and other antipyretic drugs can help control the fever, and make it easier to break. Once infected there is no known cure other than to allow the disease to run its course, but infection can be prevented by immunization.

Tetter Rot: The least deadly of the three American plagues, but the most feared, tetter rot lives up to its gruesome name.

People who survive tetter rot are severely disfigured, though no longer infectious. Surprisingly, even in the paranoid small-village mentality of Jenner-1's Europe they are not ostracized, as there is a common folk belief (wrong, but still believed) that a survivor can help protect others from the disease -- this is possibly a garbling of da Vinci's discovery that Cipangan horses can immunize against calenture. Still, tolerated or not, they're far from popular.

A tetter rot infection lasts 2 weeks. A roll against HT-1 is needed to survive it, however, survivors are scarred for life. Once the disease has run its course, all survivors suffer from Hideous Appearance, and must roll against HT three times: once to avoid 1 level of Reduced Manual Dexterity, once to avoid becoming Mute, and once to avoid Lame (Crippled Leg).

Adventure Seeds

"Saint Camillus Preserve Us": Infinity Unlimited keeps a tight grip on access to Jenner-1, as the American epidemics could cause havoc on Homeline, particularly the incurable tetter rot. Agents are drugged and immunized to

the eyeballs, even including some experimental nanobots gleaned from Caliph, before being sent outtime. On return, quarantine is strict, and lasts for three months. The question of sealing up the timeline entirely and leaving it to its fate comes up in high-level circles at least twice a year.

Knowledge of the timeline's existence has leaked out, however, and with the help of some sympathetic insiders (now sequestered on a detention line for their behavior), a religious humanitarian organization has managed to get some personnel onto Jenner-1. They have gone to ground somewhere in Italy, and it is suspected that they will be contacting the Accademia and passing along the understandable parts of 21st century medical knowledge to da Vinci and his cohorts.

The adventurers are charged with preventing this from happening, and keeping inter-timeline travel a secret. Whether they follow orders exactly or come up with something . . . more creative is entirely up to them.

Once More Unto the Breach: Hopeful that other cures like the immunization for calenture can be found, the Accademia has decided to send another expedition to the Americas. While there, the explorers are to capture local animals, particularly some glyptodonts if possible. More Cipangan horses are needed too, so they can be bred for immunization purposes -- the ones they have already will mate with European horses, but the foals always die before they are born. Purebreds seem to be the only answer.

Unlike Europe, the Americas on Jenner-1 have no analog any other timeline. Members of the expedition will be true explorers, unfamiliar with the architecture, language, culture, and almost anything else that can't be gleaned out of the few records left from 1492-1495. The cities of Tzemanzhu, Eoh'medah, and other American nations are ghost towns, but people still live in the country, echoing the paranoid lifestyle of their European counterparts.

Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Four Legs Friendly

Getting Timmy Out of the Well in *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Phil Masters

One of the benefits of the considerably cleaned, tidied, and smoothed-over rules mechanisms in *GURPS Fourth Edition* is that they make the treatment of animals as characters a snap. In fact, any reasonably complete species stat block is a ready-made framework for a racial template, often requiring little more than the insertion of some point values. This in turn means that special animal companions -- usually purchased as Allies -- are not only feasible, but very easy to define.

For example, let's look at two of the species which make appealing (and perhaps downright stereotyped) potential companions, and convert the data from chapter 16 of the new Basic Set directly to racial templates:

Large Guard Dog

-56 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST-1 (No Fine Manipulators, -40%) [-6]; DX+1 [20]; IQ-6 [-120]; HT+2 [20].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: SM 0; Will+6 [30]; Per+8 [40]; Basic Move+5 [25].

Advantages & Perks: Discriminatory Smell [15]; Fur [1]; Sharp Teeth [1].

Disadvantages: Chummy [-5]; Domestic Animal [-30]; Quadruped [-35]; Short Lifespan 2 [-20].

Racially Learned Skills: Brawling (E) DX+2 [4]-13; Tracking (A) Per+1 [4]-13.

Heavy Warhorse

16 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST+14 (No Fine Manipulators, -40%; Size, -10%) [70]; DX-1 [-20]; IQ-7 [-140]; HT+2 [20].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: SM+1; Will+8 [40]; Per+9 [45]; Basic Move +2 [10].

Advantages & Perks: Combat Reflexes [15]; Enhanced Move 1 [20]; Fur [1]; Hooves [3]; Peripheral Vision [15].

Disadvantages: Bad Temper (12) [-10]; Domestic Animal [-30]; Quadruped [-35]; Short Lifespan 1 [-10]; Weak Bite [-2].

Racially Learned Skills: Brawling (E) DX+3 [8]-12; Mount (A) DX+4 [16]-13.

(Okay, these add Short Lifespan and the "Fur" Perk, which standard animal stat blocks don't bother mentioning. Similarly, a properly detailed treatment of some species might require the addition of, say, Less Sleep or Extra Sleep. Many animals might also have Colorblindness, although in fact, this condition may not usually be as bad as the full *GURPS* disadvantage.)

But that's just a start. After all, an animal worth treating as an Ally ought to be slightly more interesting than the sort of thing that a character can buy in the public market. The fun comes when we notice that all the things which make animals like these rather mundane are bundled together in one place -- the "Domestic Animal" meta-trait. So, for the sort of game worlds which are infested with helpful pets, we can just chop this out and replace it with a brand new

meta-trait:

Cinematic Animal Companion: An animal noted for its helpfulness, devotion, intelligence, and uncanny ability to understand humans and convey useful information to them. IQ+1 [10]; Sensitive [5]; Cannot Speak [-15]; Social Stigma (Valuable Property) [-10]; Taboo Trait (Fixed IQ) [0]; and Gesture Skill at IQ+4 [12]. 2 points.

Note that the Sensitive advantage specifically makes the creature alert to the emotional states of ordinary *fully sapient* beings such as humans. GMs may assume that, by logical symmetry with Animal Empathy, Spirit Empathy, etc., when possessed by humans, this permits an animal to use Influence Skills on humans (and the like).

Using this will of course raise the cost of any species template which previously included either the Domestic Animal or Wild Animal meta-traits by 32 points. The Taboo Trait fixes the animal's IQ at its raised level, of course, and this might be deleted in some cases, with GM consent, or more likely changed to "IQ can only be raised by +1 more"; for example, in highly cinematic games, a "wonder horse" might have IQ 5. Raising animal IQ beyond that level, though, would really be getting silly -- unless that's the point of the game. Note that an IQ 6+ creature should theoretically be capable of speech; indeed, cinematic animal companions with that level of exceptional intelligence generally seem to understand everything that's said to them, simply possessing the Mute disadvantage and -- usually! -- illiteracy.

Wealth

It should also be noted here that the vast majority of animals are Dead Broke; their position in relation to human society prevents them from doing much useful with money, even if they somehow have any idea what it is. Equipment such as saddles, armor, etc., should be paid for by the character acquiring an animal companion, not by the animal itself.

Examples

So, having done all this work, let's build ourselves -- or rather, some hypothetical characters -- a couple of animal companions:

Mr. Snompom

25 points

ST 9 [0]; **DX** 13 [40]; **IQ** 5 [0]; **HT** 12 [0].

Secondary Attributes: SM 0; Dmg 1d-2/1d-1; BL 16; HP 9 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 13 [0]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 6.25 [0]; Basic Move 11 [0]; Dodge 10.

Advantages: Combat Reflexes [15]; Night Vision 6 [6]; Pitiable [5].

Disadvantages: Dead Broke [-25]; Fanaticism (Kurtswallider family) [-15]; Gluttony (12) [-5]; Large Guard Dog w/Cinematic Animal Companion instead of Domestic Animal [-24]; Secret (Utter ruthlessness) [-10].

Quirks: Avoids human children he doesn't know, if possible; Likes traveling by car (but *doesn't* stick his head out of the window); Overdoes the innocent act around Mr. and Mrs. Kurtswallider. [-3]

Skills: Acting-8 [12]; Brawling-17 [8]; Camouflage-9 [12]; Filch-13 [2]; Gesture-10 [4]; Observation-12 [1]; Stealth-13 [2]; Tracking-14 [0].

Background

Mr. and Mrs. Kurtswallider aren't bad people, even though their fabulous wealth and jet-set lifestyle do tend to distract them from things that other people might find important; they're just terribly busy. They really do love their adopted

daughter, Jenny Kurtswallider, even though they sometimes only seem to pay her much attention when she gets into trouble. Fortunately, they're quite clever about spending their money, and Little Jenny has had some of the best nannies and tutors that can be afforded anywhere. She's also got a pet which any child would envy.

She picked out Mr. Snompom when he was a cute puppy. Had Mr. and Mrs. Kurtswallider been paying more attention that day, they might have noticed that he was quite a large puppy, even then, but they just agreed that he was adorable and paid what he cost. Jenny promised to look after him and house-train him properly, and she carried out that promise faithfully with the aid of the Kurtswallider family's faithful chauffeur, Thurl. She did spoil him rather, but fortunately he gets lots of exercise to burn off all that expensive dog food.

The sweet puppy has grown quite large indeed, but even if the adult Kurtswalliders sometimes worry about him, it's become clear that Little Jenny loves him far too much for them to get rid of him. Anyway, he's perfectly well behaved, and sometimes helps Little Jenny in small ways when she gets into her funny little scrapes -- and despite his size and strength, and the impressive way he has of moving quite quietly when he wants to, he does still have the most adorable puppy-dog eyes.

There are quite a lot of people with different views of Mr. Snompom, actually, but very few of them choose to come anywhere near the family these days. (There'd be more, but not all of them are in any state to express that opinion -- or anything else.) Little Jenny worked very hard to house-train Mr. Snompom, and he understands very well that he shouldn't leave messes lying around -- so he doesn't. And when Little Jenny's Weirdness Magnet and assorted Unknown Enemies make for messes bigger than Mr. Snompom can hide on his own, the taciturn, equally loyal, seven-foot-tall Thurl (Little Jenny's other Ally) will always step in to help.

Come to think of it, Mr. and Mrs. Kurtswallider probably ought to pay a bit more attention to a lot of things.

Dwarfcruiser

25 points

ST 25 [5]; **DX** 9 [0]; **IQ** 4 [0]; **HT** 12 [0].

Secondary Attributes: SM+1; Dmg 2d+2/5d-1; BL 125; HP 25 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 13 [0]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 7 [0]; Dodge 11.

Advantages: Fearlessness 1 [2]; Heavy Warhorse w/Cinematic Animal Companion instead of Domestic Animal [48].

Disadvantages: Dead Broke [-25]; Impulsiveness (12) [-10]; Intolerance (Dwarves) [-5].

Quirks: Quiet and respectful around human women; Hates to retreat. [-2]

Skills: Brawling-14 [8]; Gesture-8 [0]; Mount-14 [4].

Background

The human-ruled Empire of Megalos and the underground dwarf kingdom of Zarak are at peace, and have been for centuries. That's the official position, anyway. But once upon a time, they were at war, and it was a bitter war, and if there's one thing which the Megalan aristocracy and the dwarven race have in common, it's the ability to hold grudges. Add to this the fact that the borderlands between the two are sometimes remote and wild, and little watched by the high lords and law-givers of either realm, and you've got a recipe for blood feuds, petty raiding, and vicious ambushes.

Sir Lionel of High Rassingbourne maintains the traditions of his class in every sense that he understands them, and does what he feels is appropriate about the "d---ed dwarf problem" whenever he can. As a proud knight, he has of course acquired a fine warhorse, and thanks to good luck in his purchase, a long and diligent regime of training, and his natural sense for animal handling, he has perhaps the best mount on the northern borders.

His faithful steed, Dwarfcrusher, is a wonderful creature, which understands him perfectly and works well with his squires and men-at-arms even when Sir Lionel isn't around. (It has a trained warhorse's hair-trigger temper, but is intelligent enough to understand when a human isn't actually being provocative.) Dwarfcrusher has also absorbed Sir Lionel's basic views and instincts on many subjects, especially dwarves, and may even have accumulated a higher body count than Sir Lionel himself.

The Omniscient Eye

How Did They Heal Bones In the Old Days?

About 18 months ago I had a spiral fracture in my lower leg that required a titanium rod. In the 21st century this was no big deal; a little bit of surgery, a little bedrest and crutch work, and some physical therapy and I was almost good as new. But I'm sure in a typical fantasy setting this would be a much bigger problem. How would medical science/art handle such an injury in past eras?

--Richard Dodson

A modern physician has a number of advantages over a past counterpart --- everything from X-rays to germ theory --- but over the years the basics of treating fractures have remained constant. The most sweeping advancements in patient care have occurred in other medical areas. If you had broken your leg a thousand years ago, chances are good that you would have walked again.

A fracture is a break in a bone, usually with injury to the surrounding tissues. This causes bleeding internally and external bruising. Severe fractures damage muscle and connective tissue, in some cases breaking the skin. Bone has limited flexibility, the long bones of an adult human responding to stress like a stick of chalk. If you apply excessive transverse force (i.e., from the side), the bone will snap. Force applied from an angle may cause an oblique fracture; or, if you twist it, the bone will develop a spiral fracture.

Closed fractures occur when the bone breaks along a single plane and remains inside the body. If the fracture is horizontal, the bone easily repairs itself and can bear a limited amount of weight. The more angled the plane of fracture, the less stable the bone will be until it is repaired.

Open (compound) fractures are those in which the bone penetrates the skin. An open fracture is not only more likely to be severely out of alignment but its exposure to air, dirt, etc., makes it likely to become infected.

Comminuted fractures are when the bone is in several fragments. They are often due to falls or collisions and are difficult to heal. The intrusion of soft tissue between the fragments can also delay or prevent their union. Today these injuries are usually fixed with plates, pins, or screws.

Spiral fractures result when the bone has broken due to twisting. The resulting fracture line follows a curving diagonal path. These fractures are prone to slip if set back into position due to the weird angle of the break. Richard, you probably suffered your spiral fracture when your leg decided to move in two directions at once. Incidentally, spiral fractures appear on bones that have been split for their marrow, a classic sign of butchering that has been used to infer cannibalism in the archaeological record. Hopefully cannibals were not the cause of your fracture.

Greenstick fractures are specific to children. You've heard that children have soft bones? Not quite true: more like they have some "give" because their bones are not fully mineralized. Children can experience fractures that do not completely break the bone, which instead bend and crack. These are called *greenstick* fractures because the bone behaves like green wood.

The process of bringing the pieces of the bone back into contact is called reduction, and it can be done manually, through traction, or by surgery. When things are messy, the bone fragments may also be fixed with metal pins or screws. After that, the bone may be immobilized (usually in a cast). Immobilization is not always necessary but is recommended when displacement of the fragments is likely to occur. The bone is repaired in stages, taking several weeks depending on the size of the bone and the age of the patient. If any of these stages become interrupted things go awry. In some cases, the bones never unite and form a false joint, or they unite badly and result in deformity. If blood enters the muscle, it may ossify into irregular plates of bone. If the bone becomes infected the patient may develop

osteomyelitis, where part of the bone dies and the surrounding living bone is chronically infected.

So that's how bones work and don't work. For almost as long as humans have had limbs they have been breaking them, so it's worth taking a look at how treatment has changed over the years. There are numerous cases of ancient remains with healed fractures, a number of which didn't turn out so well. Generally speaking, the simpler the fracture the better chance there is of making a functional recovery. A simple break of the upper arm doesn't necessarily end in deformity; even if the bone fragments are overlapping by half a diameter the bone will repair itself more or less normally. On the other hand, there are skeletons with broken arms that never healed, thigh bones that are an inch shorter than they started out, and hips fused by arthritis. One of the Neanderthal skeletons from Shanidar Cave had extensive injuries, suggesting that he was cared for by members of his community for years.

Little is known about ancient medicine until the advent of written records. What follows is a summary of what you might have experienced if you had a fracture in the past, starting about 5000 years ago.

Classical Period

The first use of the splint is in ancient Egypt around 3000 BC, where bark and rawhide were used to immobilize broken limbs. Resin-soaked bandages were also used, though it's unclear if the resin was used to harden the linen like a cast or if it was applied as a tonic. Catastrophic fractures were handled by amputation and Egyptian surgical kits included early versions of bone saws. Anesthetic would have been minimal or non-existent.

Greece is the birthplace of the most famous of early physicians. Hippocrates was writing at about 400 BC and was regarded as authoritative through to the Renaissance. He described methods of setting simple fractures that are similar to those used today, setting the bones by hand and bandaging to account for swelling. Leg fractures were treated with traction, tying the patient's leg to a post driven in the ground. He advocated that patients with leg fractures be given bed rest for several weeks while the leg was extended, a practice that today we realize leads to stiffness and atrophy. A few anesthetics were used, including those mystical herbs mandrake and henbane.

Greek and Roman medicine were part of a greater system that led directly to medieval Western medicine. Though they shared a common body of knowledge there were distinct differences in the quality of care one might receive from Greek and Roman doctors. Doctors in Rome were less highly regarded than in Greece, being more craftsmen than philosophers and often coming from the lower social classes. Better treatment was available to those with greater resources. Doctors were not regulated and quackery was frequent, often causing as many problems as they fixed. Most Roman doctors were competent manipulators, able to treat fractures and dislocations by hand as well as conduct operations to surgically reduce fractures (despite the risk of infection). Roman battlefield experience prompted specialization within the medical field; indeed, Roman military surgeons were rivaled only by arena surgeons who had valuable gladiators in their care. Hospitals were established for the first time, though they were primarily military institutions. In addition to the more general role of *medicus* there developed specialists such as the *chiurgus*, from whence comes our word "surgeon."

Asian medical texts were contemporaneous with Greek and Roman texts but were considerably more advanced. Early Indian accounts suggest the surgical amputation of limbs and the use of prostheses (either crutches or wooden legs). Several manuals are more explicit in their treatment of injury and treatment, detailing a number of splinting and bandage techniques as early as 600 BC. Not only did Asian healers have detailed understanding of human anatomy but they had access to opium and mandrake, the latter being used as surgical anesthetic in China by AD 250. Trade contacts across southwest Asia transmitted knowledge to Europe, possibly influencing Greek thinkers. While invading the area in 327 BC, Alexander the Great was said to favor Indian surgeons over his own -- you can't buy better publicity than that.

Medieval Period

Conventional wisdom holds that all this classical learning was lost after the fall of Rome. Or was it? Despite their lack of classical texts, medieval doctors were capable of adequate emergency care. An archaeological study of skeletons

from 13th century York revealed a number of healed fractures with very few deformities. The cemetery mostly contained individuals of lower social status, so we can infer that even the poor were receiving treatment. Some classical knowledge was apparently retained on a folk level though the monasteries excelled at physick, probably due to access to Greek texts. The Cistercians in particular have been singled out as expert bone-setters. A 13th century cemetery associated with the order contained an individual whose fractured knee was braced by a leather collar with copper-alloy inserts (as copper was widely held to be medicinal). In one remarkable case from Sweden, an individual had copper plates screwed directly to a broken arm. Judging by the degree of healing the individual must have lived for some time after the surgery. This is one of the earliest known instances of surgical fixation, predating the popularity of the practice by several hundred years.

European medicine benefited from contact with the Muslims. While their treatment of fractures was essentially the same, Muslim doctors had much better understandings of anatomy, pharmacology, and sanitation, all of which were definite post-operative pluses. For example, the first recorded use of a plaster cast was in the 9th century when Arab physicians used a mixture of lime and egg whites. Their European counterparts were still limited to splints and slings, and their poorer treatment of infections made amputations common. Muslim scholars were familiar with both Greek and Indian medicine, neither of which was widely known in Europe. During their experiences in the Holy Land, the Crusaders were exposed to Eastern medicine both directly and through intermediaries such as the Byzantines. Numerous writings made their way back to Europe when the Crusaders stopped to sack Constantinople while on their way to Jerusalem. In the 1100s the Crusaders established military hospitals that also ministered to pilgrims, the Knights of St. John Hospitaler existing to this day in the form of St. John Ambulance.

The middle of the medieval period witnessed the establishment of hospitals and universities such as the famous medical school at Salerno. Classical works on medicine were in translation at the Benedictine monastery at Monte Cassino. By the 13th century towns were beginning to require academic qualifications for physicians and quality control was on an upswing. Medical specialization continued into this period, influenced heavily by the medieval guild system. Some schools and doctors established codes of conduct and jealously guarded their business. Bone-setters became a specific occupation, occasionally performed by barber-surgeons. One term used for a bone-setter was *algebrista*, derived from the same Arabic word that gives us algebra because both practices reunite fractions. Medieval barbers did more than a shave and a haircut; they also performed bone-setting and bloodletting, the red-and-white pole supposedly representing blood and bandages. This class of medical practitioner would become organized during the early Renaissance, and eventually split into their modern fields.

The Renaissance

The Renaissance narrowed the gulf between East and West and promoted direct experience through dissections. While sanitation and hygiene were still lagging in Europe, techniques learned in previous centuries were being put to good effect. During the 16th century, Greek and Arabic medical works became widely available in Europe, sparking debates as to the authority of classical authors. For example, the Roman author Galen had described human anatomy using dissected pigs instead of the real McCoy. Few of these debates directly impacted the treatment of fractures except to favor dissections, meaning that surgeons were no longer working blind.

The demands of the battlefield during this time changed emergency care. Amputations remained common on European battlefields given the availability of firearms, which caused infection even as they shattered limbs. During the 16th century the Turks also came up with a new way to cast limbs with gypsum. A space was left in the cast to allow for swelling, which was later filled in with liquid gypsum. At the end of the period Europe saw the rediscovery of anesthetics though they remained rare. The alchemist Paracelsus is attributed with the discovery of laudanum, a solution of alcohol and opium that was used to dull pain. Setting limbs would become much easier with drugs to control pain instead of getting the patient drunk or giving them a blow to the head, both of which were common medieval practices.

Later Historical Developments

From the Napoleonic wars there comes a record of a French surgeon using leather strips and straw to construct a cast that was treated with a mixture of wine, camphor, and egg whites. The result was said to be quite heavy (despite the egg whites --- so much for French cuisine). Lighter casts were developed in the 1850s using plaster-of-Paris. The materials used to construct casts underwent little change until the introduction of fiberglass tape in the 1970s, which reduced the weight of a cast considerably. The current generation of fiberglass casts is also largely waterproof.

Bone grafts to replace missing bone were first attempted in the late 17th century but failed due to tissue rejection. The first successful graft using the patient's tissue was in 1820, and later the procedure was repeated with sterilized bone obtained from cadavers. The science of bone grafting and transplantation advanced through the 20th century and took a vast leap forward with anti-rejection drug therapy. Of course, if you're playing in a fantasy campaign your average necromancer may be able to eliminate tissue rejection and graft almost anything to you.

The single greatest advance in treating fractures was the discovery of X-rays in 1895. Prior to their use, doctors relied upon experience and guess-work in order to diagnose injury. Another important advance was the development of antiseptic surgery in the 1860s. As the risk of infection dropped, surgical reduction of bones became less risky to the patient. This opened the door for a number of procedures only dreamt of by doctors (and Mary Shelley) such as inter-species bone grafts and hand transplants. A third advance was the development of anesthetics such as ether and chloroform during the Victorian era. Another advance was in the development of biocompatible alloys after World War One, which simplified surgical fixation such as plates, pins, and screws. Older implants were liable to corrode and become toxic. Modern implants use inert materials such as titanium to fix bone and to replace entire joints.

The (Near) Future

Technology already affects all aspects of fracture repair, from improved imaging of the skeleton to hormone treatments. A recent innovation has been in the area of injectable bone grafts using calcium compounds to repair fractures. The filler stabilizes the limb and bone cells colonize the area within a few months. Recent experiments have also shown that fat cells can be placed on a polymer scaffold and prompted to turn into bone cells. The resulting bone is not at risk of rejection (as it is made from the body's own cells) and does not require the removal of bone from elsewhere in the body. Within a decade or so we may see these procedures moved from the laboratory to the hospital.

Farther off on the horizon is the potential use of nanotechnology to repair bone tissue. In this scenario, molecular machines might grow bone from scratch (like the body-weaving scene in *The Fifth Element*). This would be extraordinarily difficult to coordinate but nothing is impossible. The structure of bone could be further enhanced by reorganizing it or lacing it with exotic materials so as to provide greater strength.

--David M. Finch
Physical Anthropologist-at-large

Sages theorize that the Omniscient Eye might actually be composed of a panel of Experts chosen through mysterious and arcane means. Regardless, the Omniscient Eye is benevolent, and every other week it is willing to share its lore to all. Or, at least, to all with valid *Pyramid* subscriptions.

The Omniscient Eye seeks to answer questions that are tied to knowledge of the real world, providing information with a perspective that is of use to gamers. The Omniscient Eye does not concern itself with specific game systems or statistics.

Do you have a question for the Omniscient Eye? Feel free to send it to pyramidquestions@yahoogroups.com, and the Omniscient Eye might answer it!

Pyramid Review

Motocaust

Published by [Ronin Arts](#)

Written by Philip Reed

Illustrated by Christopher Shy

6.85 Meg 50-page full color PDF (5.25 Meg Zipped); \$10

The post apocalypse genre has seen a small resurgence of late, headlined by the *d20 System* modern updating of the original classic [Gamma World](#). The other *d20 System* title, [Redline -- High Speed Road Duels In A Post-Apocalyptic Future](#), took a less thoughtful more mechanistic approach in bringing *Mad Max*-style vehicular combat to the genre, while Politically Incorrect Games' *genreDiversion* title, [EarthAD: Post-Holocaust Adventures](#) provided an overview of the genre. Like *EarthAD*, the latest entry to the genre has been released in PDF format, but shares more in common with *Redline*. Developed within the space of a month, *Motocaust* is written by PDF guru Phil Reed, and benefits greatly from the artwork of Christopher Shy.

Motocaust is set in the years following an asteroid striking Missouri. The face of the world has changed: America, England, and Japan were devastated. America has recovered, but the USA is no more. In its wake, China and Germany have risen as the world's super powers. America is governed on a state-by-state basis, some democracies, some dictatorships, and some communist collectives. Life is more simple, having regressed to that of the mid-twentieth century or earlier. But each town or settlement has fortified itself and taken on a cowboy attitude to security -- all in the face of a new threat that the asteroid left behind.

New terrors stalk the wastelands between the settlements: Necros. The asteroid brought with it an alien spore that mutates organic matter, and flesh in particular. What were once dead walk again . . . The Corpsebound are amalgams of at least two human corpses; Flesh Bugs are mutated insects that crave human flesh; Hell's Servants are motorcycle riding or car driving zombies; Motorheads are intelligent zombies that lead packs of Hell's Servants and guzzle petrol as much as they chew flesh; and Shadows are ninja-like, swathed all in black, mummy-like, and use hi-tech gear to perform assassinations. Of all the Necros, the Shadows and Motorheads are the only ones that can be selected as player characters. Though these undead are powerful, ordinary human characters will have more skills in comparison.

In *Motocaust*, players take the roles of "knights of the road," crewing the cars and bikes that travel from town to town. Those provide transport, courier and messenger services, their vehicles being the best way to outrun and often outgun the Necros. Six archetypes are suggested. The bodyguard; the cycle courier; the grease monkey that fixes the vehicles; the gun bunny that crews a vehicles' weaponry; the Runner being a demon behind the wheel; and the tuner seeing to the vehicular electronics so prevalent in the late nineties designs that survive in the future of *Motocaust*. Each archetype has a favored skill, which receives a +1 bonus and can also be raised above the starting maximum of six. Each also has two penalized skills, that have a starting maximum of five, and cost a point to buy before they can be raised to the minimum score of one.

Character generation is an easy process. A six-sided die is rolled for each of the three attributes -- Strength, Intelligence, and Agility -- and then three bonus points are divided between them. All characters have 20 hit points. A further 20 points are divided between the 12 broadly defined skills. For example, the Social skill covers all interpersonal interaction, while Driving applies to cars, trucks and motorcycles. Skills are rated from one to ten, and each is combined with a key attribute for skill checks that are rolled on 2d10. Most skills are keyed to Intelligence and Agility, except for Unarmed Combat and Primitive Weapons that both use Strength instead.

Character generation ends with equipment purchase, paid for in "tp" or "trade pieces." Most equipment is generic, so that a Pistol, Semi Auto, is exactly that, rather than say, a Beretta 92F. The players and the MotoMaster can add such details, as is their wont.

Every player also receives 3000tp to build a vehicle. The points can be pooled to build something better, faster, more heavily armed and armored -- and flashier. Flash is important because a good-looking car and crew gets the business, its rating adding to the social skill under certain circumstances. Based on cycle, compact, sport, coupe, and pickup chassis, players add engines, armor, tires, weapons (machine guns, Hellfire missile launchers, and flame throwers), and a plethora of extras. These tweak aspects of the car to give various benefits. For example, vehicle decals weigh nothing, are cheap to buy, and give a +1 flash bonus, while an engine extra like cold air intakes increases a vehicle's speed. The larger the vehicle, the more options it can carry, such as turrets. An engine's base chip can also be reprogrammed with new calibration codes or even replaced. It is possible to put too much into a vehicle, but at a loss of top speed.

The design process, of which a full example is included, is not that difficult. But with so many options, it might be a little slow when done cooperatively. Two ready-to-play designs are included but there should have been an example of each chassis type given.

Vehicular combat has an abstract element in that it is described more than mapped out -- the author suggests the use of other game systems if a more tactical style is desired. It is also cooperative, with each character having particular responsibilities, much in the manner of FASA's *Star Trek Starship Tactical Combat Simulator*. Thus a driver drives, a gunner handles a weapon, the grease monkey and tuner repairs, or they handle other weapons or take pot shots out of the window. The system also uses an ordinary deck of cards with the four suits corresponding with, and giving bonuses to particular actions and events within the game. Spades correspond with bonuses to attacks; Hearts to speed changes; Clubs to handling breakdowns; and Diamonds to fancy maneuverings. A character's responsibility determines what cards can be played -- drivers play Hearts or Diamonds, gunners Spades or Clubs and so on. Both players and NPCs start with a deck of five cards played in turn to enable offensive and defensive actions. A player is encouraged to describe the event his card represents, bringing a narrative element to vehicular combat. The face cards allow special actions, such as targeting a vehicle's tires, pulling vehicular stunts, and so on. Standard skill rolls handle actual resolution with the value given on the cards acting as bonuses. In effect the cards both work to handle the flow of combat, and not only provide more options than just the rolling of the dice, but force players to describe their effects.

Physically, *Motocaust* is a hefty PDF. Much of that is due to the full-color artwork of Christopher Shy. And although these pieces make the PDF inkjet heavy, the illustrations, both sketches and photo realistic pieces, are all uniformly good. The writing is solid, but it does need another editorial pass. It also has an adult tone, including the language in the entertaining color fiction. There is a slight and sly politicism to the game, that of a superpower being brought to its knees and surpassed by a chance event. Other amusing touches include renaming doctors as "ziptucks," and having the postal service broken up into clans that war with each other in order to deliver the mail.

This basic game only covers Texas, so there is room aplenty for further support. This should include adventures, of which there are none given, and more vehicles. Two designs are just not enough. But these amounts to nitpicks in what is otherwise an interesting take upon the genre.

And it cannot be denied that this take is derivative. *Motocaust* is essentially a Deadworld -- [*All Flesh Must Be Eaten*](#) meets *Car Wars*. But *Motocaust* is not a game of survival horror, and is more to do with helping to rebuild and keep society going. The way it handles car combat harks back to one of the short stories that inspired car wars, *Along the Scenic Route*, penned by Harlan Ellison. It also has a dash of Roger Zelazny's *Damnation Alley* thrown in for good measure. Which is no bad thing and is an effective combination, as *Motocaust* is easy to grasp and both setting and mechanics have a brute machismo to them.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Mechamorphosis (for *d20 System*)

Published by [Fantasy Flight Games](#)

Written by Lysle Kapp & Rob Vaughn

Illustrations by Cil Cheung, Joe Ng, Matt Kuphaldt, Chris Pickrell, Hian Rodriguez, & Franz Vohwinkel

Edited by Greg Benage, Rob Vaughn

64-pages b&w softcover; \$14.95

It's somewhat ironic to note that while some companies have difficulty getting supplements out for a single product line, Fantasy Flight manages to get several products out in their Horizon line, but they're all self-contained settings independent of one another. The fifth release in the chain is *Mechamorphosis*, and fans of the eye-candy cartoon *Transformers* will see the deliberate parallels.

Thousands of years ago, the Great Generator on Mecha Terra gave out. The one dependable source of nexus energy, the lifeblood of the robotic mechamorph race, was gone, and the inhabitants fell to fighting amongst themselves for what precious little was available.

In stepped one of the guilds with an offer: The Tyrants had a source of power they were willing to share, and all they wanted was control of the planet. An orderly society could more easily devise new sources for nexus energy. You'd think people would think twice before rolling over for a group that calls itself the Tyrants -- you're kinda asking for it -- but as a nod to the similarly obvious Decepticons from the TTV show...

The Tyrants' mysterious source of energy, however, is to suck it out of other mechamorphs. Some mechamorphs discover the fraud and are forced (or escape) off-planet through a white hole leading to Earth. As the setting opens, two rebel groups occupy our planet: the Exiles who openly fight the Tyrants, and the isolationist Animechs who are satisfied they have escaped persecution and don't want to rock their secret boat.

Those villains who pursued their quarry to Earth may be losing their influence over events back home, and the race as a whole has made enemies among its galactic neighbors. A select few humans are aware of the giant robot threat, and an enigmatic organization calling itself AUTO has offered to fund actions against the mechamorphs. The heroes and their human friends must use their technology and their ability to morph into vehicles, weapons, devices, and animals to stand against the oppressors and take the fight back to their home world.

Building PCs that have a minimum of two forms is a daunting idea, especially if you must codify the process in just several pages. *Mechamorphosis* heroes arrange five character creation options into priorities. Do you want your unit to concentrate on attributes over feats? Is it more important that you have greater control over the shapes you can adopt, or that you have more, cooler equipment when you become a strike helicopter? The higher the priority, the better your choices in that arena.

Once you have your priorities straight, most development options are familiar. Feats and skills are chosen normally (once again, Horizon tends to lump like skills together such as Senses, comprising Listen, Search, and Spot skills), though they have a mechamorph slant to them. There are only four classes: soldier, scout, scientist, and controller,

most of which are self-explanatory. The controller, however, is a good example of a unit that gets good use out of special powers. With these, robots can guide several smaller devices that connect with him in a sort of symbiotic relationship. Robots can mechamerge, connecting their bodies into a much larger unit for combat. Many powers are just spells with techie-style names -- *persistent image* becomes holoprojection.

The book tries to break the chaotic processes of fighting and movement down into manageable chunks -- struggles ebb and flow, and the technology needs to keep up as heroes take off and land in short order, morph a gun and fire it, or break down from a mechanical tiger into an off-roading dune buggy. Such alterations are adjudicated generously, in keeping with the anime origins. Three scales of combat are given to match the speed of the forms taken.

It's a good thing the setting is referenced seamlessly throughout, because by the time you get to the end, there's barely more than a half-dozen pages given to the history and current state of affairs, the major players, and the possible options for developing the ongoing conflict. All part and parcel of the Horizon style, but a couple of humans get almost as much development as the robots themselves, and none of them have character sheets. In fact, it's something of a triumph that we know as much as we do about anyone in the game given the lack of any real samples.

Illustrations are handled well -- the team responsible knows its sources, and some pages have pictures that look like they're changing before your eyes. Several doubled images depict the robot and its "alt form" in the same frame. That you can see how the bits and pieces of one image suggest the form of the other is representative of the attention to detail that characterizes the book on the whole. Now if only the physical quality were better -- this entry's cover seems to warp before too long so it's curling upward.

One of Horizon's most complicated offerings to date, *Mechamorphosis* isn't easy to digest. The rules are still short, sweet, and to the point, and their standard disclaimer -- the action is cinematic, so if you're stuck just wing it -- is good advice in any case. But while the concept of tracking different scales for combat isn't original with this game, it's one of the first in which only two combatants can mean as many as four different forms using three different scales in a single round. The interrelationships among generators, nanotechnology, nexus energy, and interchangeable bodies and minds get muddled too.

Nevertheless, it is another triumph for Fantasy Flight Games, in which the characters aren't the only ones making a little magic with varying sizes. *Mechamorphosis* is a slim volume with a lot of information packed into it, data that translates pretty quickly into a good germ for a campaign.

--Andy Vetromile

Two-Player Games (and Other Figments of the Imagination)

While most of the time I compose columns with a vague "beginning-middle-end" already in mind, this is one of those columns when I have no idea where it's going as I'm writing it. Consider yourself warned. (Of course, some of you might be horrified to realize that, in fact, I often do have some idea where a column is going. Yes, sometimes the semi is *trying* to jackknife on the interstate.)

Anyway, I've been in the mood lately to play some alternate kinds of games. Y'know . . . card games, board games, whatever. And, at present, it's not terribly convenient to gather up more than a one other person, I'm bemoaning the lack of good two-player games. Most games are made for at least three players, and they often require four or more. I most recently discovered this when I tried reviewing *Hex-Hex*, which I picked up at GenCon. It was an intriguing concept, and I was looking forward to it. Unfortunately, it absolutely required three people, and was ideally designed for four. With only two people, it would have played like a bad two-player version of *Uno* (which I've written about [before](#)). It was over a month before I could gather together the required number of people.

I also recently played another game which claimed to be for two to four players. It was a Hangman-style variant, and although the core concept was interesting, it just wasn't that *fun* for two players. Part of the reason is that the core rules relied on the competition between other players. In the game a player gets to keep making guesses as to the components of the word as long as he is right; the limiting factor is that any player can guess the word at any time. In games with more than two people, this means a player who is guessing must balance between adding components to the word while not adding so many that the other players will guess the word (and steal the points from him). But in the two-player version, the player has no limiting factor keeping him from guessing all day.

Anyway, I find this lack of good two-player games to be somewhat surprising. After all, the most classic games of all time – Chess, Go, Checkers, Roshambo – are all designed for two players. In fact, most of these games have had variants for three (or more) players, and they usually just don't work.

However, these two-player games are all pure strategy games. Really, when you think about it, all you need to do in those situations is design a game for *one* player, then mirror it. It's rare for two-player games to have two disparate but equally powered sides. (*Ogre* and some of the Tom Wham games spring to mind.) But I'm not a huge fan of pure strategy games; I end up thinking too hard, which means I just stare intently at the board and fret about making a deviation I'll regret 16 moves later. No, I like games that have some strategy, some luck, and lots of socializing.

In thinking about it, it's logical for games to see why the default number of players is three or more in most games that aren't pure strategy. After all, game balance is paramount in most "beer and pretzel" games, and for the most part it's already built in into any game where players can interact with each other. If one player starts to pull ahead, the other players will generally be able to "gang up" on him, knocking him back down. Repeat as necessary.

In some games, this manifests in an extreme; for example, most games of *Illuminati* I've been a part of have boiled down to "Who flinches first and attacks another player?" The attacker generally signs his own death certificate with that action. However, in other games the converse is true, such that one player can become so powerful he can shrug off attempts to stop him made by a coalition consisting of the other players, four burly friends, and the remnants of the Houston Astros.

One of the other problems with two-player games is that your options for interactions are seemingly limited. For example, *Yahtzee* is a game that works well as a two-player game, because players of that game aren't interacting with each other at all; they are only comparing scores at the end. Really, it works just as well with two or 10 players, or even solo. Have fun.

Also adversely affecting beer-and-pretzel two-player games is the lack of strategy many of them have; the "best" move is usually obvious, and there's little incentive not to do that action. This stands in stark contrast to many three- (or

more) player games, where the best move to use against one player isn't necessarily the most logical, because there is at least one other player who *won't* be affected by that master plan.

Fortunately, there are some good "beer and pretzel" two-player games. And some games can be *made* good for two players without terribly radical revisions. For example, *Wiz-War* isn't normally much fun for two players; the board is too small, so the result is that no one pursues the game's primary objective of "steal your opponent's treasures," meaning that everyone falls back on the secondary objective of "blow of your opponent." But to play with two players, simply set up the board for three players -- complete with two "dummy" treasures -- then play the game as normal; the winning conditions are the same as in the two-player version, except to win by stealing treasures the player needs to take at least one of his opponent's.

In this way, I believe I've stumbled across one good general rule for making these types of games more fun for two players. First, there should ideally be two possible ways to win: one involving establishing a goal of the player's own and one in thwarting the other player. This way, the players can pursue a goal that doesn't merely involve picking on the other player (which avoids the problem of smacking each other each round until someone falls) and still gives players some reason to interact with each other (sidestepping the *Yahtzee* problem). As a popular example, poker can work pretty well with two people, especially most of your seven-card variants. This suits the criterion of interacting with the other player (in the bidding rounds) and letting the player pursue his own goal (getting cards and building a hand).

For those considering how to make their favorite games more suitable for two players, here are a few tips:

Look to see if some aspects of a three-player game can be introduced to the two-player game. For example, it might be possible to deal a "dummy" hand in a card game, and either leave those aside (in the case of a classic such as *Hearts*) or have them be played randomly, or perhaps by the player who is currently losing. Of course, these cards probably can't serve as more than the role of random effect or spoiler . . . although if a randomly played set of cards *is* competitive with human players, that might prove insightful as to the nature of the game itself.

In board games, see if more (or less) room might give the players more opportunities for a satisfying game. Maybe making some squares off-limits or making some squares take more effort to move through will encourage more interaction.

If a game has a singular requirement for victory, it might be possible to tweak the game so that this requirement is more integral to the game. For example, in the board game *Talisman*, one of the requirements to begin an attempt to win the game is -- appropriately enough -- a talisman. In the game they are somewhat rare, although it's not difficult for everyone to acquire one. (This is in marked contrast to the previous version of the game, where there were approximately six more talismans available in the game than there are hydrogen atoms in the universe.) But in the normal version of the game there is little incentive for players to interact; it's usually much more profitable to avoid the other players and build up, *Yahtzee*-style. To encourage more interaction, however, what if there is only one talisman in the whole game (or, at least, at one time). In this completely untested variant, players would be forced to go after each other to make sure they could maintain control of the game-winning item. If players think this would give too much of an advantage to the person who has the item, then they might institute a rule that whoever has the talisman loses one Experience Point per turn (or has one permanent point turned into Experience Points). This should encourage the player who has the item to either drop it (thus making it available to all players) or go and make a final attempt to win the game.

In all, I wish there were more options for fun, interactive games for two players. Fortunately, there are enough to keep me pretty happy, and I can tinker with others to try to make them suitable for two players. (Of course, as a note to the game publishers: I'm more than happy to buy good two-player games right off the bat.)

--Steven Marsh

Strategic Eye for the Roleplaying Kind

Seven Board and Card Games Roleplayers Will Love

by Christopher Floyd

Every roleplaying game has a different degree of "game" in it. Some are freeform or story-driven while others are mechanistic, plumbing deep into statistics and strategies. While every roleplayer may prefer a varying degree of "gaminess" in their RPGs, it's hard to imagine a roleplayer who doesn't like pure games -- "strategy games" is what they'll be called this year -- like those played on a board, with cards, or with dice.

There are many qualities a game might have that would make it appealing to a roleplayer. The most prominent ones are isolated here and will use the following tags to denote which qualities the individual games discussed in this article possess:

-
- C** The game assigns players unique characters or game roles. These may confer special capabilities or winning conditions. By distinguishing one player from another this way, some games create characterization and limited roleplaying opportunities.

 - T** Games with this tag sport a simulated sense of time and/or space, keeping the game from being overly abstract, turning pure competition into an event, and establishing a foundation for narrative elements (see below).

 - N** The game features certain story elements -- a mystery to solve, a "script" to follow, or an archetypal narrative situation. The game might also reference (and mirror in its gameplay) an established literary work.

 - I** A little spontaneous creativity, of the sort obsessively honed by roleplayers, will go a long way in these games, either toward winning the game or, at very least, making it more entertaining.

 - A** Games with this tag are implicitly aimed at a roleplaying audience or an audience with crossover connections to roleplaying (fantasy fiction readers or computer gamers, for instance).

 - V** Let's face it: even a mediocre game can become great fun when everyone lets loose and breaks out the silly voices. Roleplayers are well aware of the fun value of accents and flamboyant voice-acting, and with these games they probably won't be able to restrain themselves.
-

The games profiled below are just a few which have aspects that roleplayers will especially enjoy. It is not this article's intention to review these products fully, and the descriptions will not necessarily explain all of the rules or features. Instead, these capsules attempt to explain why each game would appeal to someone who also enjoys roleplaying games. So if you're looking for a fill-in game when half your gaming troupe can't make the session or if your new girlfriend insists on seeing what this "Saturday night gaming" thing is (and *Call of Cthulhu* might scare her away), any of these games is a great choice if you also want to have fun and hopefully satiate that roleplaying jones until next week.

BANG!

Mayfair / Da Vinci Games

4-7 players

CTNV

\$10.00

If you were going to roleplay a classic spaghetti western, one good first step is having all the Italian vocabulary you could ever need conveniently on hand. **BANG!** just happens to offer this and so much more. To start, the mechanics evoke a narrative feeling and a sense of time and space: When shots are fired and some folks are dodging behind barrels while others mount their horses to get out of range, the table quickly starts to feel like the town square in the midst of a shootout. There's a cornucopia of character cards featuring rough-and-tumble cowboys and cowgirls like Paul Regret, Rose Doolan, and Slab the Killer, each with a unique special ability that also serves to characterize. Then there's the gripping, tense, and sometimes perplexing gameplay. Each player has a role - there's the Sheriff, his Deputies, a band of Outlaws, and the conniving Renegade. The catch: Only the Sheriff's identity is known. The rest are secret, and only death reveals the truth.

Any roleplayer will relish playing an Outlaw. All the Outlaws win if the Sheriff is killed, but their success depends on revealing themselves -- with that first fateful shot on the Sheriff - only when they are all in a position to make a concentrated attack. Until then, they must act innocent while attempting to whittle down suspected Deputies, whose job is to help the Sheriff clean the streets of Outlaw vermin. Typically, then, everyone acts like a Deputy, congratulating the Sheriff on a great shot, promising to help him weed out Outlaws, and not complaining when the Sheriff confiscates his weapons or horse. Skillful acting and convincing bluffs are surprisingly effective in swaying a Sheriff's perception of you when everyone's equally suspect.

There's always one player in a roleplaying group who can't be trusted by the rest of the party, who seems ready to double-cross anyone for his own benefit. If that conniver is lucky enough to draw the Renegade when the game starts, you'll have a challenge on your hands. He wants to kill the Sheriff, but only when the two of them are the last players in the game. This means he's effectively a Deputy until the Outlaws are uncovered and killed (although if he can sneak a shot in at a real Deputy before then, he makes his job much easier later on). Then the guessing game begins again, as the Sheriff must figure out which of his loyal Deputies has it in for him. A good Renegade depends on his earlier friendly actions to mislead the Sheriff.

Playing the Sheriff can be stressful, but it's tailor-made for the sleuth of your gaming group. He'll have plenty of opportunities to collect clues about each player's identity, though it's common to have the story turn tragic when the Sheriff makes the wrong call and guns down his own Deputy.

Which is perhaps the part that would make roleplayers a little incredulous: A Sheriff that doesn't know who he's deputized? A gang of Outlaws who play it by ear when they decide to take on the law? The Italian text on the cards isn't the only reason **BANG!** plays out like a spaghetti western instead of a historical frontier story. The chaos and confusion of bluffing, speculating, and sometimes just shooting the first person who looks at you funny is all part of the rip-roarin' fun.

[Witch Trial](#)

| V

Cheapass Games

3-7 players

\$7.50

If you're playing **Witch Trial** without roleplaying, you're missing more than half the fun. Granted, it's not a typical roleplaying scenario: Players are lawyers trying to get rich off a recent spate of witchcraft accusations. As such, they'll charge anyone with anything, admit as much evidence as they can no matter how absurd, and hang defendants out to dry if a plea bargain would serve them better. It's a narrow premise for most roleplayers, but the brilliant silliness of the cards can't help but inspire.

The appeal for gamers in *Witch Trial* is using the skills of spontaneous creativity fostered by roleplaying to justify what would otherwise be luck of the draw and the mandate of strategy. Ultimately, the goal is to sway the jury to your side (each trial has one player as prosecutor and one as defense) to make the final verdict -- determined by the roll of the die -- more likely to go your way. Card plays during the trials generally add or subtract from the jury's likelihood to convict. It could be bland and mathematical, but when a trial starts by accusing Meek Little Sarah of the dreadful charge of Wearing a Hat in the Theater (witchcraft itself not being a crime, witches are punished under related statutes) and the prosecution immediately establishes that Sarah's guilt is clearly evinced by her ability to Read Without Moving Her Lips, any roleplayer worth his salt has to be moved to take up the challenge of making the absurd charges make some kind of sense.

That's not to say you want it to make any *true* sense. Rather, the most enjoyment comes in fitting your arguments into the logic of the setting, as outlined by the card titles, flavor text, and the oddly evocative although completely anachronistic Victorian illustrations of Charles Gibson. Players who can mimic the tone they pick up from the cards and then pile on the pomposity, aloofness, and judicial gravitas of an old-timey lawyer will generate plenty of professional respect from their colleagues and fun for all onlookers, although it won't necessarily earn them a generous amount of money from a grateful township. Victory still comes down mainly to numbers, although an air of confidence in the courtroom may arguably give one an edge when negotiating a settlement.

A roleplayer won't find endless versatility in the role they are asked to play in *Witch Trial*. Pandering to stereotypes is probably more effective than developing a uniquely original persona. It often happens, too, that pragmatic playing gets in the way of constructing the most humorous or bizarre case. Still, *Witch Trial* is a challenge to roleplayers. They have probably never been asked in a gaming session to do anything remotely like defending Mad Gertie Hayes from an unmeritorious charge of Tampering With the Post with only a Faithful Pet and the fact that she Doesn't Cast a Shadow as evidence in her defense.

[The Lord of the Rings](#)

NCA

Fantasy Flight Games

2-5 players

\$44.95

Would there be roleplaying games today if *The Lord of the Rings* had never been written? The answer very well might be "no." There is something in the temperament of fantasy literature fans that wants to do more than read the story; they want to live it. These days, roleplayers have a wealth of genres to dabble in, but it's unlikely any of them will surpass classic heroic fantasy in popularity. Just the title of this game may be enough to make a roleplayer swoon, though there are plenty of other reasons for him to like it.

Many games have been created based on Tolkien's works, but Fantasy Flight's is undoubtedly the one that most authentically reproduces the feeling and flavor of the books. The reason why is the same reason that the game -- its setting aside -- will appeal to the roleplaying crowd: It puts them in the story and makes them all heroes. The *Lord of the Rings* is a cooperative game -- all players are Hobbits, and part of the Fellowship asked to bring the One Ring from Bag End to Mordor. One player isn't the winner; either they all win or they all lose. The opponent is the game itself.

Traveling through Tolkien's tale involves moving through four storyboards: Moria, Helm's Deep, Shelob's Lair, and Mordor. Players must cooperate and communicate to move efficiently. If they don't (or if luck just isn't with them), they will trigger events with rapidly worsening effects. Each of these events is based on a plot point of the books, entitled "Fly You Fools!" or "Wormtongue Unmasked." Most require the playing of appropriate cards to stave off bad results, which are usually the movement of the Hobbits toward Sauron (or Sauron towards the Hobbits) on the "Corruption Track," which starts with the Hobbits on one end and Sauron on the other. When the Ring-Bearer runs into Sauron, the game is over and the Fellowship loses.

No one would pretend that playing *The Lord of the Rings* is the same as roleplaying Tolkien's epic. Ultimately, it involves the team working with the abstract (but exceedingly clever) system to move some pawns from here to there before some other pawns get from here to there. But besides evoking all the memorable moments of the books (and, again, translating them into abstract effects), *The Lord of the Rings* tangibly feels like the books. You quickly become literally afraid of the next turn of the dreaded "Event Tiles" and you cringe when you see Sauron's Burning Eye on the face of the die. You hope against hope that everyone can muster the resources to get through Moria before the Balrog attacks. Like the characters in the trilogy, players must constantly make the best plans they can in the face of overwhelming odds and frightening prospects.

Some nice turns in the system also promote an interesting kind of narrative resonance with the books. For instance, whoever plays Sam is immune to some of the effects of rolling the die (always a bad thing, with the best effect being the one-in-six chance of nothing happening). The Ring-Bearer is often required by Events to roll the die. Therefore, it is often wise to get the Ring into reliable old Sam's hands when Frodo, the starting Ring-Bearer, gets dangerously far down the Corruption Track. Another example is the Gandalf cards, which basically let the team of Hobbits break the rules or ignore some bad results if they can pay the resources required. What this means is that Gandalf shows up out of nowhere to bail everyone out when things look particularly hopeless. Sounds like the Gandalf we all know and love.

The *Lord of the Rings* can't replicate every aspect of the story. For instance, if there are five players, the fifth Hobbit is Fatty Bolger, who, in the novels, stays behind in Bag End when Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin head off with the Ring. These inconsistencies really shouldn't be a drawback for roleplayers, who should recognize that just the possibility of the quest to Mordor failing is a break from what Tolkien wrote, but since the set of roleplayers has a significant overlap with the set of fanatical Lord of the Rings purists, it's worth warning about.

The *Lord of the Rings* is mostly a game of planning and anticipating and doesn't have as many of the "proto-roleplaying" aspects of *BANG!* or *Witch Trial*. What it has is the real feeling -- rare in a board game -- that you are participating in a story. And, more than that, you are part of a team whose cooperation and occasional sacrifice is necessary to bring about the happy ending. For roleplayers, a love of these things may run even deeper than a love of J.R.R. himself.

[Munchkin](#)

A

Steve Jackson Games

3-6 Players

\$24.95

Munchkin is a strategy game meant to model roleplaying gaming. Ironically, it does so by summarily eliminating many of the qualities detailed above as roleplayer-friendly. *Munchkin* lets players haphazardly shift roles (in the form of races and classes); it foregoes creativity and instead rewards opportunistic number crunching; it obliterates any kind of narrative atmosphere and it certainly doesn't encourage cooperation (not the unconditional kind, anyway). The reason for all this iconoclasm is, of course, that *Munchkin* is a parody of everything we roleplayers love and all we nostalgically cherish. The humor could only be lost on the very newest initiates of the hobby. For everyone else, the absurd monsters (like the "Undead Horse"), the even more absurd weapons and magic items ("Mace of Sharpness"), and the heedless grind toward the next level will be familiar and hilariously fun.

[Mythos](#)

TNA

Chaosium

2+ Players

\$8.95 for a Starter Deck

Although defunct as a CCG line, one would be remiss in overlooking *Mythos* when discussing games with a narrative quality, especially since its *Call of Cthulhu* universe is one of the most revered roleplaying settings. *Mythos* has players completing story "scripts" that call for certain cards to be played from their decks - sometimes a specific card or sometimes a class of card like "any monster" or "any indoor location." It has a tangible (though imprecise) sense of space, as players must move from one geographical location to another, and there is a logic to the world, since only being in certain locations will allow play of other cards like tomes (found in libraries, for instance), artifacts, or monsters. The atmosphere of Lovecraft's world is evoked effectively through the artwork and the numerous locations, characters, and tomes mentioned in his work. It might be a small letdown to roleplayers that these story elements never quite coalesce into the real, engaging stories they seem to promise, but *Mythos* still has much to offer an audience hungry for narrative. *Call of Cthulhu* fans are undoubtedly already hooked.

Junta

C V T

West End Games

2-7 Players

\$30.00

This classic boardgame from the early 1980s was hard to find for the last decade until a recent reissuing. A combination of some "crunchy" wargaming systems and some surprisingly prescient "German-style" elegance, *Junta* is first and foremost a game of negotiation, sweet-talking, backstabbing, and vengeance. In a Central American Banana Republic, each player takes the role of a powerful family. Periodic elections determine who is "El Presidente" and he distributes other valuable positions to everyone else - generalships, ministerial positions, and the like. Ultimately, it's all about money, and El Presidente must dole out a secret amount of foreign aid to each family each turn. Shortchanging someone too often might start a coup, a short wargame in which loyalists battle rebels in the streets of the capitol. It's the tangle of deals, alliances, and vendettas that elevates what would normally be plain money-wrangling into a roleplayer's delight. The pacing of the game encourages players to remember every favor and especially every offense, no matter how small. This vicious history provides roleplayers with all they need to really dive in to their role; add a flamboyant accent and the shameless bootlicking and outrageous cursing are irresistible.

The Big Idea

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Cheapass Games

3-6 Players

\$3.00

Much like *Witch Trial*, this Cheapass offering appeals to roleplayers because of its reliance on impromptu creativity. Combining an adjective card with a noun card to create an exciting new consumer product - some examples are "Frozen Pants" or "Perforated Cat" - players then vie for everyone else's venture capital and hope for a successful product launch. Products that get more capital have a better chance of a profitable launch, and those who invested more will make more. The trick, then, is anticipating which products will be popular with the other investors when the simultaneous disbursement of capital takes place, but on the surface every product is the same - just an adjective and a noun. Roleplayers, take notice: Unlike *Witch Trial*, spontaneous creativity is the key to winning *The Big Idea*. After presenting your "Disposable Car" to the market, you have to pitch it to the other players. Choosing the right product and a humorous pitch ("Thanks to space age plastics and the opening of Antarctica to landfill development, we're pleased to introduce . . . the disposable car!") are the only ways to give your product value and make investors' choice less arbitrary. May the best salesman win.

Planet DQ-458772-61

by Tom McGrenery

This adventure is designed for a party of characters from any game featuring interstellar travel, and is suitable for *GURPS Traveller* or various space opera games.

The Planet

Far from any other inhabited planet, on the fringes of the explored galaxy, is a planet covered almost entirely by water. Its designation, as assigned by the Galactic Survey Group, is DQ-458772-61. Somewhat larger than earth, the planet exerts a gravitational pull of 1.1G at sea level and is orbited by two moons.

There are two areas of land on Planet DQ-458772-61, both small islands. The first, designated Island A, is situated directly on the equator. Island A is shaped like a narrow oval, oriented north to south. The island is 800 meters across at its widest point and measures three kilometers from northernmost to southernmost extremity. Island A is a picture-postcard paradise, with a large proportion of its area being taken up by shallow beaches with golden sand that stretches down to the sea. Above the beaches, the ground is still sandy but punctuated with low scrub. Here the ground rises, forming a ridge along the length of Island A. The ridge is populated with tall thin trees with notched trunks and multi-fronched leaves. The trees grow precisely half a meter from one another.

Island B lies 78 kilometers due south. It is roughly circular, being five kilometers in diameter. This island is surrounded by rocks and a coral reef, and is a large flat expanse of thinly wooded ground. Covered in grass and scrub, where trees do grow (the same species that grows on Island A), each tree grows 86 centimeters from its neighbors. Island B is considerably more rocky than Island A, with the occasional outcropping and gully to relieve the monotony of the terrain.

Both islands have small amounts of wildlife, reptilian creatures generally no larger than a squirrel. It is unclear what they eat. The seas surrounding the islands are better populated, teeming with a wide variety of aquatic life. The climate is hot, not unlike that of Earth's Caribbean. Islands A and B are desert islands in planet-wide ocean. And they are fake.

The survey ship "Perdita" discovered and logged planet DQ-458772-61 some 12 days ago, but the information her crew transmitted was only of a basic and cursory nature. After the initial transmission, nothing more was heard from them.

Getting to the Planet

The heroes could happen across planet DQ-458772-61 by happenstance, in the course of ordinary space travel, perhaps diverted from their planned journey by the distress beacon of the *Perdita* (the *Alien* method). Alternatively, they may be hired or ordered to investigate the disappearance of the earlier survey team.

The Abandoned Ship

The *Perdita* remains where it landed on Island B. At seven meters long and designed for a crew of three, the ship stands silently in a flat clearing. There are two ways to get into the ship -- to enter via the airlock, the investigators must overcome the security lock, a simple alphanumeric combination. If they were sent to check on the *Perdita*, the PCs will already possess this passkey. If not, some inventiveness will be required to bypass the lock. On the other hand, they could just go through the giant gaping hole in the port bow. An explosion has blasted right through the thick hull, close to the prow of the survey vessel. There's enough space for a fully grown adult to climb through and into the navigation room, though they'll probably need a leg-up, as the hole is a meter and a half above the ground.

Inside, the ship is cramped and humid. The *Perdita* is divided in to several sections, as follows:

Navigation Room

This section contains seats for all three of the crew, and it is from here that they piloted the ship. The astrogation consoles are situated here. Also, an explosive device was detonated here, damaging several devices but mainly directed through the hull.

Crew Quarters

A living area for the crew with bunks, cooking facilities and a bathroom.

Laboratory

The lab is not particularly well equipped, but it does contain some basic scientific equipment. The *Perdita* is only designated to undertake the first stages of planetary surveys, with more in-depth scientific studies usually being undertaken by later teams.

One of the islands' lizards is here, kept in a transparent cage and looking very healthy.

Engine Room

A standard propulsion unit takes up most of the space in here, which comprises the rear half of the *Perdita*. A family of the islands' lizard creatures have taken up residence in the ventilation shafts.

Hold

This contains all the survey team's equipment, including small water and ground vehicles. Some PCs may be interested to note that only two of the four laser carbines noted in the inventory are still here.

Computer Room

The main interface with the ship's computer is in this room. The computer is dormant but can be reactivated with a minimum of hassle by a trained operator. The computer may either work on a traditional interface or may speak to the heroes in a friendly and helpful voice. If the GM wants a tense horror adventure, the latter is recommend; nothing is guaranteed to spook players more in an SF game than a friendly, helpful computer.

The computer has plenty of information for the PCs. It holds the records of what happened to the crew before they disappeared.

The Ship's Log

The survey team's documentation since arriving at planet DQ-458772-61 is not as complete as it should be, though it is impossible to tell whether this is because the records were deleted or because they were never made in the first place. However, the following information is available.

After an uneventful transit to the system, the *Perdita* took high- and low-orbit readings, including an oceanographic scan before settling down to land on Island B. Some lively, jocular debate occurred between the crew members over which of them would get the whole planet named after them, and which would get only an island each to bear their names.

The crew remained inside the *Perdita* overnight, running standard scans via the ship's sensor array. The next day, they went out to explore the islands. Daniels took a skiff over to look around Island A. Crewmembers Jensen and Billing remained on Island B -- Jensen was particularly interested in the lizards on the island and brought one back to the *Perdita* for study.

By late evening, Daniels had not returned from Island A. Jensen and Billing attempted to reach him via the shipboard communications devices but failed to make contact. With night fast approaching, Jensen and Billing elected to follow procedure and remain on board the *Perdita* until morning, keeping shift watches and periodically trying to contact Daniels.

In the morning, Jensen and Billing armed themselves with laser carbines from the hold and set out for Island A. An hour later, Jensen returned to the ship alone. She proceeded directly to the hold, from which she retrieved an explosive device. This she rigged in the navigation room to blow the whole ship in the event of any unauthorized entry. Precisely what triggered the device before the PCs arrived is unclear, but Jensen apparently did not set the device correctly, as the ship is still largely intact. Having done this, Jensen left the ship in the direction of Island A and did not return.

The computer will answer any questions the investigators may have about the crew and their actions to the best of its knowledge, including displaying what video footage it has from within and without the ship. In general, however, it will not speculate as to the motivations for their actions.

Investigation

Exploring the islands, the heroes will gradually notice the unnatural uniformity of the landscape. Both the shapes of the islands and the spacing of the trees suggest that the islands are artificial constructions. Don't actually come out and say this to the players, though. The suspicion should be enough to start with.

A biological examination of the lizard creatures shows a rudimentary digestive system, with unidentified active acids in the stomach. The lizards are not amphibious.

That the islands are artificial can be proven with an examination of the planet's tidal systems. Every 50 years, the twin moons cause a huge tide that would utterly obliterate the islands. So how do the lizards and trees survive?

In fact, there is intelligent life beneath the planet's waves. The undersea creatures that call the planet home have developed technology advanced enough to detect the transmissions of alien life. Known to themselves as the khalqua, these tentacled creatures knew that sooner or later an alien craft would come to their world, and so they prepared the islands for the land-based creatures they were shortly to encounter.

What's Actually Going On

What the truth is depends on whether the GM wants a can-do tale of adventure and pulp sci-fi, or a game of mounting tension and fear in the vein of a horror sci-fi movie.

The Horror Option

Run as a horror scenario, the tropical tranquillity of Planet DQ-458772-61 also exudes a brooding menace. In this version, the islands have been set up as a lure to allow the planet's natives to trap and examine the newcomers. The khalqua are aware that the creatures they intend to dissect are sentient beings. They just don't care.

The islands -- particularly Island A -- have been carefully seeded with traps. These traps range from deadly to the merely sadistic. The khalqua felt that they

About the Khalqua

Khalqua look something like a hideous cross between a squid and a lobster. A diamond shaped head gives way to a thick, muscular neck which sports six large tentacles, two of which have claws. The khalqua walk on six bony legs that enable them to scuttle equally well on land or the sea bed. In general, however, while underwater the khalqua use their tentacles to swim,

didn't necessarily need more than one live specimen. They also knew that a rescue mission would be sent.

flattening them out like fins. Khalqua are able to breathe both in and out of water.

The traps situated on the islands include:

- blades that spring out or drop sharply from the treetops, intended to incapacitate the victim
- concealed pits, with a three meter drop to a floor of sharp and irregular rocks -- it is likely that anyone falling in will suffer a broken leg or worse
- tripwires that (on Island B) trigger rockfalls to trap the unfortunate victim

Three traps on Island A have already been triggered, which the PCs will find sooner or later, assuming they have time. Daniels was trapped by a falling blade that pierced his left forearm, pinning him to the ground. This blade now lies discarded on the ground, surrounded by a patch of dried blood that tests confirm is Daniels'. Daniels was collected by the khalqua and taken beneath the sea. Jensen's body is nowhere to be found. She is in fact still alive, having been captured directly by the khalqua.

Billing's body is still on the island. Next to a tree with a razor sharp, blood-stained blade embedded in it, the investigators find a formerly concealed pit. Someone has plunged right through the thin covering of the trap, leaving a hole. Within the pit is the body of Billing, severed in two just above the waist, blood everywhere. If they can bear to check, the PCs will note that the decomposition of the body is much less than one might normally expect.

After three of the active traps have been triggered, the khalqua wait until the sun has set and then slowly emerge from the ocean under cover of darkness. Armed with both conventional weapons and devices designed merely to incapacitate, the 10-strong team approach the triggered traps to capture those caught within. Depending on how much time they have, the PCs may be able to escape the traps (or they may have never really fallen into them) before the khalqua arrive.

The endgame of this scenario is largely player-led. Once the khalqua arrive, it becomes a tense game of hide and seek in the warm night air. The PCs may want to simply get to their ship and escape, or they may want to try and find Jensen and Daniels. Daniels is beyond help now, but Jensen is still being kept alive to test her physical and psychological reactions to various stimuli in a lab on the ocean floor twenty kilometers to the east of Island B, shielded from detection thanks to careful security measures. It might be possible to track the khalqua capture team back to their base, or to capture one and attempt to barter. The success of such efforts is down to the GM.

The Action Option

In the case of an action-packed adventure, the traps will be much less nasty and tend to consist of things like simple deadfalls and snares that close on the victims' ankles before hoisting them up to tree level and leaving them dangling in an ungainly fashion. In this case, all the crewmembers of the *Perdita* were captured alive and are being held in the undersea testing base.

Once the PCs have explored the islands and found no trace of the *Perdita*'s crew, send in the khalqua. The heroes will probably be able to fight off the capture team without too much difficulty. As a result, the khalqua will send in heavier reinforcements. Their mission will still, in theory, be to capture the heroes but if they kill them, well, that's okay too.

If the PCs are captured, they and the crew of the *Perdita* will be dumped back on the islands armed with spears and told that the last two left alive can leave the planet. This is a lie, obviously, but it's good for a laugh.

The khalqua's reinforcements include lightly armed but nimble air skimmers that blast out from beneath the sea in a spectacular spray of water. These will attempt to strafe at the PCs if they are on foot or on the sea, and pursue and attack the PCs' ship as and when they make a break for it.

The air skimmers are launched from the same complex as the laboratory, so if the PCs can detect the launch site (the *Perdita*'s computer, having been awakened, will do this automatically), they can pin down the location of the lab. They

may well want to try and spring the crew of the *Perdita* from their prison. This is laudable and to be encouraged. The exact layout and staffing of the khalqua's test facility is up to the GM, but it is only a research outpost, quite some way from the main settlements of the khalqua. Because of this, as long as they don't take too long about it, the PCs should be able to get in and out before hordes of heavily armed khalqua turn up.

Lost Jewels

by Paul Drye

With the possible exception of gold, gemstones capture the imagination like no other form of wealth. As such, they can serve as romantic McGuffins in a wide variety of campaigns. In the case of adventures set in the last 100 years (say, *GURPS Cliffhangers* or *Call of Cthulhu*), a named gemstone like the Koh-I-Noor or Hope can provide a wonderful hook into the minds of players.

Unfortunately, many of these jewels are well-attested throughout history, and it can be difficult to drop them in just anywhere. Solutions include making up one's own named jewels, or ignoring the history and hoping no one notices, but a third possibility is best of all: Use one of the many famous gems that have disappeared from the world stage.

The Braganza Diamond

Discovered in Brazil in the 1700s, the Braganza is one of the most contentious jewels in history, with the story of its discovery, its size, its present whereabouts, it actually being a diamond, and even its very existence all in dispute.

Bearing this in mind, one common story runs as follows. Several Brazilian men were sentenced to exile from the civilized portions of Brazil and ended up in the Minas Gerais region, which was the world's greatest source of diamonds at the time. During a drought they were able to reach a rich patch of alluvial diamonds at the bottom of a river, and scooped up an enormous rough stone weighing in at 1650 carats. To put this into perspective, the largest gem diamond discovered prior to this, the Great Mogul, is reckoned to have been 787.5 carats. Even in the modern day, only the Cullinan has surpassed that figure.

The jewel was brought to the local governor, who pardoned the men. He then passed the diamond on as a gift to João V of Portugal, whose dynastic name was given to it.

At this point, the Braganza Diamond disappears into myth -- assuming it wasn't a myth all along. Even if it did exist, most believe that it was actually a clear topaz, a stone also found in that part of Brazil. Discovering it, and clearing up the mysteries surrounding it, could make the careers of a group of investigators.

Various incarnations of the diamond might be:

- **A rough diamond:** weight of 0.75 pounds, in the shape of a lumpy octahedron about two inches across. Its value is difficult to place, as the "rough trade" is largely controlled by DeBeers, and there's not a lot of open market competition for very large gems. A reasonable figure would be in the vicinity of \$100,000,000, with the potential for it to be much lower -- a diamond larger than the Cullinan was found in Brazil earlier this century but, as it was industrial grade and unsuitable for carving into gemstones, it had no real value.
- **A rough topaz:** weight of 0.75 pounds, roughly tetrahedral or prism-shaped about two inches across and evenly cloudy. It would be worth in the range of \$500 to \$5,000.
- **A cut gem:** since very little is known about the rough gem, the cut-down version of it could be nearly anything. As a rough guide, the 3106 carat Cullinan produced fragments of 530.2, 317.4, 94.4, and 63.6 carats, as well as nearly 100 other smaller gems; in 1997 a 100 carat diamond sold for \$16,550,000. A cut topaz would be worth a couple of times more than it would be as a rough, depending on the quality of the cut.
- **An attested gem:** if the adventurers can prove that the gem is actually the Braganza (as opposed to your average, everyday three-quarter pound diamond), the value of the gem goes up still more. Any number of museums would become interested in it, though whether any of them could come up with the required funds is difficult to say. For a topaz, this historical connection would be its saving grace for price, upping its value by a couple of orders of magnitude.

The Irish Crown Jewels

Not individual jewels, or even "crown" in any normal sense of the word, the Irish Crown Jewels were two pieces of jewelry used as the insignia of the Order of St. Patrick. Both were kept in Dublin for when a monarch of the United Kingdom wanted to invest a new member of the order. One "jewel" is a star, while the other is a badge; both are primarily diamonds with rubies and emeralds interspersed in various patterns.

Some time between June 11th and July 6th, 1907, the jewels were stolen from their safe in Dublin Castle. They have never been recovered. Suspicion fell on Sir Arthur Vicars, who held the only two keys to the safe that contained them - experts testified later that the safe's lock had not been cracked, but opened normally -- and Lord Haddo, the son of the then-Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. Neither was the main suspect, however, as that was Francis Shackleton, a man who lived in the same house as Sir Arthur and who was in serious debt. An inquiry cleared Shackleton, but it was widely considered a whitewash in order to avoid a scandal somehow involving Haddo.

If Shackleton stole the jewels, it's likely that they were broken up into their constituent gems and sold in pieces. GMs are free to ignore likelihood, but if a reasonable explanation for the jewels to remain whole is wanted, another possible perpetrator is Francis Bennett Goldney, who was an Officer of Arms for Dublin appointed six months before the theft. When he died, it was discovered that Goldney had a kleptomania for historical treasures. There was no sign of the Star and Badge in his collection, but the possibility remains that he was the thief.

The Order came to an end when most of Ireland became independent in 1922. The last member of the order died in 1974.

The Star of St. Patrick

A compass-shaped arrangement (two squares overlapping at 45 degrees) of small diamonds about three inches across. A circle of blue is inscribed in the center with the motto *QUIS SEPARABIT MDCCLXXXIII* ("Who shall separate us? 1783") In the center is a shamrock constructed out of emeralds, on a background of the cross of Saint Patrick (rubies in the shape of a X on a white diamond background).

The Badge of St. Patrick

Less spectacular than the Star, the Badge is similarly made of small diamonds, rubies, and emeralds. It is much the same as its brother in terms of the icons on it, but it is oval in shape and topped by a gold harp in turn topped by a crown. The harp and crown cover a hook that attached the badge to a sash during ceremonies.

Both pieces are relatively fragile, and inclined to come apart under rough handling. As wholes, both are not saleable, since they're stolen property and highly distinctive. A sale is possible in the black market, but they would fetch only what a collector would pay: it would be up to the GM to decide who this collector might be, and the depth of his pockets. On the other hand, if recovered and returned to the British, the Crown Jewels would probably gain the adventurers fame and reward.

If broken down, the gems in the Star and Badge are anonymously small, and worth approximately \$1,000,000 in total.

Replicas of both pieces can be seen at <http://www.doyle.com.au/images/patset.jpg> (the upper portion of the badge is beneath the knot of the fabric).

The Roseate Pearl

Another gem that may or may not have existed, the Roseate Pearl was a large, pink pearl from the west coast of Australia.

It was reported to have been found in 1912, when it was bought by pearl magnate Abraham Davis. He then took it aboard the steamer Koombana for the return journey to his home in Broome, Western Australia -- the center of Australian pearling. A cyclone sunk the Koombana en route, and the pearl was lost. Davis then reportedly haunted his mansion in Broome until it was demolished in 1980; variations on the story say he was murdered for the pearl, and the ship sunk to cover the crime.

Broome itself is an interesting location worth noting, as Davis is one of only several ghosts associated with the town and its pearl-diving riches. It is one of the few locations in the world where the *Pinctada maxima* pearl oyster lives, a species that often grows more than a foot in diameter. From the 1880s to 1914 it was a boom town, then rapidly turned into a ghost town between the wars. In 1942, the town was attacked in a Japanese air raid that killed dozens (leading to more ghost stories), and Broome nearly fell apart before the cultured pearl industry arrived in the 1950s. As of 2004, Broome is a small but thriving modern town built on the bones of an older and vastly more dangerous place.

As a legendary gem, there's no hard information about the Roseate Pearl, but GMs can use other famous examples of *Pinctada* pearls as a basis. The largest known is a lumpy ovoid, about 4 inches by 2, weighing 0.4 pounds, and worth perhaps \$5,000,000. Large round pearls are much smaller, but the largest is about 0.6 inches in diameter, and worth in excess of \$1,000,000 (none have been sold recently). In color it could be light pink, lavender, or a dark pink shading towards purple.

The Brunswick Blue

Karl, Duke of Brunswick was one of the 19th century's most fanatic jewel collectors, and had a collection that included the enormous Agra Diamond. He was most particularly interested in colored gems, and arguably the most intriguing one he had was the Brunswick Blue, a drop-shaped, dark blue gem of 13.75 carats of such murky history that it's been impossible to trace it much before the Duke bought it.

The Hope Diamond is the world's most famous blue diamond, and it's all but certain that it is a cut-down version of the French Blue, a diamond belonging to Louis XIV and later stolen during the French Revolution. One guess as to the origin of the Brunswick Blue is that when the French Blue was cut down into the Hope, a second gem may have been fashioned from one of the remaining fragments. This idea is far from universally accepted, but remains the best guess to date.

The Brunswick Blue is small for a famous diamond -- not even 0.25 inches from end to end of its drop shape -- but still one of the larger dark blue stones in existence and as a simple stone would be worth hundreds of thousands of dollars; as a piece of history, it would probably sell for more. What makes it particularly interesting is its connection to the French Blue and the curse that stone supposedly held and passed on to the Hope. After Karl's death in 1873, the Brunswick Blue was sold to an anonymous buyer in Geneva and has never been seen again. GMs are urged to consider what might happen if the Brunswick and the cursed Hope are brought back together after two hundred years of separation.

The Lost Fabergé Eggs

In 1885, Emperor Alexander III of Russia commissioned a large piece of jewelry in the shape of an Easter Egg from Peter Carl Fabergé. Giving it to his wife as a remembrance of her childhood in Denmark -- where similar, if less-spectacular, jeweled eggs were given to the Royal Family as Easter presents -- it was a huge hit. The Emperor decided to make jeweled egg-giving a family tradition, and the tradition continued after his death and into the reign of Nicholas II; it ended only with the Russian Revolution. By convention, each was hollow and could be opened to reveal a small, jeweled prize.

When the Revolution engulfed Russia, the Imperial collection of Fabergé eggs was at first sequestered in the Kremlin, but eventually it scattered to the winds. Of the fifty or so made, eight are unaccounted for as of 2004:

- **Alexander II Commemorative:** Of unknown appearance.

- **Alexander III:** Also of unknown appearance.
- **Cherub with Chariot:** This poorly known egg is believed to be a cherub made of sapphire pulling a chariot containing a gold and diamond egg.
- **Danish Jubilee:** A jeweled egg on an extremely elaborate base, this white, blue, and gold piece was made in 1903 for the Dowager Empress. Contained within was a tiny portrait of her father, Christian IX of Denmark, whose 50th jubilee as King was in that year.
- **Empire Nephrite:** Unknown in appearance, but presumably made from nephrite jade.
- **Hen Egg with Sapphire Pendant:** The first Fabergé egg was a faux egg containing a gold hen, which in turn contained a ruby pendant. This piece was made the next year and follows the same theme, but ultimately contained a sapphire pendant held in the beak of the hen.
- **Mauve Enamel:** Made primarily of light purple enamel, this egg is sometimes called the Rabbit Egg because of its prize: the other major symbol of Easter, a rabbit decorated with small white diamonds.
- **Necessaire:** The Necessaire is only known from description, and apparently was decorated with diamonds, rubies, and emeralds. A large diamond and ruby capped it. While the egg is lost, its prize remains: a small, high-peaked green chest, banded with white enamel and gold.

The eight eggs are the shape of a chicken egg, though sometimes with large bases, and weigh 0.25 to 0.5 pounds. Each is worth in the multi-million dollar range, possibly over \$10,000,000, with the exact value of one only knowable after it sells at auction - the GM has room to maneuver here.

These eggs are most useful in a thematically linked campaign, where for some reason all eight need to be found. Eccentric millionaire Armand Hammer -- godfather to Prince William, one-time owner of the DaVinci codex now possessed by Bill Gates, contributor to the Watergate slush fund -- is connected with the disappearance of several of the eggs; his Occidental Petroleum was one of the few conduits between Soviet Russia and the rest of the world during the 20s and 30s.

Conspiracy/Occult theorists might want to consider that seven Romanovs were murdered in the basement of Ipatiev House in 1918. Is there a connection, and if so, who does the eighth egg represent? Alexander II abdicated in favor of his brother Michael II, who was executed five weeks before the massacre of the rest of the family, while the Dowager Empress Maria escaped to London (along with an egg of her own, the St. George).

The Marlborough Diamond

On the eleventh of September, 1980, two Chicago mobsters by the names of Jerry "Witherhand" Scalise (he was missing four fingers on his left hand) and Arthur "The Genius" Rachel strolled into Graff Jewelers, in London. There they stole a necklace containing the Marlborough Diamond, named for when it was owned by the Duchess of Marlborough (a cousin of Winston Churchill).

They were on a flight back to Chicago two hours later, but were identified and tracked by Scotland Yard while still in the air. A phone call to Chicago police had the two arrested as they went through customs at O'Hare Airport.

There was no sign of the diamond. In the two hours that had passed between getting their hands on it and boarding their plane, it had been passed off. One theory, based on dubious testimony from a London cabdriver, is that it was in a package with a New York address dropped into a mailbox en route to Heathrow. Despite the authorities being hard on the trail of the thieves from the beginning, however, no-one has any real idea where the diamond could be even now.

The necklace is composed entirely of diamonds, a single strand for half of its circumference, expanding to two then three lines as one moves towards the pendant. A circular pendant, with five small strands hanging from it, dangles from the front of the necklace. The Marlborough Diamond itself is in the center of the pendant.

It's likely that the other stones in the necklace were sold individually, as they are sufficiently nondescript that they could be resold. The white Marlborough Diamond would have presented more of a challenge, as it was 45 carats (0.3 ounces) and was "cushion cut" -- an old style of diamond faceting, vaguely square with rounded edges and corners, that went out of fashion in the early 20th century. To be resold, it would have to be recut into a modern style, and

probably divided into smaller, less-obvious stones. It's just as likely that it's still untouched and in the hands of a private collector. Given the unusual presence of Chicago gangsters in the picture, especially ones who immediately flew back to the United States after the heist, some investigators believe it may be in the possession of an American "mob boss."

Pyramid Review

Call of Cthulhu 6th Edition

Published by [Chaosium](#)

Written by Sandy Peterson & Lynn Willis

Edited by Lynn Willis

320-page b&w hardcover; \$39.95

The dark universe of Howard Phillips Lovecraft comes alive once again in the latest version of Chaosium's classic game system. Completely compatible with previous versions of the game, the new version sports a creepy layout and includes the complete text of Lovecraft's famous titular tale, "The Call of Cthulhu." If you aren't already familiar with Lovecraft, you've doubtless seen his influences in such films as *The Blair Witch Project* and *In the Mouth of Madness*, if not the Jeffrey Combs features based directly on his works. His is a world where the lives of men are as inconsequential as those of ants, and just beyond our reckoning, dark malevolent entities lurk awaiting the conditions which will let them manifest on our plane of existence. This otherworld of dark alien gods, and the knowledge of those entities is known as "The Cthulhu Mythos."

Call of Cthulhu provides GMs (called "Keepers" in this system) all the reference materials they will need to setup and run a campaign. They will of course need to provide their own dice, paper, pencils and players. The system itself is called the "Basic Roleplaying System," and will be familiar to players of *Runequest* as well. Players have attributes which describe their character in general terms, and skills which describe their character's aptitudes at particular activities. The system uses d100 for skill checks, and players will want to roll below their current skill levels to succeed in their actions.

In addition to the classic roleplaying stats of intelligence, dexterity and strength *Call of Cthulhu* includes some unusual stats unique to the Basic Roleplaying System -- and to this particular game. The "Idea" stat gives the Keeper a useful "catch all" roll when players are lost or floundering. "Know" rolls allow the dice to determine whether or not a character knows a particular thing. "Sanity" measures the current mental stability of the character. The "Mythos" stat measures how much current knowledge of the secret otherworld and its entities the character understands. Raising this stat will lower the characters sanity permanently, and this can lead to some of the most fun roleplaying as players act out their characters' delusions, phobias, and hysteria upon discovering what is really going on out there.

According to the book, game play is best handled as a mystery-solving experience where there are layers of depth to the tale. The old man in the graveyard may be an agent of a bigger conspiracy or a darker cult, which in turn is merely a puppet for something even more sinister. Players are encouraged to solve problems using brains rather than brawn because the really powerful monsters are completely immune to most physical attacks. Ideally, play is set in the 1920s, although the book includes reference material for modern day adventures as well as those set in the late 1800s.

There is a magic system in the game, and typically the spells are better for dealing with these cosmic horrors than any conventional weapons. However, as players learn the spells from the dark and powerful tomes that contain the mythos knowledge, they lose their sanity. It is difficult to build a powerful spell-casting character that isn't completely mad.

A very thorough "bestiary" of Lovecraftian gods, monsters, and other horrors is included. Statistics and descriptions of these entities, where they may be found, and methods of driving them away (if possible) is detailed. The black and white artwork in this section gives a good basic description for the Keeper, and a comparative size chart is included to show the players scale when facing these opponents.

The book also includes four scenarios. "The Haunting," "Edge of Darkness," "The Madman," and "Dead Man Stomp" are adventures suitable for beginning players. These adventures have been included in previous versions of the system as well. Also included is a chronological description of disasters and oddities since the late 1800s, but this too is included in previous editions.

What's new? If you're a returning player and have the **5th Edition** or newer rules should you plunk down cash for the newest edition? That is the \$39.95 question. If you're just looking for new content, you will find the **6th Edition** lacking. It has the same cover art as the 5.6 version of the book, and the rules haven't changed. In fact, the biggest new section is the text of "The Call of Cthulhu," which can be found online and in numerous anthologies. The artwork and details of Lovecraft's favorite fictional city, Arkham Massachusetts, is a bit more detailed and includes the geographical location for several of Lovecraft's more famous tales. A small section on alien technology has also been included.

But missing from the new version are the sections on Lovecraft's Dreamlands, and criminal procedures and detective techniques, as well as the Forensic Pathology text which made the **5th Edition** such a complete reference book. Also, the book reproduces the error-filled "Resistance Table" featured in the recent **Cthulhu Dark Ages** book. The new layout is creepy, but in places it is hard to read compared to the simple fonts of previous versions.

Yet the book is delightful to read, and the game is easy and fun to play. If you don't own a copy of this game, then it is well worth the price. Chaosium treats its customers with great respect when it chooses to make new versions of its product completely compatible with products it made 10 years ago. While this version comes highly recommended, returning players may wish Chaosium had added game content rather than prose to the book in this new release.

--William Blake Smith

Pyramid Pick

Gloom -- The Game of Inauspicious Incidents & Grave Consequences

Published by [Atlas Games](#)

Designed by Keith Baker

Art & Graphic Design by J. Scott Reeves

110 Cards & Rules Sheet; \$19.95

Are you sitting comfortably? Then I shall begin . . .

Come gentle reader; let me tell you of a curious box that crossed my threshold this very morn. A box within whose confines contain the means to impart to you tales of doom and dismay, a torrent of tragedies, and the final, untimely death in turn of society's best forgotten misfits and misanthropes. You will hear of a miscellany of mishaps, each in their own way enough to make the sufferer doubt his own Self-Worth, until such times, as one last happenstance is enough to drive the sufferer into the throes of despair and maudlin melancholy. If death by ennui does not overcome the individual, something else surely will . . .

"What is in this box?" I hear you ask. Why Sir, it is nothing less than *Gloom -- The Game of Inauspicious Incidents & Grave Consequence*, from that fine purveyor of indulgences, Atlas Games. Further, it comes from the very pen of one Mr. Keith Baker, whom I am told, is the creator of rousing stories of adventure and derring-do set in *Eberron*, itself I believe to be the winner of some nefarious competition. But *Gloom* is not designed to stir the heart and set it racing, but one to tug slowly and mournfully at its strings. In this, I am sure, Mr. Baker does not draw for inspiration upon titles by such authors as H. Ridder Haggard or George W. Griffith, but upon the pen and writings of the late Mr. Edward Gorey. Readers of a less discerning taste might suggest other inspirations as put forth by Mr. Tim Burton in the form of *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, and the troubles of the Baudelaire children as chronicled by a certain Lemony Snicket in his popular *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. Perhaps they might serve as inspiration to some, but to those I would proffer these fine examples of Mr. Gorey's work: *The Gashlycrumb Tinies*, *The Doubtful Guest*, *The Epileptic Bicycle*, and *The Deranged Cousins*. Having read these and enjoyed his incomparable drawings and longing words of an age since passed, you will be in no finer frame of mind to appreciate the awful inherent glumness of *Gloom*.

Gloom is intended for those with a tender heart that have acquired at least eight years of age. It is best played when the tea has grown cold and the sky is gray, at the end of a miserable day. It concerns the dismal doings of four equally dismal families. These are "Castle Slogar," where Professor Helena Slogar employs unorthodox science to preserve the lives of her husband, Lord Slogar, daughter, Melissa, and to create a groom for Melissa with the aid of freelance gravedigger, Elias E. Gorr. "Hemlock Hall" is home to the widower, Lord Wellington-Smythe, his much doted upon twins and their wayward demimonde older sister, Lola, and Butterfield, the sly butler. The matriarch, The Old Dam, dominates "Blackwater Watch," dispensing murderous discipline through her *handyman*, Willem Stark, and while she favors her niece, Angel, Cousin Mordecai is sure to fall foul of her wrath. Meanwhile, the family dog, Balthazar has a penchant for unearthing the wrong bones. Darius Dark is the proprietor of "Dark's Den of Deformity," a circus peopled by performers with as little talent as he has for selecting them, from the ordinary bearded man and intensely shy illustrated lady to the mundane opera singer and the quite creepy clown. As play progresses, each family figure will suffer the slings and arrows of woeful misfortune, acquiring Pathos Points that sends his Self-Worth plummeting, the objective being to send this deep into the negative when such times as an Untimely Death will be his undoing.

What does deserve to be brought to your good attention are the cards themselves, a misnomer if ever there was one.

For each card is not manufactured of card, but is a sliver of opaque plastic designed in such ingenious a manner that when one card is laid on top of another, some details of the one below remain visible to the eye. In other instances, the details of the top card will obscure details of the one below, thus negating its effects. The cards come marked in black, red, and white, each benefiting from the refined pen of artist J. Scott Reeves, and are one of four types. The Character Cards are marked with a name, a portrait, a modicum of flavor text, and a family symbol. The latter consist of a Disembodied Brain for Castle Slogar, a Top Hat for Hemlock Hall, a Scythe for Blackwater Watch, and a Circus Tent for Dark's Den of Deformity. The Modifier Cards are marked with between one and three Pathos Points spaces sinister side. These spaces vary in rarity, the ones at the bottom being both rare and valuable. Together, the value of these spaces total a character's Self-Worth, but only those that are visible. Modifier Cards are also marked with a Story Icon or more, of which more anon. Others have a Special Effect that can be immediate or continuous, "was married magnificently," for example raising the number of cards that can be drawn. They also only affect the player whose character the card is attached to. Event Cards work in a similar fashion, like "Smoke and Mirrors," which cancels another Event Card when it is played, and "Misfortune Favors the Old," that lets a participant play two more cards each turn. Finally, Untimely Death cards turn worthless living characters into valuable corpses.

Play is simplicity itself. Participants select a family and receive a hand of five cards. Who so ever has endured the most miserable day takes the first turn. On your turn, friend, you can play or discard as many as two cards, or chose to pass. Your initial card can be of any type, but prithee, you are forbidden from inflicting an Untimely Death card on a character as your second card. You can play Event or Modifier cards. As such times as a character has suffered something lamentable that has driven his Self-Worth into the negative, an Untimely Death card can be placed upon him. The Character's Card is turned over to show a skull and he is placed aside along with the pile of cards played upon him. For the most part, the deceased take no further action during the remainder of the game. A game continues in this fashion until such times as all of the members of a family have passed on, when the game comes to an end. Each participant counts just the total Self-Worth of the family members that have passed on. Neither the living nor the dead of other families, counts towards a partaker's final total. Whom so ever has the lowest or least Self-Worth is the victor.

Competing in a hand or two of *Gloom* will reveal a simple stratagem or two. Targeting the lowest of the Pathos spaces on the Modifier Cards to deny them to your rivals, while placing them upon your own characters is one. Characters can be targeted with early Untimely Death cards to deny the scoring of Pathos Points. Some cards possess both positive Pathos Points and beneficial Special Effects, like the aforementioned "was married magnificently," which increases a character's Pathos by +15 and gives the benefit already indicated.

In truth reader, *Gloom* is an ingenious design, its mechanics made possible by the translucent quality of the cards. It is pleasing in play, but becomes more engrossing when the Story Icons are taken into account. They are in turn, Beast (indicating the presence of dangerous animals), Blank (which merely covers up Icons below it), Death (curses, diseases, or ghosts), Duck (woebegone tricks gone wrong), Goblet (feasts and poisons), Lucre (money), and Marriage (relationships, both good and bad). These act as hints and suggestions should you decide to elucidate and elaborate upon the circumstances of each card. How else could one explain how Lord Slogar "found love on the lake," but "was cursed by the queen"?

If *Gloom* has a downside, it is the smallness of its text, offset perhaps by your pince-nez or a magnifying glass. Yet dear reader, put such an unkindness aside, for this is a dolorous delight of mournful magnificence in the vein of [Once Upon A Time](#) and *Dark Cults*. Come friend, the Darjeeling cools and the clouds draw in, time I think for another hand of despondency and despair. I commend to you, Mr. Keith Baker and his forlorn fabrication, *Gloom -- The Game of Inauspicious Incidents & Grave Consequences*.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Betrayal at House on the Hill

Published by Avalon Hill

Designed by Bruce Glassco

\$44.95

Betrayal at House on the Hill has an interesting history. It was under development at the original Avalon Hill back in 1998. When Hasbro bought the company, it was one of the few unpublished games that survived the transition, and was kept in the pipeline for several years. When Hasbro turned the Avalon Hill brand over to Wizards of the Coast, the game made the transition there, where it was polished, streamlined, and finally released to shelves, making it one of the "new" Avalon Hill's first entirely original games.

The premise of the game is quite unique. Up to six players cooperate to explore a decidedly haunted house, but the actual haunting doesn't occur until halfway through the game. When it happens, one of the players turns against his teammates, and undoubtedly tries to murder them in one of 50 endgame scenarios!

Players begin their terror-filled night by choosing one of 12 characters, ranging from cute little girls and burly athletes, to psychic detectives and clever scientists. Each character is rated in four attributes: Might, Sanity, Knowledge, and Speed. The attributes come into play as players try to make their way through difficult areas of the house or avoid the nasty events that will inevitably occur.

The house is "built" as players explore it using a tile system. Each tile represents a room, and as the house is explored, players place down these tiles on one of three floors. Over the course of a game, only about half the room tiles are played, giving each game a very different house. Uncovering and exploring a room allow players to draw item cards, face (often deadly) events, or uncover Omens.

The house's Omens all point toward the ultimate haunting, and include such horror stereotypes as crystal balls, skulls, spirit boards, and others. Each time an Omen comes into play, players roll the dice (labeled 0, 1, and 2). If the result comes up less than the number of Omens in play, the haunting occurs.

The haunting is when things get downright dangerous. Players cross-reference the room where the haunting was triggered with the final Omen drawn. This decides which of the 50 endings they'll play, as well as the player that betrays the rest of the group. The traitor and the heroes each get separate texts to read that spells out their goals and victory conditions, so it's often that each side doesn't know exactly what the other is up to. If the explorers win, they walk away from the house alive. If the traitor wins, his former friends will be dead, undead, or perhaps something more sinister.

The quality and scope of the endings varies, though most of them are quite fun. Some are straight-up attack scenarios involving zombies or vampires, others are more involved (and can get quite complex), such as when the house starts collapsing into hell. Still others are a bit goofy; one has the explorers shrink to the size of mice and run from the house's cat! There's a lot of replayability built into the game, given all the combination of endings, house layouts, items, and explorer types. Like any game with multiple scenarios, you'll probably find some that you really like and others that you find anticlimactic or weak. But with 50 to play, you're unlikely to see the same ones over and over again.

The components of the game are quite nice. The six miniatures (each which represents two personalities) are pre-painted and well-detailed, similar in quality to Wizard of the Coast's latest *Dungeons & Dragons* miniatures. The

cards are oversized and use a high-quality stock, though graphically they are a bit plain and aren't individually illustrated. The room tiles themselves are sturdy and painted with evocative images of traditional haunted house motifs, including bloody rooms, conservatories, mad scientist laboratories, and Victorian-style bedrooms.

The game is also packed with almost 300 scenario-specific tokens. Again, these aren't illustrated, and can be quite a hassle during play to use, as you'll have to spend some time digging through them trying to find knowledge tokens, shades, drips, zombies, et cetera. They're not really necessary -- it's rare that a scenario requires more than a few counters -- so you'll probably find yourself just grabbing the nearest token and pretending it's something else to avoid the downtime. It would have been a nice idea to replace many of these with generic monster or item plastic pieces.

While exploring the house is both moody and fun, there's not much in the way of strategy required, especially during the first half of the game. You move your explorer around the mansion, discover rooms, and hope for the decent card draws. While there's not much decision-making here, there's a huge variety of items, events, and rooms for your explorer to find, and tension certainly rises as the Omens are uncovered.

Once the haunting occurs, cooperation and cleverness is often required to win, though it's possible that the house layout will make victory much easier or harder, depending on the endgame scenario. Sometimes, the goal requires items or rooms that haven't come into play yet. It's common to see some explorers running madly about the house opening doors, others trying to fulfill victory conditions, and the traitor stalking everyone with a sharp object! Despite its reliance on card draws and luck, the game's sheer variety and fast-pace keeps it interesting from beginning to end.

Betrayal at House on the Hill is an easy game to teach, and can be taught to new players in under five minutes. Best of all, the game can easily be finished in under an hour, and that includes setup time! ***Betrayal at House on the Hill's*** combination of exploration, item gathering, and cooperation make it an excellent choice for boardgamers, roleplayers, and horror fans alike.

--J.C. Connors

Spawn of Clio's Nightmares

*"Ask me not what I think; the unwilling brain
Feigns often what it would not; and we trust
Imagination with such fantasies
As the tongue dares not fashion into words --
Which have no words, their horror makes them dim
To the mind's eye."
-- Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Cenci*, II:ii:82-87*

[Every Halloween](#), dark fantasies descend upon the sleep of Clio, the Muse of History, dimming her mind's eye to the true course of events. If the sleep of reason brings forth monsters, the sleep of history brings forth whole destinies -- or dynasties -- of terror. She dares not fashion them into words, perhaps, but they stitch themselves together across the lowering years. She tosses and turns -- if you listen, you can hear her horrified murmurs tonight.

*"So much for Caligula as emperor; we must now tell of his career as monster. . . . His body was conveyed secretly to the gardens of the Lamia, where it was partly consumed on a hastily erected pyre and buried beneath a light covering of turf. Later his sisters, on return from exile, dug it up, cremated it, and consigned it to the tomb. Before this was done, it is well known that the caretakers of the gardens were disturbed by shades, and that in the house where he was laid not one night passed without some terrible apparition . . ."
-- Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars**

When the Senate staked Julius Caesar at midday on the Ides of March, they thought they had rid Rome of its most sanguinary tyrant. But his grand-nephew Octavian took power and consolidated it in his own talons, yielding only to the greater appetites of his own stepson Tiberius. But even Tiberius' sadism was dwarfed by that of Caligula -- who saw no reason to step down. Ever. The blood flowed freely in the streets, and he drank deep from any and all who dared question his vampiric rule. Even his death -- hacked to pieces in the Forum -- did not end it; strengthened by his earlier gluttony, Caligula came back again and again. His scholarly uncle Claudius could never find the rituals to banish him forever, and although he summoned up the now-divine Julius for aid, he could do nothing against Caligula's newfound powers. Only Claudius' other nephew, Nero, has the appetites and the cruelty to withstand Caligula -- when Claudius is pushed into the final Night, the two will tear Rome to pieces to glut themselves on its spurting blood.

This is a gore-soaked **Imperial Rome-Blood Types** campaign (which can also be a **Vampire** setting, of course) from the most lurid imaginings of Suetonius and Robert Graves. The Julio-Claudians are vampires; it's up to the GM whether other lineages of vampires exist in other provinces (Aegyptus, say, or forbidding Dacia) or if the Caesar gens is unique. (The specific rules of Roman vampirism vary, but should err on the side of returning from Tartarus.) The flavor can be blood-and-brinksmanship politics, as the shadowy Caligula, the weak Claudius, and the savage Nero compete for power -- or it can be all desperate heroism featuring PC gladiators, priests, and patricians trying desperately to cast off the vampiric scourge and restore the Republic. Or the "rats in the vallaes" -- despised Jewish tentmakers, plebeian slaves, and such -- may hold the secret to ending the vampires' power forever, in the symbol of a prophet crucified a few decades ago in the east, and the Cup that purifies All Things . . .

*"What bright babes had Adam and Lilith! --
(Eden bower's in flower.)
Shapes that coiled in the woods and waters,
Glittering sons and radiant daughters."
-- Dante Gabriel Rossetti, "Eden's Bower"*

The painter-poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti, his poet sister Christina, and their writer brother William came of literary lineage. Their mother was the sister of John Polidori, doctor to my Lord Byron and creator (or revealer) of *The Vampyre*, dead by his own hand in 1821. Their father was a scholar of the secret meanings in Dante -- the hidden hints of the *Fideli d'Amore*, a cult of Venusian splendor. Together with John Everett Millais, William Holman Hunt,

Frederic George Stephens, and others, they founded the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in 1848, dedicated to discovering the authentic roots of Western art, before the corrupting influences of the later Renaissance could set in. They believed, with the influential critic John Ruskin (a major supporter), that "the world itself should be read as a system of visual signs." Their paintings glorified the Feminine Principle, the occult Magdalen, the triple goddess -- maiden, whore, and crone. But they were more than an incestuous artistic movement -- they were a coven, a witch-cult, headed by the Rossettis descended from the streghe of southern Italy and (perhaps) tainted with vampiric blood. "Pre-Raphaelite" was a sign -- the *Malleus Maleficarum* was written the year of Raphael's birth. The Brotherhood wished to turn back the clock to the great flowering of medieval witchcraft. Stephens destroyed his art in 1850, but the others continued to hold exhibitions and exalt their Queen of Air and Darkness.

This *Steampunk-Spirits-Wizards* campaign frame can be played as a conspiratorial, secret-history style game set in the early years of the Brotherhood, or later as a "magic returns" game, when the cult assumes Victoria-as-Devouring-Mother (perhaps during the Mutiny of 1857 or the great Indian famines of the next decade) and actively infiltrates the spiritualist and naturalist movements. PCs can be witches themselves, allied to the Pre-Raphaelites or opposed to them -- or art historians, classicists, and literary critics who stumble upon the insane truth. Wild cards can include the Masonic male-magick circle that took up the Blade in 1888, or witchly British intervention in the American Civil War.

"Where are the notes?" I asked. He pointed to the table, and for the hundredth time I picked up the bundle of manuscript entitled 'THE IMPERIAL DYNASTY OF AMERICA.' One by one I studied the well-worn pages, worn only by my own handling, although I knew them all by heart, from the beginning, 'When from Carcosa, the Hyades, Hastur, and Aldebaran . . .'"

-- Robert W. Chambers, "The Repairer of Reputations"

Conspiracy theorists have long posited a secret bloodline connecting the American presidents together, a hidden monarchy that bursts into flower above ground with such families as the Adamses, Harrisons (whose descendants include LBJ), Roosevelts, and Bushes (and the Tafts, Kennedys, Gores, and other "political dynasties"). Some are just under the surface -- Barbara (Pierce) Bush is descended from Franklin Pierce. In fact, of the 43 U.S. presidents, almost 60 percent were cousins or closer; George W. Bush is related to 12 presidents (not even counting his father). It is worse than they think. The bloodline is the bloodline of Hastur, trickled down through the veins of America under the true Great Seal -- that of the Yellow Sign. Washington, D.C., laid out to an occult plan designed by Grand Master Freemason George Washington, is the reflection of Carcosa, the City Under the Black Stars. He Who Shall Not Be Named made a secret pact in 1789, when the first President took his true oath at midnight -- and He stretched out His Presence in 1989 to shiver the fortresses of his scions' enemy.

This can be a secret-history conspiracy game, of course, riffing off *Delta Green* or any other setting linking the U.S. government to the Hastur Mythos. But it might be almost as fun as an almost-secret history; the Lineage can be uncovered by any scholar who tries, and the true nature of international politics is known to think tanks and educated (if neurasthenic) citizens the world over. The toadlike Childer of Tsathoggua burrow into the flesh of Europe's governance, having displaced Yig's Reptoids in the *annus horribilis* of 1789. The Pacific Rim shrinks under the psychic lash of the Iloigor and Ghatanothoa, whose "sky dragon" forms the Chinese and Japanese worshiped as kings. The stars came briefly right in 1789 (an excellent setting for historical Mythos horror); they have begun to realign since 1989, setting the stage for covert war between the servitors of the Great Old Ones -- and for possible liberation by the saving remnant in Africa, where the true Eidolon of Man first walked millions of years ago.

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Spiraling Out of Control . . . And Back In?

This is another one of those columns I had half-written in my head, then the more I thought about it, the more I realized that I was wrong (or, at least, came to a different conclusion than the one I was working toward when I started mulling it over). Coming from the pseudoscientific school of thought, I've since modified my hypothesis.

But I get ahead of myself.

This is our annual Halloween issue, loosely devoted to horror-y goodness. And my original idea was going to center on the idea of a situation spiraling out of control. This is the core of many good horror stories, both of the written and roleplaying kinds. Things seem normal at first, or otherwise controllable. But then, as [complications](#) and revelations stack, the heroes realize they're in over their heads.

The question I was mulling over, however was: What's the fundamental difference between an action story and a horror story that uses the out-of-control scenario?

I realized that a lot of action-adventure movies and books also have that element of events spiraling out of control. And, in both, the heroes may realize they're in trouble, but they believe -- in thought or deed -- that they can still pull a victory out of their hat. The difference, it seemed, was that in an action story the heroes *do* succeed, while in a horror story they realize at some point that they can't succeed.

Really, it doesn't take much thought to turn the events of a season of the *24* television show into a horror story (it starts out with a nightmare premise, after all). And the movie *12 Monkeys* walks this cusp of action or horror right until almost the last minute.

However, while I could probably draw some conclusions about movies (and, perhaps, one-shot adventure campaigns), I realized their lessons weren't necessarily applicable to a horror campaign. And that's when I mentally started to rewrite my column.

Because, I realized, perhaps the biggest difference in what an action gaming series versus a horror gaming series would be trying to simulate is its time scale. Action-packed gaming series are, almost by definition, fast-paced. Events usually happen quickly. Even long uninteresting travel sequence disappears in a fade-by, ala the Indiana Jones movies with their red lines on maps.

This is important because, in an action series, the time any particular emotion can be clung to is fairly brief.

A horror series, on the other hand, is usually more about pacing -- usually slow, but sometimes fast enough to keep the players off-balance. Long segments may be spent in otherwise not terribly interesting circumstances, because they're building a mood,

In all, horror games have a long time to mull over all manner of emotions.

Once I realized this, I posited to myself that -- in many cases -- the emotions evoked by events in either type of campaign are the same, but the time scale is vastly different.

As things spiral out of control in the action campaign, the heroes have that momentary realization of, "Wow! We're in deep pooh!" And then, after that inspirational flash sinks in, the heroes are expected to dart off to save the world.

In a horror campaign, however, the heroes can dwell on that realization of, "Wow! We're in deep pooh!" *much* longer.

Thus in an action campaign, if the heroes -- either through action, inaction, or because they were tricked -- accidentally release Rexthulhu the Elder Dog, there is going to be that moment of, "Oh, no! What have we done?!" Followed by a call to action, a hastily assembled plan, and a chance to put things right.

In a horror campaign, the heroes might see Rexthulhu pad off into the sky, the screams of the innocent echoing into their ears into the night. They'll have that momentary expression of, "Oh, no! What have we done?!?" And then they may not have an immediate plan or course of action. In fact, it's quite common in horror stories for the heroes to mope around, worrying about the implications of the evil they discovered/unleashed/inspired/temporarily dissuaded.

Thus I realized that, if I wanted to run a horror campaign, there's no reason I couldn't run, say, the first half-dozen or so adventures *exactly* like an action-adventure campaign. The heroes find themselves in difficult situations, but through perseverance and determination they can overcome the odds and (more or less) save the day. But then there would be that adventure where everything falls apart -- where the curtain is pulled back, and the heroes realize things have spiraled out of control.

Only, while their action-adventure counterparts might be able to wrest the reins away from a dark fate and reclaim their destinies, in a horror campaign there are no such immediately gratifying options.

In the real world, there's a saying: "Fast, cheap, or good: You can have two out of three." While in action-adventure games it's usually possible to squeak out all three, in horror two out of three is a best-case scenario. And, when things spiral out of control in a horror game, "fast" is usually the first casualty.

--*Steven Marsh*

We Have Met The Enemy . . .

A Nationwide Zombie Apocalypse Deadworld for *All Flesh Must Be Eaten*

by J. Edward Tremlett

No one knows what has caused The Outbreak, which is what the American government in exile has delicately called the viral, hostile takeover of the USA.

All the newly-appointed Press Secretary can say for certain is that, one short month ago, in the heat of Summer, the heartland of the country was literally overrun by Enemy Combatants. They moved swiftly and ferociously, as if turned manic by some new drug. And they tore anyone they got their hands on to pieces, ignoring bullets and tear gas as they swarmed over the police and National Guard.

Countermeasures have been taken. The National Guard has been fully mobilized, and the surviving population has been moved into barricaded Relocation Centers. However, the government admits that the Enemy Combatants -- newspeak for "The Undead" -- may still be spreading too fast to contain.

And no one wants to speculate on what the next step might be . . .

Present History

The Enemy was first seen in Russell, Kansas. They decimated the city within hours, charging past all attempts to stop them, killing as they went. After that they spread outward: running at phenomenal speeds along the roads and fields, tearing into whatever towns and cities they came across. They stopped only to pull their victims apart.

At first, Washington wasn't sure what it was dealing with. The best hypothesis was that a terrorist cell put a bioagent in the drinking water, but nothing on file could account for this. What could make men, women and children behave like monsters? How could they run that fast? And why were previously-fleeing civilians defecting to join the Enemy?

There were no real answers until the Center for Disease Control's Special Pathogen Branch confirmed that it was some kind of contagion. Studies showed that anyone who was bitten or roughly handled by the Enemy quickly BECAME the Enemy. Victims developed a horrible fever within minutes, started dehydrating, and soon behaved -- and moved -- just like their infectors.

The CDC promised more information, following further tests, but their forward outpost was overrun shortly thereafter.

When it became clear that Kansas, Nebraska and the edges of the neighboring states were near-complete losses, the President acted. He declared martial law, and enacted harsh measures: proclaiming the seven states that bordered Kansas and Nebraska "as good as lost," and ordering the evacuation of everyone in the 14 states bordering them. He also called for the erection of armed barricades along the East and West coasts, preparing for complete containment of the uninfected population.

It was a huge and risky plan, but the government was certain they could do it with enough manpower. The problem was that most of that manpower was overseas, fighting the War on Terror. The Marines, Army and National Guard available were just too small for the amount of muscle needed, and it would take far too long to recall the necessary troops.

Instead, the President relied on the Federal Emergency Management Agency, who'd been waiting for such an emergency since the 1980s. Within hours, FEMA took direct control of the remaining National Guard, and deputized the largest of the right-wing militia groups (whom they'd been secretly funding all along).

With those two forces they got the barricades started, and began to evacuate the population of the 14 "buffer" states. They also activated the "Emergency Internment Centers" they'd made to house dissidents and troublemakers in the event of martial law. These would be used as temporary quarters and clearing houses for the evacuees, until such time as the crisis was overcome, or the barricades were ready.

Thanks to the closeness of the Western Centers, the bordering states on the West side were depopulated on schedule. Civilians were herded by gun-wielding survivalists from Montana, shoved into waiting National Guard transports and sent off to safety. The militias were then given extra weapons, armor and ammunition, and ordered to remain behind and hold the line until further notice.

The handling wasn't as smooth out East. The National Guard weren't keen to work with Southern "Patriot" groups sporting Klan regalia and Confederate flags. And there was the added complication of there being only a few Internment Centers on the East side of the country to send the evacuees to.

Between the tactical errors, miscommunication and internal hostilities, FEMA lost valuable time. The Enemy used this opportunity for all it was worth, surging past the Eastern "line" without a fight. The survivors of the debacle were ordered to hold their ground, but this proved impossible. Instead, they left the refugees in the Centers to their own panicked devices, and retreated one state at a time.

The Enemy charged due East, absorbing every town, city and Center on the way to Washington DC. They arrived to find the square mile surrounding the nation's Capitol barricaded by as many Marines as the government could call up. They'd torn down the tenements, dynamited the subways, mined every road and put men and armor on every approach they could think of. And as much air power as could be spared was circling overhead, waiting for the order to fire.

By all rights, the city should have held, especially with all the missiles dropped onto the surging masses that attacked. But somehow the Enemy got inside in less than a day, forcing the President and his surviving Cabinet to flee. With them went the vital air power the National Guard needed to finish the middle of the Eastern barricade, and what was supposed to be one long refugee camp was split into two smaller camps.

The heads of state relocated to the Marine base at Guantanamo Bay, telling the National Guard to hold the barricades against the Enemy at all costs. That was the last direct order they gave the Guardsmen, and there's been no word of reinforcements. In fact, there's really been no word at all.

The American government in exile says this is just temporary, really. They appeal for worldwide calm, and say that the situation is expected to "stabilize" soon. But while they speak of "high confidence" in their emergency measures to the international media, they seem unable to control the disaster.

And they cannot answer the really tough questions -- especially "What now?"

The State of Things Today

As of now, America is a divided fortress with its guns pointed inward. The entire center of the USA has been written off as "compromised." The massive evacuations have forced the "uncompromised" population -- between 30 and 25 percent -- behind state-spanning barricades on either coast. Food, shelter, and medical supplies are holding behind the three barricades, for now, but the defenders are quite aware of how fast they're dwindling.

The National Guard has been given authority over the barricades, which are under martial law. They have been ordered to shoot, kill, and burn any possible Enemy Combatants who approach the largely-makeshift barriers. They have also been ordered to keep the refugees inside those barriers until the all-clear is given -- a task that gets more difficult as supplies get lower.

The North-Eastern barricade starts at Portland, Maine, and then zig-zags its way down to where the Delaware River splits Pennsylvania from New Jersey, terminating at Cape May. The Florida relocation center is hidden behind a wall that goes from Tampa over to Orlando, and then through Titusville.

Both of the Eastern barricades have weathered terrible attacks, and are constantly fending off new offensives. Almost all their air power evaporated when the government fled Washington D.C., which means that they have to shoot it out with the Enemy on the ground. After a bad fight, the area before the barricades is almost soaked with corpses, and they have to burn them where they lay for fear of stepping into the mess.

Conversely, the much larger Western barricade -- which stretches from Seattle down to Los Angeles -- hasn't suffered as many attacks compared to the ones out East. It seems that the more efficient evacuation deprived the Enemy of fresh "converts," and has slowed them down. They also retain most of their air power, so they can blast oncoming masses down to size well before they reach the walls.

Canada and Mexico have reacted independently of America, using their militaries to close their borders. They have burned down forests, dammed rivers and collapsed cavern entrances to deny anyone a chance to slip past them. Helicopter gunships constantly patrol the air, firing on anything that moves over land, and a line of armor waits beyond that, able to fire accurate shells at anything that gets past the air support.

The majority of the Enemy are located on the Western and Eastern halves of the country, milling just outside the gunships' reach and turning new members with each fresh kill. They charge toward the barriers when they're too hungry to hold themselves back, anymore, and fall back when they lose too many.

In spite of all precautions, the Enemy keeps getting inside the barriers. Every time there's an attack, the infection spreads, leading to panic and deadly stampedes as people turn into zombies. The commanders are convinced that sympathizers are letting the Enemy in, or are deliberately infecting themselves. But nothing they've done has stopped this from happening.

Story Starters

Escape to Safety

Anyone still alive inside the Q-zone -- as the massive Quarantine Zone is called -- is trapped in a nightmare. The Undead are extremely swift, and seem somewhat intelligent, which makes even the slightest mistake in dealing with them a fatal one. They are also clearly capable of hearing a normal conversation from some distance away, and anything louder than a whisper brings them running within a minute: just firing up a car is a near-guarantee of being swarmed.

The Q-Zone is completely dead to the world. Power and phone lines are offline, as are the cellular towers. Local radio and television stations are likewise inoperable. Survivors can always try to get a generator going for their satellite TV, or get satellite radio going in their car, but the Enemy will swarm the location in minutes.

As such, the zone is also an informational cul-de-sac, with rumors taking the place of real news amongst the few survivors. However, those folks who've been lucky enough to get their hands on a working, battery-operated CB-radio have been told that the East and West sides of the country are refugee camps. They say that if you can make it through the zombies surrounding the camps, you'll be home free.

Of course, that's a pretty big if . . .

Prisoners of the Dead

During the 1980s, FEMA built a number of highly-secure prisons for "troublemakers" in the event of martial law being declared. When the Outbreak occurred, the prisons made excellent clearing houses for evacuees. They used them to reunite families, group people together and send them on to the barricades for housing.

However, even in the face of disaster, FEMA was still FEMA. While they had everyone under their thumb, they used the excuse to find a number of those "troublemakers" and detain them, just because they could. And once the good,

respectable citizens had all been shuttled to the barricades, FEMA left their prisoners behind to rot.

The prisons are highly secure, and have enough food and water to last the prisoners for years, provided they can get out of their cells. But they have no weapons: the Guard took them all on their way out. And sooner or later the Enemy is going to head their way.

Can they hold out against masses of crafty undead with nothing more than what they can scrounge . . . ?

The Last Detail

The various armies of Western Patriots were proud to have been asked to defend their country. They swooped into the evacuation zones, got the civies out and set up the initial borders alongside the National Guard. The Guard pulled out shortly thereafter, giving the people's militias beaucoup supplies, along with two final orders: Hold the line, and shoot whatever came at them from the wrong direction.

But it's been weeks since then, and the promised relief has yet to come. Ammunition is running low, morale is terrible and the Enemy just keeps coming at them, day after day after day. It seems like each new shortwave radio message brings news of another group being overrun, and people are talking about dropping and running back to the compound up north, or maybe even the barricades.

It's only a matter of time before either the ammo or their nerve runs out, and they have to make a run for it. Who will be the first to say "screw this" and head for the hills? And what will they find when they get there . . . ?

Border Patrol

Contrary to what people inside the Q-Zone have been told, there's nothing waiting for them at the barricades but missiles, machine guns, and flamethrowers, in that order. The National Guard has been tasked to keep the Enemy out and the uncontaminated in, and that's just what they're doing.

Civilians who approach the barricades are to be treated as the Enemy, just in case they're unwittingly carrying the disease. It's not the most pleasant of duties, firing on your own countrymen, but orders are orders. It's only slightly less pleasant to tell the people on the inside that they can't go out and forage for food and water in nearby towns, just in case they bring back the disease.

And it's even less pleasant to have to deal with the political organizing going on in the only way they're entitled to during martial law: pepper gas and rubber bullets. Any "agitators" are rounded up and detained just in case they're responsible for the outbreaks inside the barricades. But even with the brigs full of would-be Thomas Jeffersons, the Enemy is still getting through.

No word on what to do next has come. Until further notice, it's guns on the horizon and gas masks on your face 24/7. But sooner or later they're going to be too slow catching the infiltrators, or run out of bullets in the middle of a firefight. And then it's all going to be over . . .

Panic, Anger and Fear

For those civilians cooped up inside the barricades, life is pretty rough. There's hardly enough food to go around, even with everyone fishing along the coastline. The medical supplies are also running out, living conditions are getting so filthy that Cholera and other hygiene-related diseases are making the rounds, and anyone who dies is taken away by the Guard and burned on a pyre outside the walls, "just in case."

The barricades aren't working, either -- not completely. Every time the Enemy makes a banzai charge, the infection gets inside. People have tried telling the Guards that it's not traitors or inside men doing it, but the idiots won't listen. Lucky for them, they've got gas masks, but the civies aren't even allowed *that*.

It would be tolerable if everyone was on the same team, but the ethnic barriers are starting to go back up again. Especially out East, where the "Patriot" groups that FEMA activated are taking full advantage of the situation. They're peddling their antiquated, racist ideas on rebuilding America, and anyone who speaks out against them is called an "agitator" and taken off to prison. The Guard isn't siding with them, but they're not shutting them up, either.

The situation is a powder keg, waiting to blow. And then what?

Intelligence Gathering

Satellite surveillance has revealed that the vast majority of the Enemy are at the borders, having stripped the interior mostly clean. This means that the way is clear for the Center for Disease Control and USAMRIID to send small teams of experts into the Q-Zone. They are being backed up by the Marines, who have orders to secure all information and get back to Guantanamo at all costs.

The primary target of all intelligence gathering is the Center for Disease Control's forward observation unit in Des Moines, Iowa. The Special Pathogen Branch were the ones who figured out that it was a contagion, and promised further reports. They may have reached a breakthrough before it all came down around them, but even if they didn't, their notes are still invaluable.

The secondary target is the Menninger Clinic of Topeka, Kansas: a hospital primarily known for its amazing research into psychiatric problems. One of its celebrity out-patients -- Dr. Margaret Folder, a nobel-prize winning microbiologist -- had holed up in the Clinic as the Enemy was approaching. She was apparently making some serious headway into understanding the nature of what America was facing, but then the city was lost, and with it all contact with the Clinic.

Third, there is the center of the outbreak, itself: Russell, Kansas. Everything happened so fast that there was no time to ask what may have caused the disaster, but there may still be clues left in town. There is no strategic or military value to the town itself, and intelligence can find no reason why it might have started there. But hopefully that will all be cleared up once they get on the ground.

The Final Solution

There's a reason why reinforcements haven't been forthcoming. The President could have ordered the Navy back to both coasts, and used its air power to supplement the takeback of America, but he won't. Instead, he's keeping the battleships and carriers well clear in case they need to play the last card: nuclear weapons.

The current plan is to see if the barricades can hold long enough for the contagion to burn itself out. However, if the Enemy should be able to overrun one or more of the Camps, then the birds will be launched. "A few" nuclear weapons launched from a waiting submarine should be enough to devastate the Enemy without completely irradiating the heartland, and they can pinpoint the areas of largest saturation by satellite and target accordingly.

It's not a decision that's been made lightly or frivolously. Everyone involved in this is aware that America's heartland will be irradiated for at least a generation, and may never fully recover. But they are also aware that it's only a matter of time before the Enemy swarms over the Mexican or Canadian border, and then . . . who knows?

With that in mind, Marine forward observation units are being sent in to see if there isn't some other solution to the problem. What battle tactics are they using, and can these be turned against them? Do the Enemy have any other weaknesses that can be exploited? Can they be destroyed in large numbers any other way?

It's a suicide mission, either way you go, but the consequences of finding nothing are too terrible to contemplate.

The Enemy

STR 4
DEX 3
CON 2
INT 0
PER 7
WIL 2

DPs: 26

EPs: N/A

Spd: 18

Essence: 6

Skills: Brawling 2

Attack: Bite damage d4×2 (4) slashing

Weak Spot: Chemicals (Sodium Chloride) -- 8

Getting Around: The Quick Dead + 10

Strength: Strong Like Bull +5

Senses: Like Nothing You've Ever Seen +10

Sustenance: All Flesh Must Be Eaten 0; Occasionally +2

Intelligence: Animal Cunning +2; Teamwork +4

Spreading the Love: One Bite and You're Hooked +2

Special: Spores + 3

Power: 30

The Enemy appear to be desiccated cadavers, with glassy eyes and taut, flaking skin. Their eyes burn with a vicious hunger, and their muscles crack and pop as they run wildly toward their victims.

They are driven onward by the extreme need to feed. While they can go a few days without eating, the ravages of the contagion are painful, and devouring fresh flesh -- even a single morsel of it -- is a blessed respite. The creatures will swarm all over a building or vehicle if they think there's someone inside it, but can be lured away en masse by the promise of easier meat.

They are painfully aware of their greatest weakness: sodium chloride, otherwise known as table salt. It acts like acid on their skin, and if they are completely immersed in a cloud of it -- or pushed into saltwater -- they'll melt to the bone in seconds. They're intelligent enough to avoid it, which is why no one's figured this out yet.

Past that, they can be affected by normal weaponry, and feel pain when struck. And they are as susceptible to fire as any uninfected persons, especially if they continue to run as fast as they normally do once they are alight. Oddly enough, the Enemy doesn't seem to fear the fire. In fact, they seem to dance gleefully in the flames, moaning in ecstasy as they burn to a crisp and fall down.

And that's because . . .

Spores: . . . another thing no one knows about the Enemy is that fire *doesn't* completely neutralize them. In fact, the Enemy remains highly dangerous after being burned to bones and powder. Anyone who gets those ashes inside their lungs suffers the same fate as those who were bitten by them, thanks to the microbial spores that infest their dead flesh.

This is how the Enemy got into Washington D.C.: Anytime a group of the Enemy were blown up by missiles, or shot down and then burned, the ashes were inhaled by hapless soldiers. This is also why infections break out in the Camps, since the National Guard insists on burning anyone they shoot.

And if the President uses nuclear weapons against the Enemy, and the wind shifts the wrong way . . .

Doctor Dark and Miss Conduct

For *GURPS Third Edition* and *Champions*

by James L. Cambias

Doctor Dark and Miss Conduct are a pair of villains for a *GURPS Supers* or *Champions* campaign. They are fairly low-powered menaces, particularly suitable as adversaries for starting heroes or as plot elements in a larger adventure.

History

Doctor Dark has been a supervillain since 1957. He really *is* a medical doctor, originally named Alfred Deakins. As a young man just out of medical school he was involved in a British government project to study and control a mysterious phenomenon called "dark energy." However, Deakins was seduced by a beautiful Russian agent who persuaded him to steal a sample of dark energy. Deakins got the sample but was surprised by a guard. In his struggle to get away, the containment unit was breached and Dr. Deakins was bathed in dark energy.

The accident left Deakins able to control darkness and become a shadow, but his skin lost the ability to generate pigments. With his scientific career in ruins, Alfred Deakins took on the identity of Doctor Dark and began a reign of terror as a supervillain.

Well, sort of. It was more of a reign of annoyance, since Doctor Dark isn't a particularly evil man. He likes to think of himself as a master villain, but most of his crimes have been fairly ordinary: robbery, kidnapping for ransom, and occasional dabbings in extortion. He was a fixture in "Swinging London" society in the 1960s, when it was hip for rock stars and aristocrats to go slumming with supervillains.

Dark's greatest exploit was in 1975, during the height of the Arab oil embargo, when he threatened to shut down an experimental solar power plant in New Mexico unless the owners paid him a million dollars in cash. Dark managed to defeat a group of solar-powered heroes and for a brief time enjoyed the status of a major-league villain.

After that, Dark's career path was all downhill. Age was beginning to catch up with him, and his scientific skills were becoming increasingly out of date in the computer age. By the 1990s Doctor Dark was reduced to petty theft, living in a run-down trailer parked over the entrance to his old secret underground laboratory.

Miss Conduct, alias Karen Morris, was a teenager with a history of minor legal scrapes. She shoplifted a few CDs, snuck into the movies, vandalized her school, and violated all the laws governing underage drinking. A year ago, when she was 15 years old, Karen and some friends decided to end a night spent dancing at a rave by toasting the sunrise from atop a high-voltage electrical transmission tower. Drunk, stoned, and half-asleep, Karen lost her balance and fell onto a cable carrying 250 megawatts of electricity. Instead of dying, she discovered an ability to absorb and control the power.

Karen immediately decided to leave her boring hometown and her totally dysfunctional family and become a glamorous international supervillain. She realized that she would need the help of a more experienced master criminal, and eventually found her way to Doctor Dark. The aging Doctor couldn't resist the prospect of actually having an attractive young sidekick, and agreed to take her on as a supervillain in training.

Personalities and Motivations

Neither Doctor Dark nor Miss Conduct are particularly evil, but they both like to act as though they are, and at present the two of them are egging each other on to commit more serious crimes than either really would dare attempt alone.

Doctor Dark is a has-been (or never-was) master villain, given to long gloating rants and secret underground laboratories, but in point of fact his primary goals are nothing more ambitious than securing a comfortable retirement income and looking at pretty girls. He is a classic "dirty old man," with a tendency to let his hands wander. Miss Conduct feeds his vanity -- he's never had a super-powered minion before, and the fact that she's an attractive teenage girl makes him desperate to impress her.

Meanwhile, Miss Conduct is still a very naïve youngster, who thinks it would be cool to be a supervillain and hasn't really thought about it much more than that. The money is good and she doesn't have to go to school any more or keep a job. She's impressed by Doctor Dark's supervillain credentials -- he's actually got an underground laboratory! -- and hopes he can get her into the big time. The way he looks down her shirt and tries to feel her butt aren't very different from the way her stepfather used to act, so for now she puts up with him; if he ever gets too grabby she'll fry his fingers.

Their criminal schemes are chiefly robberies. Doctor Dark hates having to pay a commission to fences or money laundries, so they tend to hit places with a lot of untraceable cash on hand -- casinos, armored cars, racetrack betting windows, and branch banks.

Their tactics are straightforward and usually effective: Miss Conduct uses her flashy electric attacks to get everyone's attention and intimidate them while a couple of normal goons do the looting. Doctor Dark usually stays hidden in shadow form in case of trouble -- his shadows can attack unarmed foes, and his darkness field can make it impossible for armed opponents to see what they're shooting at. However, Miss Conduct has a weakness for attention-getting stunts and Doctor Dark sometimes indulges in master-villain style rants which delay their getaway.

If robbery gets boring, Doctor Dark does have the weird science knowledge to attempt some kind of superweapon extortion plot, probably involving "darkness projectors" or something similar. He would never go to all that risk and expense himself, but if he thinks it might impress his partner in crime, he'll risk it.

Both villains can have personal links to superhero player-characters. Doctor Dark's long career means he could be an old enemy of one PC. He doesn't hold grudges or seek revenge, but he *would* be furious if an old adversary doesn't remember him. Miss Conduct could be a friend of a teenage hero, a relative of an older one, or even the wayward child of a player-character (if there's any possibility of that, she'll claim the relationship even if it isn't true). A personal connection could mean the heroes wind up trying to stop the two villains *without* landing them in jail.

Adventure Seeds

First Blood

Miss Conduct has talked Doctor Dark into showing her how to take on superheroes. He arranges a confrontation with the player characters. Dark plants a series of clues which will lead the heroes to a well-lit electric switching substation at midnight. There will be plenty of shadows and lots of electricity for the villains to use, and their goal is only to ambush the heroes and knock them unconscious or make them withdraw. If the fight goes against the villains, Dark has a getaway plan in place. This mysterious and seemingly pointless ambush can be a red herring in the middle of another adventure, or may drive investigation-minded heroes crazy trying to deduce the motive.

Out of their League

Miss Conduct and Doctor Dark have stolen something they really should have left alone: an ancient mystical artifact of tremendous power. Now a couple of different occult supervillains are trying to get it, as is the fanatical cult which worships the item. The twosome can't use the device themselves, and are rather afraid of the really nasty villains seeking it, but their pride won't let them just hand it back to the authorities. Instead, Doctor Dark has come up with a plan to leave taunting clues for the heroes which will lead them to the device. Unfortunately, some of the other villains have stumbled across the clues.

Moonlighting

Doctor Dark is too egotistical to work for another supervillain, but Miss Conduct might be tempted to act as a minion for a cooler (and better looking) master criminal, possibly an old adversary of the PCs. Jealousy might motivate Dark to attempt some truly impressive stunt in order to humiliate his rival, or might lead him to help the heroes.

Our Gang

Following a string of successful robberies, Miss Conduct and Doctor Dark have attracted a small group of additional supervillain wannabes. Some of them have low-powered super abilities, others just have a costume and an attitude. But now the group can actually tackle some serious crimes, and maybe the two leaders are finally going to make it into the big time. Can the heroes stop them from becoming role models for supercrooks?

The Final Dark

Doctor Dark's health can't stand the strain of his recent return to active villain status. He is dying, and Miss Conduct knows it. She approaches the superheroes with an odd request: She wants them to agree to be defeated by Doctor Dark so he can die a happy supervillain. Will they help her? Or is this some weird plot cooked up by the two villains to play on the sympathies of the heroes?

GURPS Stats

Miss Conduct

300 points

A cute but tough-looking 16-year-old, with short hair dyed blue. Her costume is a blue spandex bodysuit topped with a bulletproof vest, all decorated with lightning bolts.

ST 10, **DX** 14 [45], **IQ** 12 [20], **HT** 10; Move 6.
Dodge 7, Brawling Parry 11, Lightning Parry 8

Advantages: Attractive appearance [5], Combat Reflexes [15], Daredevil [15]

Disadvantages: Compulsive Carousing [-5], Enemy (authorities) [-10], Extravagance [-10], Impulsiveness [-10], Overconfidence [-10], Selfish [-5], Youth (2 years underage) [-4].

Quirks: Brags about her crimes on her Web log, Hates water, Likes being "bad," Night person [-4].

Super Powers and Advantages: Absorption 5 levels (electricity, only to 5 levels Lightning: -20%) [40]; Dampen 4 levels [12]; Lightning 12d (with Hotshot +30%, Instantaneous +20%, Only near power source -20%) [101]; Surge 4 levels [16]; Gadget: Bulletproof vest (PD2, DR10 vs. crushing; activate 13 or less, breakable, can be stolen, -30%) [49].

Skills: Brawling (P/E) DX+1 [2]-15, Carousing (P/A) HT [2]-10, Computer Hacking/TL8 (M/VH) IQ-1 [4]-11, Computer Operation/TL8 (M/E) IQ+2 [4]-14, Dampen (M/VH) IQ [8]-12, Lightning (P/VH) DX [8]-14, Physics/TL8 (M/H) IQ-2 [1]-10, Stealth (P/A) DX [2]-14, Streetwise (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11, Surge (M/VH) IQ [8]-12.

Variations

To make Miss Conduct less powerful (more of a match for sidekick characters), reduce her superpower skill levels and her Dexterity attribute, and possibly remove her Combat Reflexes. That way she still has formidable powers, but is much less experienced at using them.

To increase her power level, boost her Dexterity, give her Enhanced Dodge (or a couple of DCV skill levels), change her off-the-shelf bulletproof vest to a full-body suit with no Activate roll limitation, and improve her skill levels. A more mature Miss Conduct could also either buy off her Overconfidence and Impulsiveness disadvantages, or replace them with Greed or possibly On The Edge.

Doctor Dark

300 points

An aging albino Englishman with bad teeth, dressed in a worn but well-kept black tail coat, round black sunglasses, a big black hooded cape, and black rubber gloves.

ST 10, *DX* 10, *IQ* 14 [45], *HT* 9 [-10]; Move 4.

Advantages: Combat Reflexes [15].

Disadvantages: Albinism [-10], Hard of Hearing [-10], Lecherousness [-15], Miser [-10], Odious Personal Habit (collects schoolgirl pornography) [-5], Unattractive [-5], Weak Immune System [-30].

Quirks: Likes to ogle women, Never removes gloves, Vain, Thinks he's a Master Villain [-4]

Super Powers and Advantages: Animate Shadow 4 levels [20]; Create Darkness 10 levels [30]; Dark Energy Beam 4d (bought as Frost Jet) [24]; Dark Vision [25]; Drain Super Ability 10 levels (2 hex radius +20%, only vs. light-based powers -30%[72]; Shadow Form [50].

Skills: Animate Shadow (M/VH) IQ+2 [16]-16, Brawling (P/E) DX+1 [4]-12, Chemistry/TL7 (M/H) IQ [4]-14, Cloak (P/A) DX+2 [8]-12, Create Darkness (M/VH) IQ+2 [16]-16, Dark Energy Beam (P/VH) DX+2 [16]-12, Drain Super Ability (M/VH) IQ+2 [16]-16, Driving/TL7 (Automobiles) (P/A) DX [2]-10, Electronics Operation/TL7 (Sensors) (M/A) IQ [2]-14, Guns/TL7 (P/E) DX+2 [1]-12*, Hypnotism (M/H) IQ [4]-14, Leadership (M/A) IQ [2]-14, Literature (M/H) IQ-2 [1]-12, Physician/TL7 (M/H) IQ [4]-14, Pilot/TL7 (Helicopter) (P/A) DX [2]-10, Research (M/A) IQ [2]-14, Savoir-Faire (M/E) IQ [1]-14, Science! (M/VH) IQ-2 [2]-12, Stealth (P/A) DX+2 [8]-12, Streetwise (M/A) IQ [2]-14, Weird Science (M/VH) IQ-1 [4]-13. *Includes bonus from IQ. Languages: English (native), Latin (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-13.

To make Doctor Dark into the master villain he thinks he is, give him a few levels of Charisma (or increased Presence) to offset his looks, improve his Dexterity, and give him enough Wealth to hire some competent underlings. In his prime he had a gang of henchmen known as the Shadow Ministry; they were normal humans and relied on brawling and melee weapons rather than firearms.

Champions Stats

Miss Conduct

Val	Char	Cost	Roll
10	STR	0	11-
18	DEX	24	13-
	OCV/DCV	6	
10	CON	0	11-
10	BODY	0	11-
13	INT	3	12-
10	EGO	0	11-
13	PRE	3	12-
18	COM	4	13-

3	PD	1	
6	ED	4	
4	SPD	12	Phases: 3, 6, 9, 12
4	REC	0	
24	END	2	
20	STUN	0	

Total Characteristics Cost: 53

Movement: 5"/10"

Cost Power

- 10 Bulletproof Vest: Armor 10 PD 10 ED (30 Active Points); Activation 9- (-1 1/2), OIF vest (-1/2).
- 7 Daredevil: 2d6 Luck (10 Active Points); Only When Taking Risks (-1/2).

Elemental Control: Electricity Control

- 20 Elemental Control Cost
- 20 Electrical Absorption: Absorb 12d6, half to END and half to Lightning Bolt (60 Active Points); Only against Electricity (-1/2). Total cost: 40 points.
- 20 Electric Tolerance: +60 ED (60 Active Points); Only vs. Electricity (-1/2). Total cost: 40 points.
- 20 Lightning Bolt: 12d6 Energy Blast (60 Active Points); Only near a power source (-1/2). Total cost: 40 points. 6 END.
- 20 Power Damping: Suppress 8d6, any Electrical power (+1/4) (50 Active Points); Reduced by Range (-1/4). Total cost: 40 points. 4 END.
- 20 Power Surge: 8d6 Energy Blast, No Normal Defense (defense is heavy electrical surge protection, +1), 0 END (+1/2) (100 Active Points); Cannot be Pushed (-1/4), Only affects electrical systems (-1), Reduced by Range (-1/4). Total cost: 40 points.

Skills

- 20 4 Combat Skill Levels
- 5 Computer Programming 13-
- 2 Science: Physics 11-
- 5 Stealth 14-
- 3 Streetwise 12-

Total Skills & Powers Cost: 174

Total Character Cost: 225

150+ Disadvantages

- 5 Distinctive Features: Blue Hair (Easily Concealed)
- 15 Hunted: Police 8- (More Powerful, NCI, Limited area)
- 15 Psychological Limitation: Compulsive Partyer (Common, Strong)
- 15 Psychological Limitation: Overconfidence (Very Common, Moderate)
- 10 Psychological Limitation: Spendthrift (Common, Moderate)
- 15 Social Limitation: Underage (Very Frequently, Minor)

Total Disadvantage Points: 75

Doctor Dark

Val	Char	Cost	Roll
10	STR	0	11-
10	DEX	0	11-
	OCV/DCV	3	
8	CON	-4	11-
10	BODY	0	11-
18	INT	8	13-
13	EGO	6	12-
13	PRE	3	12-
6	COM	-2	10-
2	PD	0	
2	ED	0	
3	SPD	10	Phases: 4, 8, 12
4	REC	0	
10	END	-3	
19	STUN	0	

Total Characteristics Cost: 18

Movement: 5"/10" running

Cost Perk

7 Underground Laboratory: Body 2, DEF 2, Size 50 hexes. Suburban, underground. Total cost: 33 points.

Cost Power

5 Nightvision

10 Flight 5", 0 END (+1/2) (15 Active Points); Only in Contact with a Surface (-1/4), Only in Shadow Form (-1/4).

Elemental Control: Dark Energy Manipulation

15 Elemental Control Cost

15 Dark Energy Beam: 4d6 Energy Blast, 0 END (+1/2) (30 Active Points).

43 Darkness Field: Darkness to Sight Group, 5" radius, 0 END (+1/2), Personal Immunity (+1/4) (87 Active Points); No Range (-1/2). Total cost: 58 points.

30 Light Drain: Drain 3d6, Any one light-based power (+1/4), 0 END (+1/2), Area Effect (1" radius, +1/2) (45 Active Points).

15 Shadow Control: Summon four 75-point Shadows, Slavish Devotion (+1), 0 END (+1/2) (60 Active Points); Requires Shadows to Animate (-1). Total cost: 30 points.

15 Shadow Form: Desolidification, 0 END (+1/2) (60 Active Points); Cannot Pass through Solid Objects (-1/2), Does not protect against energy attacks (-1/2). Total cost: 30 points.

Skills

25 5 Combat Skill Levels

2 +1 with Dark Energy Beam

3 High Society 12-

1 Language: Latin, fluent

5 Paramedics 13-

5 Science: Chemistry 14-

3 Science: Weird Science 12-

3 Stealth 11-

3 Streetwise 12-

5 Systems Operation 13-

1 Transport Familiarity: Helicopters

1 Weapon Familiarity: Pistols

Total Skills & Powers Cost: 212

Total Character Cost: 230

150+ Disadvantages

- 10 Age 60+
- 10 Distinctive Features: Albino (Concealable with disguise)
- 10 Physical Limitation: Sickness-prone (Infrequent, moderate)
- 5 Physical Limitation: Hard of Hearing (Infrequent, slight)
- 10 Psychological Limitation: Cheapskate (Common, moderate)
- 15 Psychological Limitation: Lecherous (Common, strong)
- 5 Reputation: Super-Criminal 8-
- 15 Susceptibility: Direct sunlight (Very common, 1d6 per minute)

Total Disadvantage Points: 80

Summoned Shadows

Dr. Dark's summoned shadows are 0-point normal beings with the Shadow Form power (see above) Always On, costing 24 points and two other abilities:

- 45 Shadow Attack: 3d6 Energy Blast, Affects Physical World (+2), 0 END (+1/2), No Normal Defense (defense is any means of generating light, +1) (67 Active Points); No Range (-1/2).
- 6 Flight 4" (8 Active Points); Only in Contact with a Surface (-1/4).

The Omniscient Eye

Can I Live on a Gas Giant's Moon?

In a now famous movie, the good guys' main base is on a moon of a gas giant. How would a habitable world's environment be affected by orbiting a gas giant? In one of my campaigns, I have a habitable world that orbits a small gas giant that orbits a large gas giant (yes, I know it is highly unlikely, but this is a game). How would that affect its environment?

--H. B. Seba

In the admittedly biased view of human or human-like life, any habitable world will share certain features; a surface temperature that allows for liquid water on or near the surface, gravity sufficient to hold an atmosphere, low levels of radiation, and an atmosphere that has suitable pressure and composition . . . and that's ignoring several factors that might make the star system unsuitable. (Fortunately there are lots of star systems, so we can pick and choose).

The temperature of a world is primarily dependent upon its distance from the local star; as in real estate, location is everything. The habitable zone is the area of a star system where a planetary surface is, Goldilocks style, neither too hot, nor too cold. A world with an atmosphere can possess environmental mechanisms that can regulate extremes of temperature. The effects of such mechanisms means defining the limits of the zone is tricky, but for a star like ours, the region between 0.95 and 1.15 AU from the Sun is believed to lie within this zone over a significant period of the star's life.

In our own system the innermost gas giant is Jupiter, orbiting at 5.2 AU from the sun. The search for extrasolar planets has, however, found gas giants with a wide range of orbits, so it is not unreasonable that our moon may orbit a gas giant within the habitable zone. Furthermore, gas giants themselves radiate energy; this may be sufficient to extend the outer limit of the zone somewhat for an orbiting moon.

A habitable world will also need to have a high enough gravity to hold an atmosphere; exactly how high will depend upon the temperature, but it is likely to be high enough to be comfortable for humans. Gravity is proportional to the density and radius of the world. Rocky worlds typically seem to have densities between three and six times that of water depending on composition; therefore for any specific gravity, the radius of a world can vary by a factor of two; either small and dense, or large and light. The local gravity, in Gs, is given by the density (in kilos per cubic meter) multiplied by the radius (in meters) multiplied by 2.75×10^{-9} (approximate value of the gravitational constant of the universe expressed in Gs and multiplied by $4\pi/3$).

The other major factor for habitation that we have identified is radiation. On Earth the surface is protected from radiation in two ways: by the atmosphere and the Earth's magnetic field. The atmosphere absorbs ultraviolet radiation in the ozone layer; if our gas giant moon has a thick enough oxygen atmosphere it may also block UV this way, otherwise any inhabitants will have to be mindful to wear their sunscreen. Charged particles are deflected by the Earth's magnetic field, impacting the atmosphere near the poles as aurora. While it is possible that the moon of a gas giant would have its own magnetic field, this would be insignificant compared to the field of the gas giant (were Jupiter's magnetosphere visible, it would appear from Earth the same size as the moon!). This field may deflect particles away from the moon or towards it; in which case auroral displays would be visible across the world. This radiation flux increases the closer a moon is to the planet. In the inner orbits this can result in an atmosphere being stripped away as the radiation adds energy and reduces molecules to ionized atoms; the faster, lighter ions more likely to exceed escape velocity. While there are simple organisms that have a high tolerance to radiation, such an environment is not something humans consider habitable without the addition of considerable shielding.

Orbiting a gas giant is not in itself enough to make a world uninhabitable. It will, however, have considerable effect

upon the environment of such a world. The moon will almost certainly be tide-locked, with one side facing the planet at all times. As it orbits the gas giant the moon will experience days as it rotates with respect to the star; this may result in a local day being considerably longer than on Earth. The side of the moon away from the gas giant will experience fairly typical days and nights defined by the presence of the sun in the sky. On the side of the moon facing the gas giant, it will be a dominant element of the sky; at "night" the reflected light of the gas giant will illuminate the landscape, while part of the "day" may be reduced to darkness as the sun is eclipsed. Being tide-locked will also result in reduced tides in any bodies of water on the moon with what tidal effects that do occur being caused by the sun and any other moons that orbit the planet.

A moon would not experience seasons in the way a planet does. On Earth the seasons are a result of varying energy input from the sun caused by the angle of the incoming light. During summer the light hits at a high angle, concentrating it, while in winter it hits at a lower angle and is thus spread over greater area. This variation in angle of incident is caused because the Earth's axis is tilted with respect to the plane of its orbit. Unlike the Earth, however, the moon of a gas giant does not orbit a sun, but instead a planet that is orbiting a sun. The angle of incoming sunlight is therefore dependent upon the angle of the plane of orbit. The world will experience seasonal effects as the gas giant orbits the sun and as the angle of orbit changes. Depending on the relative time-scales of these events the world might experience extreme and mild seasons on a regular pattern as the effects add or subtract from each other.

Tidal effects on a habitable moon will vary from those experienced on a planet. As a tide-locked body the moon will not experience tides in the way Earth does. If the world possesses large enough a body of water to have a global sea level this will vary from the sphere due to tidal effects (being higher facing and opposing the gas giant, and lower perpendicular to that), but would only have the local variation that we experience due to the effect of the sun and any other moons.

The planet's gravity will, however, have some effect in the form of tidal stress, an input of energy caused by differential force across the moon. In our own solar system this effect is greatest upon the Jovian moon, Io. Due to Io's close orbit to Jupiter large amounts of energy are imparted, resulting in dramatic levels of volcanic activity. Even on a world at a greater orbital distance this tidal energy could result in volcanism and moon-quakes.

The influx of tidal energy is also what keeps oceans liquid under the ice crust of Europa, Callisto, and possibly Ganymede. Worlds like this are not habitable by humans in their natural state, having only tenuous atmospheres and low surface temperatures; however, there are a couple of possibilities worthy of mention. The first is that such worlds would be suitable real estate for colonies, either on the surface or within the ice (possibly even breaking through to the ocean below). These such colonies would require an artificially sustained environment; however, oxygen for an atmosphere can be obtained from water ice, and burying a colony provides both temperature insulation and protection from radiation. Such a colony would be better protected from the hostile environment of space than a orbital or asteroid colony, but still highly dependant upon technology to maintain viability.

The second possibility is that such a world could support a native ecosystem. Unlike a typical terrestrial ecosystem this would be a bottom-up rather than top-down system, feed by geothermal energy from below rather than sunlight from above. On Earth, an example of an ecosystem like this include deep-sea black smokers. These support a variety of life forms including life forms as complex as clams and tubeworms. It is impossible to predict how far life could evolve in an environment where such vents are the only energy input into the ecosystem.

Another way in which a habitable moon could vary significantly from Earth is the possibility of other moons close by. These may also be habitable, in which case a close approach may result not only in moon-quakes and volcanism, but the possibility of biological material being transferred; this may just be single cell organisms and viruses, in which case each approach may mark a coming plague, or in more cinematic universe the flight of more advanced creatures. In any case, an intelligent species evolving on a habitable moon will have easier access to more planetary bodies than a species native to a terrestrial world (such as ourselves).

In the specific case described in the question, where the world orbits a gas giant that itself orbits another, the main problem is setting up a system that allows for stable orbits and also a moon that is habitable (and solving the three-body problem is outside Omniscient Eye's remit, and hence left as an exercise for the reader). In order for the moon to

have a stable orbit around it's parent (we'll call it Gas Giant A) it must be far enough away from the second giant (we'll call that one "B"), and for A to orbit B, they must both be far enough from the sun (which we'll just call "the sun") . . . but if we get too far from the sun, the moon is reduced to a ice ball.

If both gas giants are similar in size they can orbit a common center of gravity, far enough apart that the moon has a fairly stable orbit. In this case the moon will have "seasonal" effects as planet A moves towards or away from the sun along its orbit with B, and strong tides due to B's gravitational effects. In the case where the sizes are different B needs a huge orbit around the sun so that A can have a stable orbit it. In order for the moon to be habitable, it will still need the energy to maintain a suitable temperature. An old, hot sun would help, as would planet B being a brown dwarf: a super-giant jovian (13-75 Jupiter masses) able to fuse deuterium, but not hydrogen like a star. This world may exist in a warm twilight, with even full sunlight being the equivalent of a cloudy day on Earth.

Of course, in a space opera universe, exotic forms of matter, energy sources, or the ability to shift planet sized bodies around a solar system will allow environments outside those supported by science. Depending upon the level of technology that is available, any world might be made to have an Earth-like environment -- even if it requires the use of gravity generators and force fields to do so.

James Galloway
Astrobiologist/Planetary Scientist

Sages theorize that the Omniscient Eye might actually be composed of a panel of Experts chosen through mysterious and arcane means. Regardless, the Omniscient Eye is benevolent, and every other week it is willing to share its lore to all. Or, at least, to all with valid *Pyramid* subscriptions.

The Omniscient Eye seeks to answer questions that are tied to knowledge of the real world, providing information with a perspective that is of use to gamers. The Omniscient Eye does not concern itself with specific game systems or statistics.

Do you have a question for the Omniscient Eye? Feel free to send it to pyramidquestions@yahoogroups.com, and the Omniscient Eye might answer it!

Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Pyramid Review

Casablanca: An Exotic City Sourcebook (for Mean Streets)

Published by [Deep7](#)

Written by William Jones

Cover by Gregory Price

Cartography by William Jones

35-page 2.68 Meg Zipped PDF Document; \$4.95

The city of Casablanca promises a near unique blend of flavors, bringing together the exoticism of Arabic North Africa and the French chic represented by its colonial empire. Despite the enduring popularity of the 1942 film that helped to make the city so famous, the roleplaying game has for the most part ignored its warm and dusky climes.

But with the release of *Casablanca: An Exotic City Sourcebook*, we have the chance to go back to the city at the time of the film *and* more. Intended for use with Deep7's [Mean Streets](#), it takes the dark and moody action of that XPG away from the shadows of America's skyscrapers and east across the Atlantic. Its time frame is roughly 1938 onwards, when Morocco is divided into two protectorates, one Spanish and one French. The port of Casablanca lies in the latter, and with the onset of war, becomes a focus of Axis and Allied attention. The political situation is made more difficult during Germany's occupation of France and the establishment of the Vichy Government, which continued to administer the French Protectorate of Morocco. This did not stop the Nazis from using their influence and more to crack down on members of the French resistance or on the members of Allied Intelligence operating in the city.

This is in addition to the peaceful, non-militant efforts made by the natives in order to obtain independence for the kingdom. Such demands would continue long after the war, when France resumed control of her North African Holdings -- despite the assurances of the Allies. Eventually the independence movement would resort to outright violence, forcing France to relinquish her control in 1956. This is the time frame for the third focus of the sourcebook, roughly from 1943 when the Allies invade and ensure a steady supply of the elixir known as Coca-Cola to the populace, up until independence is gained. Essentially, it moves the *Mean Streets* milieu on from the pulp noir of the 1930s and 40s and into the true blue versus Soviet red of the cold war and the early 1950s. The sourcebook suggests the other two earlier timeframes as being set during the pre-war period under the French administration, and then under wartime Vichy control.

The supplement opens with a history of Morocco that brings the reader up to speed on the current situation in the early forties and explains some of the cultural mores that the western visitor should be aware of. It explores the city district by district, covering the Medina, Casablanca's old town; the Port District; the Quartier Habous, Casablanca's most recent extension and home to its wealthier inhabitants, particularly the Europeans; and the Industrial Nord, the target of German saboteurs after the Allies arrive. With each district are given descriptions notable locations and associated NPC's. Thus the section on the Medina is accompanied by the template for a pickpocket -- a potential threat to westerners in the old town; details of a traditional Moroccan café and its owner who might have links to the pro-independence secret society, the Zawiya; and the decrepit Hotel du Port, whose owner refrains from asking questions. The bulk of the location descriptions are within the Quartier Habous that includes lavish hotels, banks, the police and government buildings, the Palais Royal -- the occasional home of the Moroccan Sultan, and last, but not least, the Café American. This is run by a world-weary and cynical American expatriate, who much like his on-screen counterpart, has a hidden past.

The third chapter on the underground explores the organizations operating in the city both within and beyond the law. The former is primarily the pro-Vichy police prefect, Jacques Guignard, who in co-operation with a German SS officer has grown rich on graft and corruption. Operating against them are members of the Free French Movement, and British Intelligence operatives. Of course, the Moroccans continue to oppose Spanish and French occupation of their countries, initially by the Zawiya secret society and its subsidiary cells known as the Taifa. Their methods are non-violent, consisting mostly of propaganda acts such as boycotts and strikes, as opposed to the Istiqlal, founded after the war. This independence party actively agitated to be rid of their French masters, resorting to violence in later years.

The supplement includes the adventure, "Dark Secrets of the City of White Houses." This is a murder mystery where the characters are brought from America to Casablanca to investigate the death of an American journalist. Both his wife and editor do not believe the authorities' findings that he died by his own hand, and perhaps the truth lies in the story he was investigating. While this is a good adventure in true noir style, being set in the fifties means that it ignores the earlier time frames of the supplement, which are likely to attract many prospective buyers. A set of adventure seeds at least would have offset this, but none are given.

Finally, an appendix gives several additions for the *Mean Streets* game. These include notes on haggling, the new skill of pickpocket and new archetypes. The three have stronger political influences than might the average *Mean Streets* or Pulp Noir characters. They are the War Criminal, the Freedom Fighter, and the War Correspondent, let down only by a lack of discussion of probable skills for either. Templates for the three might have offset this. The appendix is rounded out with more historical notes on the Allied meeting between Churchill and Roosevelt in Casablanca in early 1943 and the Treaty of Fez, signed in 1912 to create the French protectorate in Morocco. Finally, it lists French Resident Guards, Sultans of Morocco, and useful phrases in both Arabic and French.

Casablanca: An Exotic City Sourcebook comes as a 2.68 Meg zipped file that unzips into a 2.85 Meg 35-page PDF file. Behind the very nicely done cover, the supplement has been done in black and white with a light blue wash, used particularly for the maps and the photographs that take the place of illustrations. These are well handled and are appropriate to the supplement. Although the city map is clearly done, the one of Morocco severely lacks detail.

Despite it being for *Mean Streets*, this supplement has a greater use outside of that game, should any GM want to take his game to the city of Casablanca during the timeframes discussed. In particular, *Return to Honor*, *All The King's Men*, and *Dogfaces*, all for *GURPS WWII* could make use of its contents, as could any espionage RPG. Let down only by its failure to support the pre-war and wartime periods of the setting, *Casablanca: An Exotic City Sourcebook* is proof of the versatility and usefulness of the PDF, providing a good sourcebook for more than just *Mean Streets*.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Mutants & Masterminds Character Record Folio

Published by [Green Ronin](#)

Designed by Rick Achberger

Developed by Steve Kenson

Cover by Ramon Perez

16-page b&w softcover; \$4.95

Given the proliferation of photocopiers, printers, and PDF files, is there really any need for another professionally designed character sheet, outside the one included at the back of most games? Is it worth it to provide a multi-page booklet on a single character? If it's the *Mutants & Masterminds Character Record Folio*, it is.

The folio benefits from its straightforward organization and intuitive progression. The first page is all about the most common character traits, which is to say those used for rolling dice, referencing stats, and other system rules. Abilities, saving throws, and attack scores are all in easy reach. Not only is there a Hero Point track, there's a summary of what they're used for. You can tally your damage, up to and including a box for noting that you're, well . . . dead. Handy.

Only at the end of the personal information section does one find the vital statistics -- height, weight, hair color, costumes, and anything else that might get a superhero a date. You can describe your character visually and/or textually with sketches and origin stories. Quirks of personality, flaws, and so on go here as well.

In between these segments are the building blocks of superheroes. Your skills, feats, and powers fit here, and each has its own space for all the components like how far your energy blast reaches, how many skill ranks you have, and how your equipment is built. All of this minimizes page-flipping and looking up things like how long your acid cloud lasts (assuming you hold up your end and fill in all the little boxes). The artistic player even has a grid on which he can draw a schematic of his super-gun or booster boots or whatnot.

But since few superheroes work in a vacuum (and fewer still in a comic-book RPG), you'll need a cast. This includes a two-page roster of supporting characters (the Aunt Mays, Franklin Richardses, and Perry Whites), and then the team to which the PC belongs. The common enemies, the members, shared tactics, and so on are on one page, and minions are on another.

The headquarters gets two pages to itself for descriptions and schematics, plus more for team vehicles and the grids to draw those as well. These include where the building is, what it looks like, and the features given it once you've built it using the device creation rules from the core book.

The book tapers off to your past and future -- files for crimes you've solved and slots for choosing how you want to expand the hero as you gain levels. The whole thing is wrapped in a cover that adds M&M system information to the mix, much like a mini-GM's screen.

The only actual art is the cover, but it's a dandy fight scene. The focus is on the inside anyway, where the layout is sharp and clear. The type inside the boxes, while very small, is fairly obvious in purpose; the organization makes it apparent which box is for "Name" without you having to squint. The origin and background sections are the only real

gaffes -- the spacing of the lines is awfully tight to be written in comfortably.

The sheaf makes good use of its space in most instances. There may seem to be too many device boxes for the average hero, but a gadgeteer is going to need those. On the other hand, the team info isn't as well balanced, most of it crammed into one page. Ironically, there are entries for four minions, but only five teammates, and the minions are allotted more space. For servants like the team butler and his ilk, it's too much space (and he could be added to the supporting characters); but for your faithful sidekick Kid Glory, it's not roomy enough.

These are minor points, and Green Ronin has done their job well considering the book must be of generic value to a raft of characters they cannot possibly anticipate. It has plainly resulted from lots of careful thought, from little touches like a box on the front cover for listing your PC's name, to entries you might not have thought to add to your run-of-the-mill character sheet. It's as much fun to fill out as it is to play the persona -- you'll want enemies just so you can chalk them up and keep score. The *Mutants & Masterminds Character Record Folio* is both an effective organizational tool and a good way to get players to think outside the super suit.

--Andy Vetromile

Bat's Entertainment!

Dateline: Steventown. **Population:** Me.

ITEM: I finished reading the "War Games" storyline in the Batman titles. In the course of the plot, many clichés relating to such epic tales were reaffirmed: People die, places are destroyed, friendships strained and broken, and the world will never be the same. In short, the storytellers tried to make sure that the \$61.32 spent over three months was worth it. (Which, now that I calculate and write down the amount, I find myself questioning. But that's another column.)

ITEM: I tried voting last week, having walked to two different polling stations trying to find the one I was supposed to use (the Marshmobile still being . I say "tried" because I was, in fact, turned away, having moved here recently enough that I haven't lived here the required 30 days before being permitted to vote. On the bright side, I guess I don't need to pay taxes for the next year, since that whole "taxation without representation" concept is a solid enough foundation that I feel confident dumping bales of tea into the harbor.

Anyway, what do these two events have to do with anything? Namely, that they both provided an emotional experience for me, despite both being entirely about fictional people. (Yes, I know this may cause some angry or confused e-mails. But I've come to grips with the facts: Batman isn't real.)

In trying to tie the emotions between both events together -- and come up with a column at a time when I'm stressed and under deadline pressure (see below) -- I've come to some conclusions.

First, without getting (I hope) overly controversial, I note that I'm a closet political junkie. I love the American political process, and I have a profound respect for the principles and foundations on which the country was founded. I admit it: I was totally sold on the message of my primary school civics classes. I read about issues; I debate with folks; I'll ask random acquaintances how they feel about government regulation of offensive material, or mandatory military service for all citizens.

And I care about elections. I'll be anxious months before an election. I'll make sure all my friends vote. I'll stay up the night of the election and click "reload" on CNN.com every few minutes. And I'll be thrilled if my guy wins and disappointed if he doesn't.

But on some level I realize it doesn't make a huge world of difference. The results of the election don't matter on a day-to-day basis. In six months, it probably won't make an impact on my world if I can privately invest some of my Social Security funds, or if Americans can buy prescription drugs in Canada. Politics are, on some level, primarily about ideas, which have no tangible form beyond the importance I give them.

Which brings me to the War Games storyline of the Batman titles. And I find myself connecting with these fictional characters, in a way that's surprising. I find myself yelling, "Oh, don't be such a jerk, Batman!" or, "Oh, no! I can't believe that they might kill this character!" My opinions have no more bearing on how that world is going to turn out any more than my yelling at my candidate's commercials: "Oh, don't say *that*, you dummy!" But I'm emotionally involved nevertheless.

I could make a lot of projections and connections between these two fictional worlds, but I'm going to limit myself to some off-the-cuff observations that further stretch the Batman-politics meme while I work on my "Wayne for Senator" campaign. Who knows; maybe they'll even tie in to gaming some how.

History: One of the interesting things about both the Batman books and politics is that they have a rich sense of history and continuity. President Bush is currently involved in a war on many fronts, doing his best to make the world safe from unseen and previously unknown threats. He's also the son of a previous president, who himself served as vice president under a popular leader who, sadly, succumbed to Alzheimer's before dying. Senator Kerry heroically served in an unpopular war decades ago, then protested that war when he returned home. Ralph Nader gained his fame

by his 1960's exposé that the Batmobile was unsafe at any speed. And so on.

Batman lost his parents as a child in a senseless crime. Serving vengeance, he fights crime while training himself to the limit of human abilities. He has several allies in this crime; one had her spine severed by a madman's bullet, one died after being bludgeoned to death after being betrayed by his birth mother, and one remains a haunted vigilante after he lost his acrobat parents in a Chevy Corvair rollover.

Anyway, the point is, the dramas of politics and comics have resonance because their histories imbue them with a richness that make their ultimate fates -- their victories and failures, their triumphs and tragedies -- much more fulfilling and emotionally engaging. Sure, sometimes people come from out of nowhere and accomplish previously unforeseeable events (remember when H. Ross Perot surprised everyone by breaking Batman's back?), but these seem to be rare, and are hard to relate to. In the gaming world, consider this: Having characters with rich histories -- both player and non-player characters -- will usually only enrich everyone's enjoyment. And reiterating this history periodically will make it easier to know what makes a character important and significant.

Time: The campaign process, much like a comic crossover, takes a long time to resolve. You know it's coming for a while, and even if it isn't a direct fixture in one's life, it affects and paints many aspects of the story.

While it's certainly possible for a drama to drag on too long, in general having epic events -- or the anticipation of epic events -- plod on in the background will make them more real; big decisions and consequences can be more emotionally satisfying if they don't just come out of nowhere. In the gaming world, it's often useful to foreshadow or imbue a campaign with the hints of a future adventure or the backdrop of a plot turn. If there's going to be a space launch that will play an important part, make sure it's known ahead of time (even if the heroes don't get involved). If there's going to be a peasant revolt, show the seeds of discontent being sown well in advance. And if peasants are going to be launched into space . . . well, you can figure it out.

Finality: Perhaps the best thing about comic crossovers and elections alike is that, for the most part, we know when they'll end. Likewise, in the gaming world I've generally found that, even with really big adventures and ongoing plot threads, the players are most appreciative when I clearly denote the end of a storyline. While there may be ongoing and permanent consequences from the outcome of an adventure, it's still good to note that the adventure thread itself ends. Having the sinister villain or the all-threatening illness as a perpetual, "When will it end, darnit?!" backdrop to the world can lead to player dreariness and fatigue. After all, no matter what, I know that the devisive, patience-trying riots-in-the-street War Games storyline is over . . . and so is the Batman crossover.

In all, it's been an exciting week. And, on some level, I love being emotionally involved in events that may or may not have any real effect. I'm not sure if I'll be reading the next Batman crossover, but I'll almost certainly be voting in the next election . . . unless it costs me more than \$61.32.

* * *

Unfortunately, owing to scheduling conflicts and some mind-numbingly oppressive deadlines (against which I have -- much to my chagrin -- successfully made my Dodge rolls), the plate-spinning required to bring the conclusion to the Iron Ref extravaganza has not yet been realized. I hope to have everything sorted out in the next week or two; I'll keep you posted. Thank you for your patience, and I hope you understand why we've put the padlocks on the knife drawer in the Iron Ref kitchen.

--*Steven Marsh*

Rationalizing Rations

by S.E. Mortimer

Introduction

Many players understand that their characters need to eat while on the road, but few do more than list a few weeks' worth of "trail rations" on their character sheets with no thought to the weight or storage space required to transport this much food. How many players have considered how food was actually preserved and what they might find in a pack of trail rations? Many hikers and soldiers realize the inconvenience of having to carry enough food for even just a few days and would understand the difficult logistics involved in keeping large numbers of men properly provisioned in the field. This article is intended to discuss various methods of food preservation -- both historical and modern -- and which foods might be most appropriate for travel rations. This work references both the Third and Fourth Editions of *GURPS*. On occasion there will be page references to both editions of *Basic Set*; in these instances the first reference will be to Third Edition and the second reference will be to Fourth Edition. For example, "Cooking skill (p.B53/B185)."

Food Preservation

Before refrigeration it was difficult to store many foods for more than a few days. Travelers in settled areas could purchase meals freshly cooked at inns and waystations conveniently spaced along the road at regular intervals. "Leftovers" was the most common type of traveling rations for short trips. A traveler would purchase a meal but only eat part of it, taking the remainder with him the following day in a pocket or wallet to eat on the road. The problem with this sort of travel food is that it spoiled within a few days and it was fairly heavy and bulky. To keep food for more than a few days it must be preserved in some fashion, and to pack more than a few day's worth requires some consideration about weight and volume.

The skill of food preservation is subsumed under the Cooking skill (p.B53/B185). An important aspect of preserving food is sterilization. All bacteria must be killed during the process and bacteria must be prevented from contaminating the food afterwards. A successful Cooking roll means that the food has been successfully preserved and sterilized. A critical success results in doubling the normal shelf life of the food. Failure means that the food will begin to spoil in 2d days (1d in hot climates). Critical failure results in a case of *food poisoning* for the person eating it (see sidebar, right). Food poisoning can also occur if food is eaten after its "shelf life" expires and it begins to spoil.

What follows is a selection of travel foods and preservation techniques.

Dry grain: Grain has two main advantages: It is easy to transport, and it can be stored for years if kept cool, dry, and away from pests. The Romans sometimes issued grain to soldiers who then ground the flour and prepared the bread in camp. Froissart mentions Scottish soldiers carrying bags of oatmeal which were used to make oatcakes in the field. In Asia, rice was the preferred staple. The disadvantages of grain rations are long preparation times; additional weight; and, once cooked, the food can only be stored for a few days.

Travel bread: Sometimes called "greatbread" or "waybread," this hearty bread

Food Poisoning

The vast majority of food poisoning cases are caused by improper cooking or storage of food. Some bacteria give off toxins when they multiply in the stomach and bowels, resulting in nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps, and diarrhea. More serious cases also involve fever and bloody stools. The most common types of bacteria that cause food poisoning are *salmonella*, *shigella*, *campylobacter*, and certain strains of *E. coli*. The only real cure for food poisoning is to let it run its course while the body purges itself. Bed rest and plenty of fluids will aid recovery.

If one contracts food poisoning, the symptoms appear 1d-2 days after eating the spoiled meal. On the morning of this day, the victim begins to display the symptoms (nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps, and

was made from a mixed flour (wheat, rye, barley, etc.) into which was added dried fruit, vegetables, nuts, and dried meat. This bread could not be stored for more than a week or so and it was fairly heavy, so it was only good for short journeys. It was a handy travel food because it required no preparation and was very nutritious.

Pemmican: Similar to travel bread except that animal fat was used instead of bread. Pemmican was invented by North American Indians and consists of powdered dried meat mixed up with dried fruit and nuts, and held together with animal fat (e.g. suet or lard). Pemmican could be rolled into balls or pressed into cakes, then wrapped in cloth and sealed by dipping in hot tallow or wax. It can be stored for several months.

Hardtack: This "twice-baked" bread or biscuit was common traveling fare in Europe and a special favorite of military commanders. Also called "shipsbiscuit," "sheet iron," and "worm castles," it was the food that soldiers loved to hate. A Roman clay tablet was found in northern France with an inscription that translates as, "Hardtack, hardtack. Come again no more." It was made by taking a regular loaf of bread, grinding it into powder, mixing it with water to make small cakes, and then baking it again. Sometimes sugar and salt were also added (the Romans added olive oil). In Spain it was called *bizcocho* and in Italy it was known as *biscotti*. The word *biscuit* literally means "twice baked." It was a military favorite because it was lightweight, required no preparation, and was full of carbohydrates. If hardtack is properly made (all traces of moisture removed) and correctly stored (dry and insect free), it will keep indefinitely. Hardtack can be eaten by breaking off a piece and placing it in the cheek, allowing saliva to soften it. It may also be softened by dipping into a beverage such as water, wine, or tea.

Hordiate: Also called "barley water," it was made from barley that was boiled until it began to dissolve, and then strained. This gruel was commonly fed to invalids and infants but it could also be dehydrated and powdered for traveling. *Powdered hordiate* was made by baking a thin layer of hordiate into a cake and then grinding it into powder. This powder was stored in a box or pouch and reconstituted in water before eating.

Heating: Cooking food kills many bacteria that are present. This sterilization can increase shelf life for a few days but does not prevent new bacteria from appearing, so cannot create long-term preservation in itself. Preventing contact with air after cooking (using a preservation liquid, vacuum sealing, etc.) can increase shelf life dramatically.

Desiccation: Drying or dehydration prevents the germination of grains and certain vegetables, can inhibit the growth of bacteria, and stops meat from rotting. Because a lot of the water content is removed, the final product is lighter and less bulky than the fresh item. There are depictions of the ancient Egyptians preserving fish by hanging them up on ropes to dry in the sun. William of Rubruck wrote about the Mongols preserving meat by cutting it into thin strips and hanging it in the sun and the wind, where it quickly dried and could be stored without the need for salt. Sun or oven-dried food contains about 25% water but freeze-dried food (see *Modern Rations*, below) contains less than 3% water. The Indians of the Andes mountains used the windy, frozen conditions of the mountainside to naturally freeze-dry food. This food is much lighter because of the lower water content and has a much longer shelf life.

Smoking: Smoking is an ancient method of preservation which not only dries the food, but adds formaldehyde -- a natural preservative present in wood smoke. Smoking also changes the food's taste, enhancing its flavor.

Salting: Salt preserves food by tying up water molecules so that micro organisms cannot use it for growth. Salt was

diarrhea). Roll vs HT. If the roll succeeds, the victim is inconvenienced for a day (-1 DX, -1 ST), but not enough to cause incapacitation. On a failed roll the victim is incapacitated for a number of days equal to the amount by which the roll failed (e.g. a roll that failed by 2 results in 2 days of incapacitation). A critical failure results in a potentially fatal case of food poisoning such as *botulism* (see below). Medical attention is essential.

Botulin is the most lethal form of food poisoning. The organism *clostridium botulinum*, a spore-forming bacteria, produces toxins when in an oxygen-free, low-acidic environment. Most cases of botulism result from inadequate food preservation. Botulism symptoms are similar to those of other types of food poisoning but it causes toxic effects to the muscles and nervous system, and can be fatal when the muscles controlling the lungs are affected. Cases of botulism are rare today, but the botulin toxin may be harvested and deliberately administered to poison someone (see p.CII139).

expensive -- at the end of the 13th century salt cost around 1d per pound and it took two pounds of salt to cure 20 pounds of meat (about 5d worth). Therefore, adding salt increased the cost of meat by 40%, so meat of any kind was not worth preserving unless it was in prime condition. Meat of poor quality was literally "not worth its salt."

Dried Fruit: Drying fruit concentrates the flavor and sugar. High concentrations of sugar ward off bacteria, greatly increasing shelf life for up to a year. Sulphur can be added to further increase longevity. Fruits that are commonly dried include apples, apricots, bananas, dates, figs (good source of calcium), plums (prunes), grapes and raisins (sultanas).

Dried and salted meat: This is best done with lean meat (low fat content). The meat is either rubbed with dry salt or soaked in salt brine. Once the salt has impregnated the meat it is then dried in the open air or in some sort of oven. This food is usually rehydrated and cooked -- usually by boiling -- before eating.

Jerky is a strip of partially dried meat (rubbery rather than brittle) and may be eaten in its preserved state with no preparation. **Biltong** is South African jerky. It is made in a similar fashion to regular jerky except that the meat strips are dipped in vinegar and seasoned before being dried. It has a finer texture than regular jerky.

Sausage is another method of preservation where the meat is minced, mixed with herbs and spices, and packed into a casing -- usually animal intestine but sometimes the stomach, bladder, or oesophagus is used. The sausage is steamed and then smoked to preserve it. The best sausages for traveling are dried and fermented ones such as salami and cervelat since they are lighter and have a longer shelf life.

Dried meat weighs approximately one quarter of its initial raw mass. Jerky weighs around one half. Properly prepared, dried and salted meat keeps for about one year. Salted jerky keeps for several months. Sausages keep for a couple of weeks up to several months depending on the type.

Freezing: This is the simplest method of preservation in cold climates -- simply leave the food outside. Livestock was often slaughtered early in winter to take advantage of the colder temperatures (and to avoid having to feed them over winter when fodder was scarce).

Fermentation: Enzymes of some bacteria, molds, and yeasts cause chemical changes in the food and inhibits the formation of harmful bacteria. Fermentation of food can increase its shelf life for many years.

Pickles: Usually involves impregnating the food with acid, via the use of vinegar or other acidic liquid. Sometimes a brine solution is used to facilitate the action of certain bacteria. The advantage of pickling is that it can make use of wine and mead that had spoiled (resulting in vinegar). The food to be pickled, whether it be pre-cooked meat or vegetables, was added to the pickling mixture and sealed in a container. Pickled cabbage (sauerkraut) was recommended by the British Navy to prevent scurvy early in the 18th century. Pickled foods keep for between six months and one year. The pickling liquid was sometimes boiled off prior to eating -- especially in the case of meat.

Kim chi is a Korean staple made from vegetables (mainly cabbage) that have been pickled in a solution of garlic, salt, and red chilli peppers. It is stored underground while it ferments to prevent it from freezing over winter. Chinese records indicate that a similar dish was eaten by workers on the Great Wall. Kim chi is very high in vitamins B and C and can be stored for up to a year in cool climates, but warmer temperatures decrease shelf life to a few months.

Cheese: A common way of preserving milk. Cheese is also easier to store and transport than milk. It is made by fermenting and curdling the milk, pressing and draining the liquid, adding salt, and then allowing it to dry. It takes around eight to 10 lbs of milk to make one pound of cheese. Hard cheeses such as Parmesan and Romano have the longest shelf life, keeping for years if they remain sealed (usually in wax).

Honey: Honey is a good preservative and has been used for thousands of years. The Swiss were known to use "third-rate" honey (containing beeswax) to preserve plums and apples. The Romans soaked olives in honey and stored them until they were needed for making oil. They also coated meat in honey to increase its shelf life. This method only extended shelf life for a few days in summer but honeyed meat could be kept for weeks in winter.

Soybean Curd: Native to east Asia, soybeans are low in saturated fats and high in amino acids and protein, and contain many vitamins and minerals. Fermenting soy into curd (called *tofu* in Japan) is a method of concentrating the nutrient content of soybeans. Tofu can then be dehydrated to reduce bulk and increase shelf life. Dried tofu can be chewed like meat jerky or reconstituted by adding it to hot water. It has a similar shelf life to meat jerky -- several months.

Tea: In the East, green tea was a common foodstuff. To reduce the amount of space it took up when being transported, tea (and many spices) were compressed into small "bricks." These often were used as a type of currency in areas such as China, Mongolia, and the Middle East. In order to prepare a drink, a small portion is broken off the brick and crushed into boiling water.

Algae: Some types of algae are excellent food supplements. One of the most nutritious is the blue-green algae known as "spirulina" (*spirulina platensis*, *spirulina maxima*). This algae has been eaten in Africa and Mexico for centuries and is a popular diet supplement all over the world today. NASA has done extensive research regarding its suitability as a food source in space. Spirulina is easily digestible since it contains no cellulose, it is very low in fat and carbohydrates, contains most of the important vitamins and minerals, and is around 65% protein by weight. This food is low in carbohydrates and vitamin C, however, so it must be supplemented with other foods. It can be dried into powder and compressed into "bricks" for easy transportation and can be stored for several years. It is recommended that no more than a few tablespoons of dried spirulina be consumed each day because of its high concentration of nucleic acids and the risk of it being contaminated with heavy metals.

Trail Rations

A balanced diet is essential even when traveling. A good mix of cereal, meat, fruit and vegetables, and dairy is important, both for good nutrition and to provide variety. Some preserved foods, such as hardtack and meat jerky, make ideal trail rations, but others require further processing. For example, pickled vegetables can be compressed and dried to reduce weight and volume. The best trail rations must remain preserved for long periods, are lightweight and easily transported, and can withstand harsh conditions including moisture, rough handling, temperature extremes, etc.

Compiling a Low-Tech Ration Pack: The three primary factors to consider are nutritional content, shelf life, and total mass. Secondary considerations are taste and variety. A combination of foods must be selected that provide the daily requirement of calories plus all the essential nutrients. Below is a suggested selection of foods for a low-tech ration pack that will sustain an average person for one day of moderate activity (see *Activity Levels*, below).

"Iron Rations"

- 0.5 lb hardtack
- 0.5 lb meat or fish jerky
- 0.5 lb dried fruit, legumes, and nuts
- 0.5 lb dried pickled vegetables
- 0.5 lb cheese

Total weight 2.5 lbs.

Alternatives

- 0.5 lb of powdered hordiate instead of hardtack
- 1.0 lb of polished rice or other grain instead of hardtack
- 1.0 lb of pemmican instead of jerky and dried fruit
- 0.5 lb dried soybean curd instead of jerky
- 0.5 lb dried yoghurt or milk curd instead of cheese
- spirulina instead of pickled vegetables (a compressed brick weighing 0.5 lb will last two weeks)

Nutrient Deficiency

The "Iron Rations" suggestions (left) contain all the energy and nutritional requirements to maintain good health. In the past, however, this was not always the case (see Historical Ration Allocations, below). Nutrient deficiencies can cause an array of diseases. These were particularly evident during wartime and seafaring expeditions when people did not have access to their normal diet for extended periods of time. Common diseases included *scurvy* (lack of vitamin C),

- tea (a compressed brick weighing 0.5 lb will last two weeks)

High-Tech Rations

Canned food: During the Napoleonic wars, the French experimented with boiled (*bouilli*) beef in glass jars. In time, the jar became a can, and the name was Anglicized into "bully beef." Canned rations have been widely used from the mid-19th century until today. Canned meat can be stored for a year or two, while other canned foods may keep for longer. Canned food is fairly cheap today but it is bulky and heavy. It is a useful trail ration because of its long shelf life, damage-resistant container, and lack of preparation requirements (simply open the can and start eating). Go to any supermarket to get suggestions for cost and weight, but a day's supply of all canned food would probably weigh around 5 lbs and cost \$8-\$10. It would be more practical to include two or three small cans (1-2 lbs worth) in each day's provisions and use lighter rations for the rest of the components.

Retort Pouch MREs: These are thermo-stabilized, triple-layered, foil/plastic food pouches named after the retort steam cooking process. Retortable pouches were first proposed in the 1940s, and developed in the 1950s. After being filled and sealed, the foods are retorted at high temperature to cook the food and kill any bacteria. NASA began providing retort pouch "MREs" (Meal Ready-to-Eat) for space missions in the 1970s and it was adopted as a US Department of Defense combat ration in 1975. Today, canned food is still being issued but because retort pouch technology makes it easier to heat the food in the field, is easier to carry, and tastes better than canned food, MRE rations are becoming more popular. MREs also come in a huge selection and each meal includes entrée, main course, and dessert. Because moisture content is retained, MREs are more nutritious and taste better than dehydrated or freeze-dried food, but the retained water and oils mean greater mass for transportation. MREs can be stored in a cool atmosphere for around 10 years, but shelf life decreases as the temperature increases. In a warm climate these rations last around three years and in a hot climate the food begins to spoil within a few months. One day's provision requires three MREs totaling \$15 and weighing around four lbs (after disposing of unnecessary packaging). Single-use MRE heating pouches can be purchased for around \$1.50 ea (weight negligible). Just add water to begin the thermal reaction, put the MRE ration in the pouch, and wait 10-15 mins for a hot meal.

Freeze-dried Food: The most effective method of removing water content. Just about any type of fresh or cooked food can be treated in this manner. After preparation, the food is "flash frozen" in a vacuum. The low-level of applied heat causes the ice crystals to evaporate without going back to the liquid phase. This process, called "sublimation," removes 97-98% of water content. It reduces mass, retains a high degree of nutritional content, and creates a shelf life of around 20 years.

LRP Rations: The "Long-Ranged Patrol" ration was specifically designed by the military for situations where resupply is not available, and weight and volume are critical factors. The LRP contains freeze-dried food of a similar, but less varied, selection to those contained in the MREs. The disadvantages are that water is required for preparation, and that freeze-dried meals aren't as appetizing as normal MREs. The main advantages are very long shelf life and reduced mass -- a day's provisions only weighs half that of MREs (around two lbs) and can keep for up to 20 years. Cost is \$20 per day's supply. One quart of water is also required for food reconstitution.

Elemental Nutrient Formulas (ENF): These represent the most advanced method of food reduction. ENFs replace food intake with a scientifically determined set of nutrients including carbohydrates, fiber, vitamins, minerals, electrolytes, and amino acids (protein building blocks). ENFs are designed to be mixed with water (but juice and fats/oils can also be added if available). One problem with ENFs is that they are fairly low in energy. A person performing moderate activity (see *Activity Levels*, below) would need to consume around 1.5 lbs per day. The other problem with ENFs is that they must be ingested at more frequent intervals than the usual three meals per day -- a person's ENF intake should be split into 6 meals per day. This can be bothersome since it doubles the normal number

pellagra (lack of niacin), *beriberi* (lack of vitamin B), and *xerophthalmia* (lack of vitamin A). *GURPS* already outlines the effects of some of these diseases such as scurvy (p.CII172), and beriberi (p.CII167). Most of these types of diseases take a while to manifest, so a person in good health, who has to survive on inadequate rations for a few weeks will suffer few ill effects so long as calorie content is sufficient. If nutrient deficiency continues for longer than a month then the person is in danger of contracting one of the above diseases.

of meal breaks each day. ENFs can be stored in a cool, dry, dark environment for several years. Cost is around \$30 for a day's supply (weight 1.5 lbs).

Food Tablets: These are similar to ENFs but come in a tablet form that is easier to handle and has a longer shelf life. Retailers claim that a person can survive for months eating nothing but these tablets. This might be true but not on the recommended daily consumption. A person performing moderate activity (see *Activity Levels*, below) will need to consume at least 10 times the recommended amount each day to avoid weight loss, and this number turns out to weigh and cost about the same as the above-mentioned ENFs. It is also unclear what health problems might arise from relying on these as a sole food supply for an extended period of time because one will be ingesting far more vitamins, minerals, and amino acids than the daily recommendation. Food tablets should be considered a food *supplement* rather than a food staple and would be very useful in this capacity.

Travel Ration Purchase Table

Description (one day's provisions)	TL	Weight	Cost	"Shelf Life"
Fresh food	0	4.0 lbs	\$4	3 days
Travel bread	0	3.5 lbs	\$6	2 weeks
Iron rations	0	2.5 lbs	\$8	3 months
Canned rations	5	5.0 lbs	\$8	2 years
MRE (Meal Ready-to-Eat)	7	4.0 lbs	\$15	3 years
LRP (Long-Ranged Patrol)	7	2.0 lbs	\$20	20 years
ENF (Elemental Nutrient Formula)	8	1.5 lbs	\$30	3 years
Food Tablets	8	1.5 lbs	\$30	10 years

The starvation rules in *GURPS* require that each day's provisions be split into three meals (p.B128/B426). Missing even one of these meals will weaken you. Note that the weight of 0.5 lbs for a meal of traveler's rations (p.B212/B288) is unrealistic for typical activity levels.

Activity Levels

The exact amount of food required per day is dependent upon many factors including body mass, individual metabolisms, climate, and activity levels, but the above suggestions are reasonable estimates. They will provide enough nutrition for a person in a mild climate performing moderate activity throughout the day. "Moderate" activity includes things such as marching through cleared terrain (or on a road), light labor, gardening, etc. The following modifiers need to be applied to adjust the amount of provisions required for different types of activity. This is only necessary for extended activity -- bursts of accelerated activity for a few minutes, such as running or fighting, are not enough to modify the daily allowance. Only use these modifiers if activity level differs for most of the day (GM's discretion).

- -50% -- resting, watching TV, quietly awaiting rescue
- -25% -- resting but recovering from illness or injury
- -25% -- light activity (riding an animal, driving a vehicle, standing for most of the day)
- +25% -- strenuous activity (hiking cross-country, heavy manual labor, mountain climbing, etc.)
- +25% -- cold climate

The modifiers are cumulative. For example, assuming a soldier was equipped with LRP rations. A typical allowance (for moderate activity) is 2 lbs per day. If this soldier was hiking in a cold climate, he would need an additional +50% for a total of 3 lbs of LRPs each day.

Water

As **GURPS** states, two quarts of water is the normal daily requirement for mild climates and moderate activity (p.B128/B426). In dry climates or at high altitudes, an additional one quart per day is required. In hot climates or when strenuous activity is required, an additional two quarts are needed per day. Again, these are cumulative. Cold, mountainous terrain is both dry *and* high-altitude, resulting in a requirement of four quarts per day. The desert is hot and dry resulting in a five-quart daily requirement. If strenuous activity is performed in the desert then a total of seven quarts (14 lbs) of water per day is needed. Any less and the person suffers the effects of dehydration (see p.B128/B426).

The above water estimates are adequate if one is subsisting on a normal diet, since some of our daily water requirements are met through the intake of food, which can contain up to 90% water. The problem with most trail rations, however, is that a lot of the water has been removed to reduce volume and weight. This means that the traveler needs to drink more water to compensate. When relying upon trail rations for nutrition, an extra quart of water is required per day (either drunk directly or used to rehydrate food), making the minimum daily water requirement is three quarts (6 lbs). This does not apply to canned rations or MREs because water content is retained.

Encumbrance

Even at only two lbs of freeze-dried rations per day, the weight soon adds up. If water also needs to be carried, it soon becomes evident that a traveler could not carry enough provisions on his back to last an extended journey. Assuming a three-quart water allowance per day at two lbs per quart, the traveler needs to carry eight lbs of food and water per day. A single week's rations, including water, would weigh 56 lbs, leaving little capacity for other necessities. It is for this reason more than any other that foraging and survival skills are important for those intending to embark on long treks that have few prospects for resupply.

Historical Ration Allocations

Although the fare may have varied, a weight of between three and four pounds per day seems to have been a typical allowance to keep soldiers active in the field. All armies were expected to add additional foods to the soldiers' diets whenever they became available. This could range from foraged seafood when on the coast, to a confiscated cache of local produce, to fresh meat when animals were available for slaughter.

Roman Marching Rations: Hardtack (*bucellatum*), flour or unground grain (*frumentum*) -- which was ground and baked in the field, bacon or salted meat (pork and mutton), dried lentils or chickpeas. Olive oil and fish sauce (*garum*) were also important. "Sour" wine called *acetum* was the common beverage but sweeter wine was also issued. Rations were consumed on a three-day rotation in the late Roman period: hardtack for 2 days and then bread on the 3rd; mutton for 2 days and salt pork on the 3rd; wine and sour wine on alternate days.

Mongol Cavalry: Dried meat, dried milk curd, millet, tea, and sometimes dried blood. Two flasks were carried, one held *qumiz* -- an alcoholic beverage made from fermented mare's milk. The other was used to reconstitute dried milk curd and blood with water. When in need, the rider could open a horse's vein and drink some blood.

Spanish Conquistadors: Traveling rations seem to have included hardtack, cheese, wheat, salted meat and fish, raisins, almonds, olive oil, honey, and wine.

Continental Army Rations: The earliest known legislation regarding rations for the Continental Army was passed on November 4, 1775. Each soldier was supposed to be allocated the following daily ration: 16 oz beef; 6.8 oz. peas; 18 oz. flour; 1.4 oz. rice; 16 oz. milk; and 1 quart of spruce beer.

British Navy Provisions: Hardtack, salted meat, dried peas, oatmeal, cheese, pickled cabbage (*sauerkraut*), beer, wine, and rum. Later, sauerkraut was replaced with lemons or limes (sailors were sometimes called "limeys"). Beer and wine lasted longer than water because of the alcohol content. When the wine turned to vinegar it was used in cooking and to disinfect the ship. A daily quotient of rum was issued because of its perceived health benefits, but it sometimes caused

drunkenness and morale problems.

Civil War "Iron" Rations: Salted beef or pork, hardtack, dried navy beans, and coffee beans. The pork was sometimes called "sowbelly" by the troops and they referred to hardtack as "teeth-dullers." In addition to being dipped in coffee, hardtack was sometimes fried in grease into a concoction known as "skilleygalee" or "hellfire stew." Regarding coffee, each soldier was supposed to get enough beans to make six strong cups a day. The Army also introduced desiccated vegetables. Steamed onions, potatoes, cabbage, turnips and carrots were pressed into thin sheets and dried. When boiled in water, they expanded into a vegetable dish sufficient to feed four soldiers. The meal looked very unappetizing, though, and tasted just as bad. Many soldiers called it "desecrated vegetables."

French Foreign Legion: In the Middle East men were organized into teams of two and a mule was assigned to each team. Each mule carried the equipment of two legionnaires and they took turns riding it. They could march long and far using this method. Six days rations were part of the mule's load and included sweetened hardtack called *kessra* or *ka'k*, salted meat, and dried figs or dates.

WWII Rations (Australia): Australian soldiers in New Guinea were initially issued rations that comprised of hardtack, canned beef, chocolate, tea and sugar. After 1942 rations improved and included canned fruit, dried potatoes, sausages, vegetables, jam, butter, and beans. Dried mutton was also occasionally issued and considered a treat.

WWII Rations (Japan): Standard Japanese rations consisted of polished rice, hardtack, pickled fruit (plums were a favorite), salted meat and fish, dried vegetables, soy bean paste, sugar, and sake.

Old Costumes, New Connivers

More Unexpected Takes On Classic Villains

by **Brian Rogers**

Every supers universe has them -- the villains who are canner than the heroes, using their powers to blind, befuddle, and bamboozle them before receiving that oh-so-cathartic punch to the jaw. What these villains may lack in firepower, they make up in deception, and if done properly they make the transition from the one the heroes hate to encounter to the one they love to hate. The trick, as always, is to give the players what they want in a supers universe, [but not what they expect](#). For these villains, add an extra dash of [Old Man Jenkins'](#) secret ingredient before dishing them out to your players.

Below are four classic villain styles, two of which are deception based. These two (with *Tri-Stat dX* statistics) use the cover of one of the other player-expected archetypes to throw the players off the scent.

The Time-Traveling Crook

Using futuristic technology, the Time-Traveling Crook has entered our present, usually because the future is dull. Like the Smart Guy With Henchmen, the Time-Traveling Crook sees this as a game -- a war game, or maybe the future equivalent of a LARP -- but his knowing either a) how it all turns out or b) that he can just skip back to his home time makes it fun (for him). He generally has advanced technology but no powers, and may have some of the 3045AD-S-Mart-equivalent shelf devices that the heroes see repeatedly. The Time-Traveling crook will also drop cryptic hints about things to come, asking the date by saying, "Have you married Amazonia yet? No? Okay, good." Generally indifferent to what his meddling does to the time-stream, sometimes the Time Traveling Crook will take actions that are incomprehensible without seeing the situation four-dimensionally, and heroes who can do so will get the jump on him.

The Master Illusionist

Either with inborn powers or advanced technology, the Master Illusionist is able to make people see things that aren't there. He works best when he can play the ignored man behind the curtain, but despite that many taking on this role are so foolish as to either directly confront the heroes or face them again after a revelatory defeat. The main problem with the Master Illusionist is that once the curtain is pulled back his gimmick loses most of its punch, so any returns have to place him back behind the curtain or relegate him to second class villain status.

Flicker

"Compared to mastery of time, your powers are merely seconds." -- Flicker

Frank Lake, a.k.a. Flicker, is a special effects expert who turned his talents to crime, constructing highly advanced holographic and audio gear for that purpose. He has little reason for doing this except realizing he *could*, and that he was sick of giving others the spotlight. He's only been at this for a few months, but has performed impressive thefts of both rare art and advanced technology. He uses the Muse as one of his inspirations, but in practice the two are more likely to butt heads than work together -- not that the

Flicker (130 points)

Body 6 Mind 8 Soul 7
ACV 6 DCV 13 Health 65

Characteristic Attributes

Muse would ever be so crass as to reveal a fellow performer's secrets to the audience.

Flicker has one major scheme: He misdirects opponents by appearing to have Time Travel. Half of Flicker's combat effectiveness comes from heroes not understanding what he can do. He always masks his illusions with a "time manipulation" deception: His invisibility is "time travel"; Illusions of himself let him mimic "intangibility via time slipping" or are "time drawn duplicates"; Illusions are "echoes of past or future events" or "fade back to their own time" when hit. When he's feeling outgunned he'll generate illusionary wounds that visibly heal via "temporal acceleration" and drop "weapons picked up from the 2024 alien invasion," trusting the heroes will try to disarm them while he escapes.

As for physical effects, his visible lasers are "temporally accelerated light," while his infrared laser combusts things via "hyper-time interacting with air molecules." His incapacitating attack actually overloads the optic nerve, but he'll expound that it's "temporally freezing neural pathways" -- he'll sometimes combine this with projected invisibility devices, so the target will vanish when hit and reappear when they wake up. When he does carry conventional gadgets, all of them are "jazzed up" to look futuristic. His devices self destruct when their charges end or if tampered with, leaving small burn marks. Anyone touching one will take some minor flame damage but will no doubt be convinced that they have disarmed a dangerous futuristic weapon.

Flicker wears a gold and silver jumpsuit with weapons pouches held closed by pressure sensitive magnetic seals -- other technology is built into his gloves and belt. He hides his identity behind a pair of goggles that both track eye movements to trigger his devices. He stands at a little under six feet, and has a trim but not overly muscled build. Flicker uses makeup to change his apparent age -- graying his brown hair, adding wrinkles, facial hair (apparently pork-chop sideburns are big in the future) and other distractions to maintain his facade. While in good shape for a normal man, he's no match for a costumed adventurer and he knows it, having no offensive combat training and hard earned experience at slithering from someone's grip. He trains with his weapons daily, however, and is a very good shot.

From a GM perspective, Flicker is a carte blanche to mess with your player's heads. He is also something of a scenery-chewer, if you want an opportunity to declaim your power.

He acts nationally, intimating that time and distance mean nothing to him. He'll place fake information about his activities into the media files of the towns where he operates (or onto the internet and national news databases, if they exist), so *any* quick checks will show him operating for decades -- albeit in towns where he's not currently active, to prevent easy questioning of would-be witnesses. More extensive checks may reveal that the information has just appeared, which time travel theorists might attribute to a chronal correction wave, a theory advanced in the papers of

Gadgets (4) Various explosive charges and "futuristic weapons"
Highly Skilled (2)
Item of Power (21) Battle-suit
Invisibility (6) Normal sight & sound (3 pt level), Duration 4, targets 1
Projection (5) 10m radius sight & sound. Duration 4 (10 min), area 4 (100m), Range 2 (100m) 4 projections
Special Attack (5) Incapacitating, Mind check at +1 to resist, No damage
Secondary Special Attack (5) 40 damage, Undetectable, short range (IR Laser)
Secondary Special Attack (3) 60 damage laser
Secondary Special Attack (2) Flare (Body -3), spreading, no damage, short range
Defense Combat Mastery (7)
Extra Attacks (1) only for suit functions.
Extra Defenses (1)

Defects

Inept Attack (1)
Skeleton in Closet (1) Not really a time traveler
Wanted (1) Warrants are minimal, as people think he's a time traveler
Vulnerability (1) Suit functions drop 3 levels when in high EM fields or under electrical current

Skills

Electronics - SFX gear (2)
Special Ranged Attack - Stunning attack (4)
Disguise - Makeup (2)
Police Science - Research Techniques (1)
Computers - Databases (1)
Intimidation - Imperious (2)
Demolitions - small charges (1)
Unarmed Defense - Holds (2)

the deceased Dr. Madison Thoreaux (actually some pseudo-science gobbledygook that Flicker himself concocted and placed to be found).

Flicker will say anything he can to convince the heroes that he is a time traveler: pretend to have never met them before, allude to things that haven't happened yet, and make cryptic statements about future events. In general, he'll keep them off balance and confused enough that his limited powers can keep groups of heroes at bay -- provided they don't just shoot him. Flicker can be a returning villain for months before the players twig to what's going on or an interesting one shot to let the team detective show off. . Taking advantage of player credulity in as inherently flexible a genre as supers ("My teammate is a Greek god, why can't he be a time traveler?") can be mean, so you must play this fairly.

If the PCs catch him without catching on, he'll spin a story about his efforts to save the future, using his illusion devices to display a "chronal vision" of a post apocalypse dystopia which he is trying to avoid. Naturally this is just a con to get free, or even to use the players as dupes for his next heist. Once the players deduce his modus operandi, you can turn the tables on them -- travelers from a different timeline approach Flicker and he lays his hands on real time travel equipment. Revamp his powers and present a "boy who cried wolf" scenario -- now he *really is* a time traveler needing the heroes help to avert a calamity. Or maybe not . . .

The Supernatural Killer

In the world's dark places magic lingers, vomiting up things that were never supposed to exist. Vampires. Werewolves. Zalzozhny. Nowhere else is a super's heroic brightness more starkly defined than when battling these evils, often with no more than courage, as their super-strength and power blasts are simply more weapons to which the horror is immune. The supernatural killer knows that it has an advantage in that regard, and will play with its prey, and the heroes, either by genteel taunts in fog-shrouded alleys or by slipping past impenetrable barriers to claim protected prey. When fighting the Supernatural Killer, even the strongest heroes must borrow the tactics of horror investigators: slowly gathering clues, deducing patterns and not risking too much until they can strip the beast of its advantages and face it on even ground.

The Primeval Mutant

Superhuman power sometimes strips away the veneer of humanity and brings its possessor closer to being a beast. The mutations are often limited to natural weapons and inhuman durability, the Primeval Mutant is nonetheless a dangerous foe. He doesn't rob banks, leave clues or engage in verbal fencing, but instead has a combination of wits, instinct and woodland knowledge (or sheer berserker bloodlust, or both) that makes him a match for more directly powerful heroes. Sometimes the Primeval Mutants have slipped back too far and are *merely* [highly clever animals](#), but usually they have intelligence and goals that set them at odds with the heroes -- territory, wealth, unwilling companions -- or are in the employ of those who do.

Lady Menagerie

"You have no idea what you're dealing with." -- Lady Menagerie

Even with recent improvements, there are communities in the back woods of rural Appalachia where the conditions are far from great. Darla-Noreen Handers was born in one of those, to a family with lineage that snaked back upon itself more than once in its three century American history. Darla-Noreen grew up hearing story after story from her grandmother about how this great cousin had held off revenuers or that great uncle the moonshiner, and how too many kin marriages would bring their werewolf bloodline

Lady Menagerie

Body 13 **Mind** 7 **Soul** 8
ACV 9 (12) **DCV** 7 **Health** 225

Characteristics

back to the fore. Despite the modern education, when her own powers manifested (be it from natural mutation or exposure to dumped chemical gunk), and her pudgy, pug nosed form was replaced with a winged, clawed tailed, fur-covered monstrosity, Darla-Noreen understandably flipped out. She fled north, losing herself temporarily to madness and causing a new spate of [Jersey Devil](#) sightings.

Once she calmed down, Darla-Noreen read the accounts of her rampage, with their assumptions of supernatural powers: bullets coated with silver instead of Teflon, exorcists rather than Investigators. This sparked an idea, and now Darla-Noreen lives in a large, dilapidated mansion in the rural farmland southwest of Empire City, having driven the old owners away with haunting manifestations. She -- or rather, the Lady Menagerie -- stalks the woods, enjoying the fear of the townsfolk and keeping developers at bay. Sometimes she'll let the beast loose and ravage some livestock, and other times she'll enter the city for some pheromone-attracted companionship (who will wake to pinpricks across his body -- porcupines must mate carefully) or to engage in house-breaking to increase her cash supplies. While she can't live a *normal life*, she has decided she can live a *comfortable* one.

Lady Menagerie possesses the combined powers of the small woodland creatures near her Appalachian home: she's got a coyote's endurance, an opossum's tail (and power to play dead), a skunk's musk, bat wings, porcupine quills, moles claws, and so on. While as a human her she'd be a little over five feet, the combination of her canine foot structure and wings makes her appear larger, and her body is covered with a coarse fur that makes clothing irrelevant. While still of a human mind, her passions run closer to the surface -- she's acknowledged to herself that she goes into heat (though cannot interbreed with normal humans), that occasionally she needs to just run and hunt, and that she can get truly terrified or terrifyingly angry. She does a good job at reigning that in, but sometimes emotions get away from her.

While she laughingly refers to herself as a "Varmint-thrope," Darla-Noreen knows there's nothing super-natural about her. She also knows that having people think she is gives her an edge, so if directly confronted by a super she'll play up the Creature of the Night image, picking up an accent, shying away from religious icons, fleeing open flames and such before making a shape-shifting assisted escape. Once such an encounter occurs. Lady Menagerie will move her rampaging further afield. If the heroes start hunting her, she'll hunt them -- attacking in the city while they're looking into her rural activities, and vice versa, until she can arrange an encounter with them in her mountain home further south. Darla-Noreen will find these engagements fun, with plans of beating the heroes so decisively that they'll never bother her again. If her control slips, however, there might be a dead hero, a terrified mutant fleeing to safer climes, or both.

Armor (1) wings are unarmored
Attack Mastery (3) only when in Blind Fury
Animal Summon (2) Mammals, Area 3 (10m), Duration 3 (1 min)
Extra Arm (1) Opossum Tail
Extra Attacks (2) 1 level constant, 2nd only in Blind Fury
Flight (2) winged/airplane level, 50kph
Height. Senses (4) UV Vision, Sonar, Heightened scent & hearing
Massive Damage (2) Claw strikes only
Mind Control (5) Pheromones: Any male, takes several minutes exposure, no combat
Mind Shield (3) Only when in Blind Fury
Natural Weapons (4) Claws, Fangs, Spines, Tentacle (tail)
Shape-Shift (5) any small Appalachian Mammal, some powers unavailable based on form
Shrinking (6) to size of rodent, Dependant on Shape-shift
Special Attack (1) Skunk Musk: spreading, Flare & Irritant (body -3), short range, no damage, 3 shots
Special Defenses (2) Half effect from Pain or Poison
Tough (6)
Tunneling (3)
Water Speed (2)

Defects

Blind Fury (2) When on emotional high
Marked (3)
Unappealing (3)

Skills

Burglary Breaking & Entering (1)
Controlled Breathing Play Dead (3)
Intimidation Street (1)
Stealth move quietly (1)
Wilderness Survival Mountains (3)
Wilderness Tracking Mountains (3)

Deceptive Powers in *Tri-Stat dX*

There are a few super powers that are difficult to price out for games, in part because their potency is based almost entirely around player ingenuity. Deceptive powers such as illusion, invisibility, and shape-shifting fall into this category. *Tri-Stat* handles these powers in three separate ways: illusion casting, more precisely *projection*, has each extra level in the ability reducing the viewer's chance to pierce the illusion; Invisibility is a single cost per sense, with the options of partial and full; Shape-shifting into other humans is likewise a single point cost, while shape-shifting to anything else is based on the powers you get from the form, rather than the form itself.

For GMs whose focus is more towards information gathering than combat, or who expect that their players will find clever uses for minor powers, a different system might be needed. After all, in the existing rules invisibility to sight and shape-shifting to mimic any human costs out the same as the weakest Special Attack while being far more versatile. Fortunately, the Projection rules provide a good framework for adapting these powers.

Cosmetic Alternate Forms could be removed and replaced with *Shape-shifting* (different from the power of that name in *Big Eyes, Small Mouth*, which in *Tri-Stat dX* is *Partial-Powered Alternate Form*). This is the ability to assume another shape without any attendant powers. At its maximum it lets the character change into anything of the same mass -- the character could look like a giant frog, another person or a filing cabinet -- and costs 4 points per level. Reductions to the power would limit what the character can turn into: for example, 3 points could be all animals; 2 points, all mammals; 1 point, all humans. Higher levels in ability reduces people's chance of seeing through the deception, with each level giving a -1 on Mind checks to identify the character as not being normal. Characters like Changeling or Plastic Man have at most one or two levels of this characteristic (at the 3 or 4 point ranges respectively), as they keep their distinctive colorations when they change. Super-spies like the Chameleon are restricted to the 1 point ability, but have 8 to 10 levels in it, where even the brightest heroes can be fooled. Naturally, characters like Changeling will need Power Flux or Dynamic Powers to mimic the abilities of the forms they take, but now there's a simple mechanic for looking like something you aren't.

Likewise, Invisibility could be structured on this pattern, with the maximum level of the characteristic being invisible to nearly all senses costing 4 points (everyone should have some obscure senses that can penetrate the invisibility, if only as a plot element). Reductions to the power decrease the number of senses, based on concept and utility: perhaps at 3 points it's all visual senses; 2 points is standard sight; 1 point it's non-standard sight (such as IR vision for a Vampire or Android). There's a lot of room for leeway here, with GMs determining the power of any sensory combination. Again, each level in the characteristic gives a -1 to be detected; assume that 4 levels equates to conventional 'invisibility', as the reduction is now greater than an average man's Mind; after that, spotting the invisible man is done via secondary effects such as seeing puffs of breath, footprints, curtains moving etc., with modifiers for action like carrying visible things or making direct attacks. Levels less than 4 are transparency, camouflage or effective stealth. The Invisible Woman has the 2 point version of this characteristic (normal sight only). Judging how much harder she is to spot now than when she first appeared, she's probably bought it up from 4 levels to 8-10, with a cost more reflective of how useful she finds the power.

The Duchess Of The Gulls

for *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Phil Masters

Note: This character is designed for the "Alchemical Baroque" setting described in GURPS All-Star Jam 2004.

The Duchess of the Gulls dwells on a tiny, fairly remote island in the White Archipelago. Her name means terror to the sailors of those parts, as she and her gull-subjects are forever swooping down and raining storms and potent curses on passing ships, many of which have been wrecked as a result. She has even been known to assail villages on nearby islands, and the scope of her reign of fear seems slowly to be widening.

She is clearly a powerful witch, but the people of the Archipelago do not really think of her as human. Those few souls who have seen her well enough to describe her, and survived, say that she is dark as night, though always clad in robes white as snow, and her words are as strange and incomprehensible as her actions. Her subjects are clearly no ordinary gulls, and old folk huddled round the fires say that some flocks in those parts have always been odd, but until the Duchess came, a bare five years or so ago, they had never been so terrible.

The White King is now looking for brave souls to end this terror, and shrewd adventurers might wonder if they should learn more about the Duchess before they set out to deal with her; but the true story of her life is as obscure and strange as it is sad and human.

Background

Many years ago, in a land far to the south, where the Southern Plains rise up to the rocky hills of the Solar Empire, a local witch took herself an apprentice, a clever young girl of useful talent. The girl learned fast, eventually matching her teacher, who by then was old and slow and toothless. However, the girl was less clever in love than she was in witchcraft, falling for the sunny smile of a local shepherd-lad who had broken several hearts before he came to her. She thought that no boy could possibly break a witch's heart, but there came a day when the shepherd-lad proved otherwise, saying unkind words to her before he went away whistling to tend his flock.

At his back, the girl grew terribly angry, and called upon powers that she had been told not to name, cursing the boy with ill-luck. That is not a good curse to suffer when you are tending sheep in a land of high cliffs and hard rocks; the boy was distracted by the petty troubles it brought him, and eventually slipped and fell and broke his neck. The girl had to pretend to herself that she was glad, but not show it to others.

The rest of the village guessed, though, and began to whisper behind her back, until she heard, and realized that she could never be happy there again. And so, she set out with certain souvenirs of her experiences, heading north, where, she had heard, the lands were as cold as a broken heart.

She did not *mean* to go terribly far north, but her heart had not been properly hardened yet, and several times, when she settled down somewhere for a while, some handsome foolish peasant lad or proud son of the gentry broke it again, and she would throw some curse, and set out before anyone could take revenge on her for that. By the time she had hardened her heart entirely, she had traveled beyond the edge of the land, out into the White Archipelago, where she at last found a place that was remote from the men she had come to hate.

She still found someone to talk to, mind; the island she had come to was occupied by a flock of gulls who were strange and interesting company, being in fact fairies who had settled here some years before in corporeal guise, and then forgotten, not only why they had done so, but much of their true nature. (They retained some supernatural power, however, being startlingly strong, and also able to call down strange fogs and create terror in the minds of mortals.)

They had no interest in breaking her heart, and little in the mass of humanity, and so she liked them; they saw in her a kindred spirit, wild and cold and somewhat lost, and returned her friendship.

The girl, now a woman, settled into a very old, ruined fisherman's cottage on the island. The supplies that she had brought with her, along with her magic and the aid of her new friends, sustained her for a while, and she soon learned to fish and to gather food, but she really needed much more, especially when she began improving her new home and working on new magics. Having foresworn the company of her own kind, and locked her heart away from all human sympathy, it was not hard for her to decide to take what she needed in whatever ways were most convenient for her. She began flying off across the sea with a few gulls as company, seeking out human ships and small villages, driving away anyone who sought to guard them, and taking what she desired. She used magic and plunder to make her house more homely, and settled down to improve her powers and extend her knowledge. She never thinks of herself as a tyrant or a terror; she simply cares not at all what others think, or whether they live or die. The only reason that she is striking further afield is to acquire more and different supplies, and because ships have learned to avoid the close vicinity of her island.

Very occasionally, when the Duchess needs supplies which she cannot obtain any other way, she dons plain clothes, boards a small sailing boat, calls up a suitable wind, and, escorted by a gull or two, sails to a distant port on the mainland, where her reputation is more or less unknown, to trade. She never enjoys these journeys, which she keeps as short as possible, but she can endure them. Still, any ignorant man who annoys her enough while she is in these distant harbors is likely to be in bad trouble -- possibly along with anyone else on the same ship, if he is a sailor or a traveler.

Defeating the Duchess of the Gulls would be hard work, as her gulls will defend her with the screeching fury of seabirds, while her own magic and cunning are very considerable indeed. She might most likely be driven away, only to settle in some other place, and to begin once more seeking solitude and simple comfort -- however much destruction she must cause in the process.

Game Details

The Duchess and her gulls are detailed below using *GURPS Fourth Edition*, aside from her magic, which still necessarily references *GURPS Magic* and *GURPS Spirits*. (Similar rules should eventually appear in *Fourth Edition* supplements.)

Instead of "Alchemy (Potion-Brewing)," witches should now take Herb Lore skill (treating it as equivalent to Alchemy for the purpose of creating elixirs), which can never differ by more than 2 levels from their Ritual Magic (Witchcraft) skill, and which cannot exceed their Pharmacy (Herbal)/TL4 skill. Herb Lore *can* be used to analyse elixirs in this setting, but at -2 to analyse the products of Herb Lore, or -5 for the products of any version of Alchemy skill. References to Flight (Unwinged) skill should be replaced with Aerobatics.

Because TL5 is now considered to begin around 1730 A.D., and this setting is technologically similar to our world c.1700, the base TL is now considered to be late 4 (although a very few natural philosophers and clever artificers may have reached early TL5). Also, wealth does grant free Status.

The Duchess of the Gulls (423 points)

A stern if attractive woman with jet-black hair, swarthy skin, and green eyes, always dressed in plain white silks, and usually carrying a short walking-staff topped with a human skull. Age 32; 130 lbs.

ST 9 [-10]; **DX** 13 [60]; **IQ** 15 [100]; **HT** 13 [30]

Secondary Attributes: SM +0; Dmg 1d-2/1d-1; BL 16; HP 10 [2]; Will 15 [0]; Per 15 [0]; FP 13 [0]; Basic Speed 7 [10]; Basic Move 7 [0]; Dodge 10.

Social Background/Languages: TL 4 [0]; CF Known Lands Society [0]; Modern Golden Spoken (Native)/Written (Accented) [-1]; La Langue Spoken (Accented)/Written (Broken) [3]; Norderwerten Spoken (Accented)/Written

(Accented) [4].

Advantages: Ally Group (Gulls: 20 51-point characters -- less than 25% of starting points, appear 15-) [24]; Attractive [4]; Deep Sleeper [1]; Filthy Rich [50]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Less Sleep 2 [4]; Mystic Symbol 3 [30]; Ritual Adept 1 [10]; Ritual Aptitude 5 [5]; Spirit Empathy (Specialized, Fairies, -50%) [5]; Status +1* [0].

*Free from Wealth. (Even her victims think of the Duchess as having high Status, thanks to her nickname, practical power, style of dress, and manner.)

Disadvantages: Bad Temper (15) [-5]; Callous [-5]; Delusion (All men are heartless seducers above all) [-5]; Enemy (Some lords of the White Archipelago and hireling adventurers, as a Large Group, Hunter, Quite Rarely) [-15]; Loner (12) (Only with regard to humans, -40%) [-3]; Oblivious [-5]; Overconfidence (15) [-2]; Reputation (-4 as an evil sorceress, Throughout the White Archipelago, All the Time) [-10]; Stubbornness [-5].

Quirks: Refuses to worry at all that people are unnerved by her staff; Dresses like a stereotyped "ice witch," in white silk and silver (but disdains gold and jewels); Truthful when she feel no threat or stress. [-3]

Skills: Aerobatics-11 (DX-2, H) [1]; Boating (Sailboat)/TL4-13 (DX, A) [2]; Camouflage-15 (IQ, E) [1]; Dropping-12 (DX-1, A) [1]; Fishing-15 (Per, E) [1]; Herb Lore-18 (IQ+3, VH) [20]; Hidden Lore (Fairy Lore)-14 (IQ-1, A) [1]; Housekeeping-15 (IQ, E) [1]; Intimidation-15 (Will, A) [2]; Knife-13 (DX, E) [1]; Meditation-13 (Will-2, H) [1]; Naturalist-14 (IQ-1, H) [2]; Navigation (Sea)/TL4-14 (IQ-1, A) [1]; Pharmacy (Herbal)/TL4-18 (IQ+3, H) [16]; Ritual Magic (Witchcraft)-20 (IQ+5, VH) [28]; Stealth-13 (DX, A) [2]; Survival (Arctic)-15 (Per, A) [2]; Survival (Island/Beach)-14 (Per-1, A) [1]; Survival (Mountain)-15 (Per, A) [2]; Survival (Woodlands)-14 (Per-1, A) [1]; Weather Sense/TL4-14 (IQ-1, A) [1].

Paths: Cunning-16 [8]; Luck-16 [8]; Nature-16 [8].

Rituals: Journeyman's Curse-14 [2]; Read Thoughts-11 [8]; Veil-13 [2]; Ward-13 [6]; Weatherworking-16 [10].

Formulary: Antidote-16; Beast-Speech-18; Bird Control-18; Death-18; Endurance-18; Fear-18; Fire Resistance-18; Flight-16; Healing-18; Health-17; Invisibility-15; Invulnerability-15; Long Slumber-18; Love-16; Madness-18; Transformation-18; Vision-18; Water-Breathing-17.

Equipment: The short staff which the Duchess usually carries is topped with the skull of the first man to break her heart. She stole this from the graveyard the night she fled her home village; she was unsure why at the time, and might even have admitted that she had gone a little mad, but since then, she has made it into her Mystic Symbol, and always wields it while working her rituals. (Note that with this and her default in any path of 14, she can cast many rituals at default with a good chance of success.)

The silk gowns which she wears are always very plain in style and pure white in color. She rarely wears or carries anything else of any great value, apart from her potions (which actually represent the largest part of her wealth), although her home has a certain amount of valuable plunder casually scattered around it. She often has a small knife somewhere on her person, but would be unlikely to draw it as a serious weapon.

The Duchess's house holds a herbalism laboratory equivalent of "home workshop" quality. She usually has several elixirs to hand, including a couple of flight potions, and rides a broomstick when flying.

Fairy Gulls (49 points)

Apparently normal (and quite small) seagulls, plain white with yellow beaks and feet.

ST 4 [-60]; **DX** 13 [60]; **IQ** 8 [-40]; **HT** 13 [30]

Secondary Attributes: SM -3; Dmg 1d-5/1d-4; BL 3.2; HP 5 [2]; Will 10 [10]; Per 12 [20]; FP 13 [0]; Basic Speed 7 [10]; Basic Move (Land/Water) 5 [-10]; Dodge 10.

Social Background: TL 4 [0]; CF Fairy Society [0]; Norderwerten Spoken (Native)/Written (None) [-3].

Advantages: Amphibious [10]; Blunt Claws [3]; Damage Resistance 1 (Cannot Wear Armor -40%) [3]; Fearlessness 2 [4]; Feathers (Perk, equivalent to Fur) [1]; Obscure 7 (Vision, Area of effect increased to 4 yards +50%, Defensive +50%) [28]; Sharp Beak [1]; Temperature Tolerance 2 (cold) [2]; Terror (Hideous screech, Costs 2 FP) [27]; Unaging [15]; Winged Flight (Move 14) [30].

Disadvantages: Cannot Speak [-15]; Dead Broke [-25]; Indecisive (15) [-5]; Innumerate [-5]; No Fine Manipulators [-30]; Odious Personal Habits (-1, Constant screeching) [-5]; Short Arms (Both) [-10]; Social Stigma (Uneducated) [-5].

Quirks: Broad-Minded; Dislike holy symbols, True Faith, etc., and will avoid such things if possible; Distractible; Dull; Somewhat curious, and will summon the rest of the flock to investigate novelties. [-5]

Skills: Area Knowledge (Home Islands)-10 (IQ+2, E) [4]; Brawling-15 (DX+2, E) [4]; Fishing-12 (Per, E) [1]; Survival (Island/Beach)-12 (Per, A) [2].

Pyramid Pick

DragonMech (for the *d20 System*)

Published by [Goodman Games](#)

Written by Joseph Goodman

Illustrated by Niklas Janssen

240-Page Hardback; \$34.99

Fifty years ago the Moon grew closer and the Lunar Rain began, with meteorites flattening castles and scouring the soil of Highpoint to its bedrock. The closeness of the Moon enabled the strange Lunar Dragons to come to Highpoint and weave a path of destruction. The surviving inhabitants of Highpoint found their faith sorely tested, as their calls for divine aid went unheeded, the gods increasingly caught up in a war with the alien Lunar deities. Much arcane knowledge has been lost, but the closeness of the Moon has led to greater numbers of sorcerers, many of them Moon-ascpected. Survivors found safety in the Underdeep, the initial refugees accepted, but conflict erupting as later waves overwhelmed the subterranean settlements. Yet others found sanctuary and survival in mechanics and steam power.

The Dwarven Gearwrights Guild proposed and built the first "City-Mech." A thousand foot tall, steam-driven, stone-and-iron construct, it was a refuge for thousands, impervious to the Lunar rain and the predations of the Lunar Dragons, its legs hangars housing smaller mechs with just a few crew, these used for military missions. Whole societies have grown up in the City-Mechs: The Dwarves live on top with others buying space inside; the Thieves Guilds found a place as facilitators aboard; and many Halflings became Coglings, laborers, and technicians tending the oil and grease caked "Gear Forests" deep in the bowels of the City-Mechs. Some have found refuge underground as worm farmers, others as insect-riding nomads, and there are still surviving settlements. But the City-Mech is the focal point for survival and power projection in the Mechdom, a new type of nation consisting of territory protected by roving City-Mechs and other Mechs. The Dwarves of the Stenian Confederacy field five City-Mechs and the Elves, just the one. This is Tannanliel, built from the last enchanted trees of their forest homes, now shattered and scarred. The Legion, a heavily militarized human nation, led by the highly charismatic Shar Thizdic, has built another two after having held the Dwarf engineers that built them in near-slavery. The only Orc City-Mech is powered entirely by slave labor, while rumors abound of a City-Mech constructed by necromantic means.

This is the setting for *DragonMech*, the new *d20 System* supplement from Goodman Games, better known for their [Dinosaur Planet: Broncosaurus Rex](#) campaign setting, and the line of *Dungeon Crawl Classic Adventures*. It takes an "ordinary" fantasy world and overlays two other genres: big robots, best typified by *BattleTech* and *RoboTech*; and Steampunk. In previous games, Steampunk has been essentially Victorian in nature (which is of course, its original setting), but here the Steampunk is vested in and influenced by the fantasy genre. The look and appearance of the mechs is taken from medieval imagery and Da Vinci's drawings. The 'punk involves not cyberware, but "steamware," the Steamborg character class installing steam engines in himself and replacing body parts with iron replicants. This is a world, or rather a continent that has been forced to adapt in the face of a near-apocalyptic calamity, and in doing so, is undergoing the transition that is the death of magic and the adoption of technology.

DragonMech introduces no new races nor alters the standard ones, though they have adapted to the changing circumstances of Highpoint. As have the classes, in particular the cleric, who may not receive his spells if his god is distracted, but can spontaneously cast spells if against the Lunar Dragons. New Core classes are the Clockwork Ranger variant, who protect the gear forests; Coglayers invent and construct steam power devices; Constructors are variant wizards who specialize in building devices; the Mech Jockey crew the new lords of battle and power on Highpoint; and the Stalker is a rogue variant that tries to infiltrate the City-Mechs. The most interesting of the Prestige

Classes is the Mech Devil, half-monk, half-barbarian that applies martial arts moves to Mech combat!

Most of the new feats are Mech related, as are the spells; a new clerical domain -- "Engines" -- is also introduced. More interesting are Steam Powers, steam-driven devices built by Coglayers and Steamborgs that take time, money, and often-rare materials to construct. Each is built component by component to get various effects -- want a shoulder-mounted, Orc-targeting auto-crossbow? Take a repeating crossbow and add an Automator, a Targeter, a Discriminator, and finally a Scanner. This and other such devices *are DragonMech's* steamware, and while this is one of the several devices described, the emphasis is on letting a player build the devices that *he* wants.

DragonMech gives rules for mech construction and combat, as well as the society that has evolved in and around them. Construction goes into time and labor necessary to build both ordinary and City-Mechs, powered whether by steam, clockwork, slave labor, or through animated or undead means. Plenty of samples are given, their look and design far more akin to that of Games Workshop's *Warhammer 40,000* than *BattleTech*. Thus they have axes, chains catapults, buzz saws, steam cannon, swords, ripping claws, and so on. Mech combat is handled pretty much like *d20 System* combat, except that mechs are difficult and cumbersome to maneuver, let alone fight in. They are, however, easier to hit. In place of a high Armor Class, a mech has an inherent Hardness, which reduces the damage taken from an impact. For those living near the outer skin of a City-Mech, the clang of such an impact, whether from sword or projectile, can be deafening! Each mech also has four levels of Critical Threshold (green, yellow, orange, and red), and as a mech's Hit Points are reduced past each one, the greater the chance of critical hits eliminating important components.

New personal equipment is mainly martial in nature. They include anti-mech devices such as the Rust Bomb and the Magnet Bomb. The Flame Nozzle and the Steam Gun are man portable versions of their mech counterparts, while melee weapons are just nastier. For example, the Chattersword is a greatsword-sized medieval chainsaw that tears gruesome wounds that are not only slow to heal, but will also rip back open and continue to bleed if the victim takes any vigorous action! New armor includes Gearmail, sewn together cogs and gears in a rough and greasy fashion, while Pilot's Armor is a version of Studded Mail that is designed to be durable and protect a mech jockey in the places that might chafe while spent in a mech cockpit. But the best protection is provided by Hydraulic Armor, heavy, steam powered armor suits that give +10 protection, increases the wearer's Strength to 20, but impose a -8 Armor Check penalty!

Plenty of information is given about the continent of Highpoint and its changed circumstances. This includes its largest settlements and organizations, as well as the various City-Mechs, one in particular being more fully detailed. Secrets are suggested, such as ancient buried City-Mechs from the First Age of Walkers. New monsters include the Lunar Dragons and other beasts from the Moon, but also pests such as the Crumble Bug, which eats at the metal of a mech.

While the Mech are the focus of **DragonMech**, they do not have to be the focus of adventures or campaigns. Beyond discussing their use in a campaign from setting adventures within them, taking them to war, and using City-Mechs as mobile bases, the player characters taking the role of an Away Team, other options are suggestions. These include taking the Divine War to the Lunar invaders, rebuilding surface society, and exploring the ruins of the surface cities dungeon style. There is even the suggestion that the mech could be introduced into an already existing campaign world, but then so could the calamity that struck Highpoint -- though this is not covered. **DragonMech** is rounded out with an interesting set of Designer's Notes.

Physically, what strikes you about **DragonMech** is how gray it is. From its cog device used throughout to break up the text to the gloriously oppressive imagery of the mechs, the art conveys very effectively the feel of Highpoint. One image starkly captures Highpoint's condition, showing the world and its moon being held in a colossal hand, slowly being squeezed together. Grey might be said to be boring, but *not* here.

If **DragonMech** has one omission, it is the lack of detail given to the gods and faiths of Highpoint, except the Lunar gods and the proto-deity, Dotrak, The Great Engine. Otherwise, this is a skillful melding of genres, the author managing to create a reason to bring the three together and then do so without the effect feeling forced. The result is that **DragonMech** is a wonderfully flavorful blend of steampunk, big robots, and fantasy.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Review

Collide-O!

Published by [Playroom Entertainment](#)

Designed by **Maureen Hiron**

Graphic design by **Elisa Anya Jaeger**

90 full-color cards, rule booklet (in English, Spanish, French, & German), 2-5 players; \$9.95

If *Brawl*, *Qwitch*, *Fightball*, *Icehouse*, *Blink*, and *Nodwick* aren't ringing your bell as far as turnless games are concerned, fear not: The pipeline always seems to have another one on its way, like Playroom Entertainment's *Collide-O!*

The object of the game is to be the first player to work through his deck so he has only one card remaining.

Each card is divided in three across its width, two ends and the middle. Each segment is a different color or set of colors. Blue, yellow, red, green, and black are the five basic hues, but two of these may be paired up into a striped pattern, and some cards put all five into a single section.

One card is placed face-down in the center of the table and the remaining deck is dealt out in its entirety as evenly as possible; extras are set aside in case they're needed. Each player draws the top five cards from his pile to form his initial hand. When everyone is ready, the card on the table is flipped face-up and play begins. There are no turns in the game -- you place cards from your hand on the table as quickly as your pattern-recognition skills allow you.

To play a card, you must overlap the one(s) already played. You cannot simply match one end color to another end color, however; the card you play must overlap the end and middle colors of the card on the table. That means if the game begins with a card that has black in the middle and red and blue on either end, your card must have black on the end and red or blue in the middle depending on which end you want to add onto. In this way, the cards spread out in both directions, forming a long chain. If players aren't fast enough, your card changes the colors needed to play and your opponents have to cough up a new one from their hand, costing them valuable seconds.

If one of the cards (yours or the one you want to overlap) has a striped pattern, you can play a card that matches either of those colors, and the five-color layouts allow you to match any color. Each time you play a card, you may draw a new one from your deck, but your play options are limited to the hand of five. If someone catches you (or thinks they do) using a card that doesn't match the current layout, they can challenge you. Play pauses, and if they're right, you are now limited to a hand of one less card (the first challenge leaves you with a four-card limit, and so on). If they're mistaken, they must wait for a card to be played at either end of the line before playing any more of their own. When someone empties their deck and is left with only one card, they win.

The cards are tough items, and the colors are bright. The game lacks much more in the way of illustration, though the full-color rulebook is nice and clear. The game also provides the rules in Spanish, French, and German.

It's a challenge for adults, but this is a good game for pulling in the younger set as well. It's a good teaching tool, demonstrating pattern matching and colors in an entertaining setting (Playroom Entertainment once again earns its name).

One of the drawbacks of the game is the length of the card arrangement. It gets longer as the game progresses, so

players have to make sure they have enough space lengthwise on the dining table or floor. Another minor glitch: Since only the end cards can be played on, the rules note you can push the other cards together to save space. Bad idea, given the shifting instability of this line. The rules also direct that if everyone is stuck, take the previously played cards from each end until you can continue. It's unlikely the game will deadlock thus, but if it does, the last card played is probably the only one you can spot -- the others jumble together pretty quickly. You may also have to revert to one of those unused cards if the first card offers no play options. No matter the problem, it's better to tell players to just play off a brand new line of cards rather than follow all the switches the rules recommend.

Turnless games that require players to slap cards down in a flurry seem to be a prominent theme these days, and every time one such makes it to the market it seems certain the idea has run its course. If there's a misstep to be made, however, *Collide-O!* isn't taking it. Another fast and furious enterprise, the speed of this game is paired with the need for mental sure-footedness, making it as exciting and stimulating an entry as its predecessors.

--Andy Vetromile

"It's Like *Wagon Train* in Space, Only as a Western"

I've been doing a lot of thinking lately about various genres lately (for various Day Job projects I'm not really at liberty to talk about, but which has a [certain irony](#)). And I had an epiphany today that, admittedly, the rest of the gaming industry has been having for a long darn time (and no doubt which [Chad Underkoffler](#) emerged from the womb with) but which finally sank in.

Namely, there *aren't* any genres.

Or, more correctly, there aren't any pure genres.

This first came to light when we were discussing horror, and it was mentioned that horror isn't a genre so much as an element that is added to *other* genres. Modern-day horror. Depression-era horror. Victorian horror. Dark ages horror. And so on. Horror is something that can be added easily to other genres:

Horror + Fantasy = *Vampire: Dark Ages* or *Ravenloft*.

Horror + Western = *Deadlands*

Horror + Cyberpunk = *Cthulhupunk*

So far, so good. But, I immediately realized, horror isn't unique in that regard. For example, "Magic" is another common element that isn't a genre unto itself, but rather an element that is added to other genres.

Cyberpunk + Magic = *Shadowrun*

Sci-Fi + Magic = *Fading Suns*

Noir + Magic = *Bloodshadows*

And – pay attention to this one --

Dark Ages + Magic = *Dungeons & Dragons*

Once I had the epiphany about magic, I realized that the granddaddy of all "genres" -- Fantasy – wasn't a genre at all, but rather an amalgam of a vague historical atmosphere coupled with magic.

And it's at this point where the idea of "genres" starts crumbling, revealing itself to be a pigeonholing technique to keep our mortal minds from turning into gibbering piles of goo. But it's too late for me, so let's persevere.

Think of your video store genres:

- Drama.
- Action-Adventure.
- Comedy.
- Anime.

Think of any of your bookstore genres:

- Romance.
- Mystery.
- Thriller.

And, yes, horror.

These are all things that, for the most part, aren't considered to be genres in the gaming world, but rather tools; you can add as much romance, comedy, and drama to a game as you can stand. You can run a mystery or action-adventure tale in almost any game. And you can always make something horrific.

Even the splinter granddaddy of all genres – science fiction – isn't a genre, per se, but rather a lens. It's a tool to examine and portray the effects and implications of technology on one end of the spectrum (the "pure" end), or an excuse to replace six-shooters and swords with blasters and forceblades at the other end of the spectrum (the "gobs-of-money-generating" end).

In this way, then, while a particular book or story might be classified as a "genre" (a love story set entirely in the modern day could rightly be classified as a romance), in the gaming world these designations don't have as much meaning because, for the most part, most genre elements can appear in most other settings.

Consider the real world. It is, by all accounts, the most mundane place most of us will ever live in. And yet, within it, we can find elements of all "genres." The real world has given us romance stories, tales of magic and miracles (or at least events that many believe to be such), horror (Son of Sam), mysteries, drama, and so on. Even things that *seem* distant from our world are, in fact, close to home: Debates over stem cell research and unilateral collection of data we consider personal are science-fiction stories, played out in real time.

These are all great platitudes, but what does it mean for gaming? Namely that, if we can obviate our mind's (and media's) desire to pigeonhole everything into a genre, it can open up a whole range of possibilities. You can add what you want intrinsically to a campaign, and can leave open other possibilities as adventure types.

On some level, this is all material that the real world figured out long ago; like I said, I'm a bit slow in putting the pieces together. But many others realized this long ago, and we have a plethora of games, books, and settings as a result:

Mystery/Detective	+	Medieval	=	Ellis Peters' "Brother Cadfael" stories.
Supers	+	Victorian History	=	<i>League of Extraordinary Gentlemen</i>
Pulp	+	Revolutionary War era	=	<i>Jack of All Trades</i>

Obviously, it is possible to go to far. For example, if you were to cram together supers, horror, fantasy, magic, time travel, and action/adventure, you'd end up with . . . well, the standard Marvel or DC Universe. But that's beside the point.

I'll probably be revisiting this theme over the next few months, but for now I'd leave you with three thoughts (which, again, the Underkofflerians have known for a long time, but so what?):

Within an existing game, it's quite possible to expand the possibilities of a campaign to include new genres, changing the focus but not the premise of the game. For example, a *Deadlands* game might focus on a group of 1890s medical investigators, turning the game into a *C.S.I.*-esque Western/Horror/Police Procedural.

When designing a new setting, or deciding on the focus for a new setting, it's possible to throw together almost *anything* you want; chances are something like it has been done already, so you'll have some justification. (Obviously, I'm grossly oversimplifying here; if it was that easy, we'd all make our own million-selling genre-crossing innovation.)

When looking at what seems to be an existing genre, consider that it may actually be composed of multiple pieces. (Again, a standard fantasy setting is really a mediievally magically delicious part of your gaming diet.) Separating them out into their components might open avenues to tweak an existing setting not by adding more, but by changing or subtracting what's already there. As an exercise in this, consider what the DC or Marvel Universes would look like without super-powers, but with everything else. (Batman could exist, but Superman couldn't. The "Spider-Man" might be an ordinary guy who invented web-shooters. Magicians, gods, and time travelers could adventure side by side, but without mutants or cosmically enhanced humans.)

For extra credit, the next time you're at the DVD section at your local gargantuan retailer, pick up a stack of random movies and see if you can sort them into genre categories other than the ones they'd normally be found in.

--Steven Marsh

A Recursion of Phoenixes

"For the egg was now red-hot, and inside it something was moving. Next moment there was a soft cracking sound; the egg burst in two, and out of it came a flame-coloured bird. It rested a moment among the flames, and as it rested there the four children could see it growing bigger and bigger under their eyes. . . . The bird rose in its nest of fire, stretched its wings, and flew out into the room . . . and where it passed the air was warm. . . . Then Cyril put out a hand towards the bird. It put its head on one side and looked up at him, as you may have seen a parrot do when it is just going to speak, so that the children were hardly astonished at all when it said, 'Be careful; I am not nearly cool yet.' They were not astonished, but they were very, very much interested."

-- E. Nesbit, *The Phoenix and the Carpet*

Death comes on swift wings, the hieroglyphs read. And reading the hieroglyphs beneath this portent can take a little longer than we think. It can take all the time in the world. Above these chiseled symbols, however, is something more than the sun and less than forever. It is, as I alluded to above, bringing death, gripped in its talons and hanging below its blood-red wings. Is it the [griffin](#)? Is it the [Mothman](#)? Well, you're getting warmer . . .

"They have also another sacred bird called the phoenix, which I myself have never seen, except in pictures. Indeed it is a great rarity, even in Egypt, only coming there -- according to the accounts of the people of Heliopolis -- once in five hundred years, when the old phoenix dies. Its size and appearance, if it is like the pictures, are as follows: The plumage is partly red, partly golden, while the general make and size are almost exactly that of the eagle. They tell a story of what this bird does, which does not seem to me to be credible; that he comes all the way from Arabia, and brings the parent bird, all plastered over with myrrh, to the temple of the Sun, and there buries the body."

-- Herodotus, *The Histories*, II:73

Along with Herodotus, we begin our phoenix hunt in Egypt, and like Herodotus, we see it first in pictures. Specifically, we see it in the hieroglyphic sign *benu*, which means the sacred bird of Osiris, dead and reborn -- as Osiris says in the *Book of the Dead*, "I am the *benu* which is in On, and I am the keeper of the book of things which are and shall be." By the time Herodotus heard it, the word *benu* may have been pronounced more like "vwanee" -- add a Greek "x" on the end of that to indicate a foreign loan-word, and you've got "phoenix." Or, it may have come from the word *phoinikos*, meaning "deep (or bloody) red," after the bird's red plumage. Or from the word *phoinix*, meaning "palm tree," in which the phoenix bird legendarily roosts. Or from Phoenicia, the land from whence both dark red (*phoinikos*) dye and phoenixes came. Or the other way round.

And we haven't even got to the (deep red?) fire yet -- the earliest mentions and depictions of the phoenix don't include it. The early phoenix is royal, solitary, and most of all, extremely long-lived (estimates range from 340 to 97,000 years, with 500 being the mode). Hesiod refers only to the phoenix' lifespan; Herodotus introduces the connection to the Temple of the Sun and the immense ball of myrrh containing the dead phoenix. Ovid changes that into a nest of myrrh built by the dying phoenix, from which (either the incense or the corpse, it's unclear) the newborn phoenix rises. Pliny offers helpfully that a worm is born from the dead phoenix' bone marrow, and then grows into a new phoenix. It isn't until the 4th century A.D. that Lactantius (possibly inspired by Pomponius Mela's description of the pyre lit by the Egyptian priests for the dead phoenix) describes a phoenix spontaneously combusting and being reborn from its own ashes. This version made it into a popular poem by Claudian, and then into the most common bestiary of the late classical era, the *Physiologus*, from whence it comes down to us, reborn every few centuries in fire and incense.

"We do not know why birds behave this way, but we know they do. We do not know who the people were who first saw and spoke of the bird which gathered aromatic plants to make use of them, but we know that they really must have seen this. We cannot say who first observed a bird in a burning nest, fanning the flames with its wings, but we can say that they actually saw such an incredible sight."

-- Avram Davidson, "Who Fired the Phoenix?"

Looking for the phoenix bird, rather than the phoenix legend, produces even more smoke and even less fire. The *benu* hieroglyph depicts a [heron](#), usually identified as the purple (or deep red?) heron, which unlike the phoenix is not at all rare. However, Egyptian depictions of the *benu* bird (as opposed to the hieroglyph) look more, to my eye, like a

crested pheasant, such as the golden pheasant of China. This bird is rare (even more so in Egypt), and inspired its own legend in China, of the *feng-huang*. This spiritual bird appears only at times of good fortune, but isn't self-born (although it is sometimes described as hermaphroditic). An even more exciting possibility is the bird of paradise, which at least some Australian anthropologists believe that East Indians traded to the Phoenicians and Egyptians, packed in myrrh to preserve the feathers. Nobody has any really convincing explanation for the fire of the phoenix, except to point to the now well-documented habit that some birds have of ecstatically "anting" with burning branches, and with aromatic plants and seeds.

"By virtue of this Stone the Phoenix is burned to ashes, in which she is reborn. Thus does the Phoenix molt her feathers, after which she shines dazzling and bright, and as lovely as before. However ill a mortal man may be, from the day on which he sees the Stone, he cannot die for that week, nor does he lose his color . . . Such powers does the Stone confer on mortal men that their flesh and bones are soon made young again. This stone is also called the Grail."
-- Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, IX:469

Medieval scholars had similar problems with the firing of the phoenix. Some said it was done by the Egyptian (or Indian, or Ethiopian) heat, others said the phoenix flew high enough to burn himself on the sun, some brought in helpful Egyptian priests, and a few claimed the phoenix set itself alight and fanned the flames with its own wings. But the best theories posited some inner power within the phoenix, either arising from the act of death itself, or from the act of birth. Wolfram von Eschenbach described this inner power as the *[lapis exilis](#)*, the Grail; other authors noted that the phoenix ate only ethereal food such as sunbeams or manna from heaven. Christian bestiaries saw the phoenix as an obvious allegory of the Resurrection. To the alchemists, the phoenix embodied the Alchemical Marriage, joining sulfur and mercury, fire and air, the "Humid Work" (involving the putrefied corpse of the phoenix producing a worm) and the "Dry Work" (in which the phoenix reduces to ash, which compresses to an egg). Phoenixian mystification continues; [Nostradamus](#) cites a mysterious "Phoenix Emperor" in his Sixains, and in the Centuries describes him as being the only one who sees a "secret writing." The phoenix appears to murky intent in the Rosicrucian manifestoes, the work of D.H. Lawrence, and the poetry of Apollinaire and Yeats.

"Manilius also states that the period of the Great Year coincides with the life of this bird, and that the same indications of the seasons and stars return again, and that this begins about noon on the day on which the sun enters the sign of the Ram . . . Cornelius Valerianus reports that a phoenix flew down into Egypt in the consulship of Quintus Plautius and Sextus Papinius; it was even brought to Rome in the Censorship of the Emperor Claudius, A.U.C. 800 and displayed in the Comitium, a fact attested by the Records . . ."
-- Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, X:2

After all that, it's no wonder that many mythographers simply write the phoenix off as a solar symbol. And indeed, it's not that much of a stretch. There is only one phoenix in the world; there is only one sun; both are in the sky. The sun is bright red; the phoenix is bright red, or even red-gold. The phoenix dies in the west (in the City of the Sun, no less) and is reborn; the sun "dies" in the west and rises again the next day. They get around the whole centuries-long lifespan thing by noting Manilius' assertion that the lifespan of the phoenix is the same as the Great Year, a complete cycle for the sun and planets. Tacitus' 1,461-year lifespan of the phoenix lines up with the Sothic cycle meshing the sun and Sirius. Even more creepily, the 972 generations that Hesiod (in the 8th century B.C.) ascribes to the phoenix matches the precession of the equinoxes almost perfectly. This may tie into the earlier Greek name for Polaris, the pole star: Phoenice. Polaris, of course, is yellowish-white, so it can't be referring to the color, this time. Perhaps it hints that the phoenix, like the [roc](#), anchors the heavens.

*"My ashes, as the phoenix, may bring forth
A bird that will revenge upon you all . . ."*
-- William Shakespeare, *Henry VI, Part Three* I:iv:35-36

That may not be a good thing, of course. The phoenix, after all, has purchased genetic immortality at the cost of undeath. The notion that the "worm" of the new phoenix emerges from the (blood-red) bone marrow gets me thinking creepy thoughts. Is the phoenix a vampire? It only dies by fire, after all, and myrrh *is* a funerary spice. In the Septuagint, Job puts it clearly: "I shall die in my nest, and multiply my days as the phoenix." (The King James Version translates *chol* as "sand" rather than "phoenix," which gets me thinking about undying silicon life forms.) Linguists

may squabble over the connection between *phoinikos* ("bloody red") and *phonos* ("murder"), but you and I know there's something going on there. Robert Graves rings further changes on the name, tying "phoenix" to Phoenissa, "the Bloody One," a title ascribed to Asherah, a.k.a. Astarte, a.k.a. our old friend [Cybele](#). Speaking of Cybele, her cultist, the exceptionally creepy Emperor Elagabalus, ate a phoenix to gain immortality. He was (bloodily) murdered, instead.

"As for longevity, that it liveth a thousand years or more; beside that from imperfect observations and rarity of appearance, no confirmation can be made . . . For the tradition being very ancient and probably Egyptian, the Greeks who dispersed the Fable, might sum up the account by their own numeration of years . . . For if we suppose our present calculation, the Phoenix now in nature will be the sixth from the Creation, but in the middle of its years; and if . . . Prophecies succeed, shall conclude its days not in his own but the last and general flames . . ."

-- Sir Thomas Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*

So what do we have? We have a mysterious singular [deep red](#) entity whose birth and death mirror that of the heavens themselves. ("The sky was rolling like a burning phoenix," says Apollinaire, whose solar cognomen bears some watching.) Its power is drawn from Outside, through a Stone Fallen From Heaven, perhaps the pyramid-like [benben](#) of Heliopolis, fallen in the Zep Tepi, the Zero Time, to become the first spot of solid ground. (Heliopolis, and presumably the *benben*, now rest under the streets of Cairo, a city named after the bloody-red planet *al-Qahira*, or Mars.) It reappears in a regular pattern we can almost make out; 540 years (the phoenix lifespan according to Pliny) separate Hecataeus (Herodotus' source for the phoenix legend) from the documented appearance of the phoenix at the court of Claudius in 46 A.D. Three more cycles take us to 1666, and the Great Fire of London. Alaric's burning of Rome (a city symbolized by a phoenix) in 410 is a Sothic phoenix-span away from the Great Chicago Fire in 1871 (the year after the settlement of Swilling, Arizona was renamed Phoenix). If the roc is the preserver of creation, then perhaps the phoenix is the eye of destruction, opening when the blood-red stars come right and collapsing the universe into the sublime alchemy of the fiery furnace. Past becomes present, death becomes birth, and the world [restarts again](#), until the phoenix sees one it likes.

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



More Questions than Answers

Chasing Girls

by Chris Aylott

Take a look at the picture on the back of the new *Dungeons and Dragons* Basic Set box.

Three boys and a girl have the game spread out in front of them. One of the boys holds the rulebook, and he's the geekiest of the four. He's the only one in glasses, and his hair slicks back in a vaguely unfashionable way. He's the Dungeon Master, the surrogate figure for the prospective buyer of the game.

The other two boys are clean-cut, well-dressed, a little more athletic in appearance, clearly the cool kids. They're smiling, glancing at each other, having a good time playing the Dungeon Master's game. Seated in between them is the girl. She's pretty, and she's staring rapt at the Dungeon Master.

I guess that's why they call it a fantasy roleplaying game.

As usual, Hasbro has its audience pegged. The typical entry-level *Dungeons & Dragons* player is 13 years old, male, bright, and probably not one of the cool kids. It's been this way since *Dungeons & Dragons* got big in the 1980s, and it's no surprise that most of today's roleplayers are bright (but not cool) guys aged 13 and up.

Roleplaying guys share another trait with that kid on the *Basic Set* box: We want to see girls staring at us from across the table. We may want the perspective they bring as players, we may want friends on the other side of the gender divide, we may just be horny. One way or another, roleplaying guys talk a lot about bringing more women into gaming.

Are we kidding ourselves or what?

Oases in the Desert

Of course, women have always been acknowledged as part of the roleplaying community. Even in the first edition *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons Dungeon Master's Guide*, one of the unnamed "other characters" is played by a woman. (She's playing the magic-user, the one who gets bitten by a spider.) There have always been a few women in the hobby who will play with the boys on their own terms.

The presence of women in gaming is also growing, seemingly in fits and starts. Most gamers attribute the presence of more women to the release of games that better fit their interests. The poster chylde for this argument is *Vampire: the Masquerade*, which brought in a legion of new roleplayers interested in the political skullduggery of undead fashion plates.

Many of the new *Vampire* players were women, and while the game didn't create gender parity in roleplaying, it helped the balance somewhat. Since then, gamers and designers have been hot on the trail of more games that will bring more women into the hobby.

So far, not much luck. The *Sailor Moon RPG* became a sleeper hit when it caught the attention of young teen girls, and the Tri-Stat system has continued to appeal to both sexes with a variety of anime-influenced properties. However, most of the last decade's roleplaying games have done little to build any new audience, much less an audience of women. Even the successful *Buffy the Vampire Slayer RPG* seems to draw more attention from male Buffy fans than women.

Twelve years after *Vampire's* debut, the involvement of women in roleplaying seems to have improved only incrementally. The designers haven't given up on drawing more women into gaming, and the latest effort -- Green Ronin's *The Blue Rose RPG* -- is due to hit the market in a few weeks.

Blue Rose bills itself as a game for Tamora Pierce and Mercedes Lackey fans, but its marketing efforts seem to be concentrated on the existing gaming community. The game is likely to be a success, especially since existing (mostly male) gamers are already considering the system for running games based on the novels of Steven Brust, the Glorantha setting, and even *Star Wars*. However, it's unclear how the game will reach new gamers outside the hobby market, especially women gamers.

Isn't there something missing from the equation here? Even if a game like *The Blue Rose* succeeds at being attractive to female players, how is the word about the game going to get out of the male-dominated RPG community and attract them?

If You Want It Done Right, Send a Woman

At Attactix Games in Aurora, Colorado, it's easier to reach a female audience than you might expect. That's largely because of Manager/Buyer Heather Barnhorst. With more than a decade of management at Attactix under her belt, Heather is one of a growing minority of women in positions of power at gaming stores around the country. She also works as a management consultant for game stores, runs a volunteer retailer feedback service for manufacturers, and is writing a book on making game stores more "female-friendly."

Barnhorst started out as a part-timer at Attactix, and says she took the job because "it was an opportunity for me to get out of the house and spend some time with adults. My kids were toddlers and I was a stay-at-home mother in much need of some intellectual stimulation. Why I thought a game store was a place where I would get that I don't know!"

When the *Pokémon CCG* became a hit in the late 1990s, Barnhorst began working more hours, ultimately taking over the positions of manager and buyer when one of the owners decided to focus on the company's miniature production arm.

"I think that my being a mom during the *Pokémon* craze really helped the store," she says. "Moms drive kids around. Moms take kids to stores. If they buy in, moms will be more willing to fork out the bucks." Barnhorst's empathy with other moms made them feel welcome and helped drive sales.

The importance of that empathy was underlined when a new competitor took the opposite approach with its customers. In 1999, the Apocalypse Gamer's Guild opened up less than five miles away from Attactix.

"It was a beautiful store," Barnhorst says. "Wood fixtures. Beautiful lighting. Cappuccino bar. Everything I would like Attactix to be in terms of aesthetics. But they didn't like kids. And they didn't have any employees who liked kids. They would make fun of us to their customers and call us that place where all the kids hung out. They really worked hard to make our kid-appeal work against us."

"They are out of business. We are still going strong."

Even after the *Pokémon* boom ended, Attactix kept the boys, girls, and relatives who buy for them in the store with *Dungeons & Dragons* groups and a Games Workshop club. Barnhorst says, "None of those initiatives would have happened except that I, as a mom, noticed that my kids wanted to play these games but had nowhere to play them. So we created programs so that they had a community."

Barnhorst doesn't think that Attactix's success with *Pokémon* was all due to customer service. Attactix was able to make the most of the game's appeal, but the game's design also played a big role in its success. She says, "*Pokémon* is an inherently friendly, even cuddly game. No one is really bad and no one gets beaten down and there wasn't a lot of smack talk going on."

"Lots of little girls loved it too. Even if the moms couldn't play, they could collect. We used to hold trading days before the leagues started, and we would get like 50 people showing, mostly the kids with their moms."

By contrast, she says, "*Yu-Gi-Oh* is very in-your-face. Boys seem to like it because of that. I don't see a lot of girls involved. A few dads. And no moms." She thinks this difference in involvement is a big reason why *Pokémon* has sold much better than *Yu-Gi-Oh*.

A Woman's Place is Behind the Counter

Heather Barnhorst was the first woman to join Attactix, but not the last. Two other women currently work in the store, and several other women have worked there over the past decade. Barnhorst says the female presence has changed the dynamics of the store and even the behavior of its customers.

She says, "There's more cleanliness and order. More emphasis on teamwork. We put a ton more emphasis on aesthetics, and move product around more. We reach out better to kids and women customers. I think moms trust us more because we can talk to them on a level that they don't talk to male employees."

The change in attitude has spread to the male customers, many of whom once showed off the worst traits of gamer subculture. "One day," Barnhorst says, "a historical miniature gamer calls up. I answer. He says, 'May I talk to someone who knows something about games?' Then he tells me that he isn't used to talking to women. Who would have thought it?"

Today, that's not so much of a problem. Barnhorst says, "The store doesn't allow the women to get away with not being knowledgeable. We are expected to help every customer who walks through the door. These days, the guys are much less likely to think of me as a woman first and a gamer second."

Attactix isn't a non-sexist utopia. "My most trying moments," Barnhorst says, "are when I see teenage boys wearing shirts with slogans that are disrespectful to women. And I still catch some of my regulars staring at a pretty woman when she comes in like she is from another planet."

Nonetheless, she says, "we make inroads on perception."

Taking the Show on the Road

Recently, Barnhorst has been applying her management expertise to helping other stores broaden their appeal. Her trade show seminars, writing, and private consulting cover a variety of targets, but creating female-friendly stores is a special focus. She says it's a topic her clients are hungry to learn more about.

Barnhorst says, "I've gotten a tremendous reception at trade shows, but these are retailers who are self-selected to want to expand their business any way they can. They understand that making businesses female-friendly makes them everyone-friendly."

Enthusiasm for improvement doesn't always translate into action, however. Even stores with a mixed-gender staff can sometimes have trouble seeing what changes to make. Barnhorst has met a number of husband/wife retail teams that don't always see eye-to-eye on how to run the store. She says, "I often hear, 'I told him that but he wouldn't believe me. I am so glad that you talked about it.' Which is kind of sad in some ways but thank goodness they are getting the information now."

Then there are the stores that apparently don't want women in them at all. Barnhorst says, "One owner that I know of gave his managers *Playboy* subscriptions as gifts. That's a terrible attitude to take into the work place. It cuts you off from a large segment of your customer base and it cuts you off from some very valuable employees."

Despite these throwbacks, Barnhorst is optimistic for the future. She says, "I do believe that women within the industry

will help us bring more female consumers into our stores. If we have to evangelize one store at a time, one product at a time, then that is what it will take."

I don't know if I share her optimism -- I have too much faith in the ability of the game hobby to foul its own nest. But Heather Barnhorst's work at Attactix seems to have changed the way they do business. They hire more women, they reach a wider variety of customers. Most importantly, they sell more stuff.

Pokémon and *Vampire* proved that it was possible to make hobby games that appeal to more than just boys of all ages. But the Attactix experience suggests that a female- and family-friendly environment can expand the hobby and keep new players after the hot game cools off.

Is it possible that the future of women in gaming depends more on who's working in the hobby than on who's playing in it? What if who's selling the game is as important as what's in it?

Ad-Verting Disaster

or, "Over 181 Billion Served"

by Eric Funk

"Didn't you have ads in the twentieth century?" "Not in our dreams! Only on TV and radio. And in magazines. And movies. And at ballgames. And on buses. And milk cartons. And T-shirts. And bananas. And written on the sky. But not in dreams! No sirree!"

-- Leela and Fry, *Futurama*

Advertising permeates this modern world. Billboards line streets, bright logos fill pages and borders of newspapers, T-shirts, hats, and even 25% of most television channels' time. Every year, some children's shows add and remove characters to keep with the toy lines. Many transit companies rent the space on the outside of buses and the space above the inside windows. Flyers and coupons fill mailboxes, while some businesses cover the exterior of their buildings with large signs. Rental and shipping companies put large logos and ads on the side of their vehicles (many companies with corporate vehicles do this). Last, but not least, above this article, one will find a [random ad](#) for a fine Steve Jackson Games product.

Advertisements represent a medium that is often ignored by role players and is easily phased out by characters; this could be a sneaky way for the GM to present Plot hooks and Red Herrings. In addition to distractions, in a game world, they can also represent subtle clues and foreshadowing. One Example is the billboard for "Cloverleaf Industries" at the beginning of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*. It is not revealed important until the end of the movie, but the clue was there. Ads could be read out as the party is traveling, walking about, looking out a window, or otherwise not doing anything "active." In the flood of information, the GM could include one or two ideas in the event that the players fail to catch on to a clue, or miss a cue to use one particular ability. If a GM suddenly starts describing ads to players, many groups will suddenly go on edge, fearing obvious Red Herrings and plot hooks. A more passive approach is to only add them in when adventurers ask "what's on?", be it in reference to television, radio, or other newscast.

A blanket term for advertisements, publicity stunts, product placement, and anything that in general gets more people to buy the product is "product awareness." With regards to product endorsement, some of the dangers and controls are discussed on p. IST96. Merchants and super heroes are two of the more logical adventuring types to accept corporate sponsorship. Heroes without secret identities and other celebrities may be approached by firms who will give them items with their company logo. Gifts of watches, shirts, hats, and/or towels are not infeasible. "Our watches can go anywhere, even into ancient ruins!"

"But there's one good thing about broadcasting to a town full of mindless sheep: I always know I've got them exactly where I want them! Mwahahaha!"

-- R.J. Fletcher Jr., *UHF*

Ads for the same company could be positive or negative for the same product type. Negative ads may attack may attack opponents' products, or show deficiencies in public works. "Has this happened to you? Buy our product and you will never see this happen again!" Alternately, they may describe the product in sarcastic tones, such as "Don't try us. We're highly addictive."

Unless people are told to look out for certain products/services/company names (or have Eidetic Memory), most people have trained themselves to ignore the ads that don't apply and thus will not retain them. While driving through an area, parking signs are consciously ignored. Children usually ignore ads for retirement homes, while seniors do the same for toy commercials.

Some industries may be forbidden to directly advertise to the public. While it may not be strictly illegal, there may be

ensorship boards set up to restrict publication of political criticism, racial comments, pornography, [tobacco](#), or even alcohol. In *GURPS* terms, countries with high Control Ratings, competition to government-owned contractors may also be forbidden from advertising.

"Organize for Anarchy!"

-- On the cover of *GURPS Illuminati* (First Edition, Third Printing)

The below represents a generalization for an ad. The words in the main table are modern, but generic enough to be adapted to most settings. To use this, roll once on each of the tables below, and on the appropriate sub-table if the "product/service" result is marked with an asterisk (*). This system has potential to report up to about 181 billion advertisements.

Using the Tables

To use this system, roll once for each of the tables until you get to the Product/Service table. On the Product/Service table, roll 4d to determine the Category, and then 2d or 3d as appropriate to find an end result. If it is marked with an asterisk (*), then there is a matching detail table below.

1d Purpose

- 1-5 Selling/giving/fundraising
- 6 Buying/collecting/lottery

1d Market

- 1 Child
- 2 Teenager
- 3-4 Generic
- 5 Adult
- 6 Senior

2d Angle

- 2-3 Positive
- 4-8 Negative
- 9-10 Both
- 11-12 Neither

1d Approach

- 1 Flashy
- 2 Loud
- 3 Assertive
- 4 Average
- 5 Soft
- 6 Subtle (perhaps no description)

1d Ad "Space"/Time Slice

- 1 Tiny / Very Short (5 sec)
- 2 Small / Short (10 sec)

- 3-4 Average
- 5 Large / Long (2min)
- 6 Huge / Infomercial (3+ min)

2d Apparent Budget

- 2 Cheap - looks like pre-school children made it
- 3 Low-budget - slow/cheap animation/props
- 4-7 Average
- 8-9 Expensive - good effects, perhaps a famous actor
- 10 Hollywood would be proud.
- 11-12 Two-phase. Roll twice on this table.

2d Ad Type

- 2 Union/employees
- 3-4 (roll twice)
- 5-7 Regular
- 8-9 Testimonial
- 10 Sponsor
- 11 Owner
- 12 Franchise

1d Prices

- 1-2 Regular
- 3 Sale
- 4 Seasonal
- 5 Prices about to rise
- 6 Coupon/"Mention this ad"

2d Style

- 2 50 (or more) years ago
- 3 25 years ago
- 4 10 years ago
- 5 Plain
- 6-9 Normal
- 10-12 Weirdness

2d Product Age

- 2 Outdated
- 3 Old/Last Season
- 4-7 Current
- 8-9 New!
- 10 Coming Soon
- 11-12 Next Season

2d	Advertiser
2-3	Industry Ad
4	Specific Manufacturer
5-6	Limited Stores
7-10	Specific Chain
11-12	Local Location

Product/Service

4d	Category	Result (2d or 3d)
4-6	Special	Government (Roll again for topic)
7-8	Society (2d)	2-3 Religious 4 Health 5 Financial 6-7 Political 8 Pollution 9 Cultural 10-12Military
9	Home Utility (2d)	2-3 Electric Company 4-6 Cable Company 7 Phone Company 8-10 Satellite TV Company 11 Water Company 12 Sewage
10	Travel (2d)	2-3 Towing 4 Safety 5 National Parks 6-7 Mass Transit 8-9 Travel 10 Vehicle Rental 11-12Car Wash
11	Personal (3d)	3-4 Barber 5 Hall Rental 6 Catering 7 Beauty Salon 8 Dry Cleaning 9 Appliance Repair Shop 10 Cleaners * 11 Auto Repair Shop 12 Storage 13 Hairstyling 14 Laundromat 15 Community Center 16-18Society for the impaired (hearing/vision)
12	Media (2d)	2-3 Radio Station 4 Local TV Station 5-9 Television Shows 10 Movie/Video Game Rental 11 Theater 12 Blank! (The Illuminated hate this one)
13	Consumable (3d)	3-4 Greenhouse

		5	Coffee Shop
		6	Pizza
		7-8	Food *
		9-10	Junk Food *
		11-12	Fast Food *
		13	Supermarket
		14	Local Food Store
		15	Gas Station
		16	Health Food *
		17-18	Alcohol
14	Commodity (2d)	2-3	Used Books
		4	Department Store
		5	Computers
		6	Furniture
		7-8	Electronics
		9	Outdoors Equipment
		10	Construction Materials
		11	Vacuum
		12	Construction Equipment
15	Luxury (2d)	2-3	Insect Repellent
		4	Sports Equipment
		5	Charity
		6-7	Vehicles
		8-9	Toys
		10	Children/Orphanage
		11-12	Tobacco
16	Luxury Knickknacks (2d)	2-3	Antiques
		4	Hobby Store
		5	Florist
		6-7	Gadgets
		8-9	Jewelry
		10	Collectables
		11-12	Model Shop
17	Luxury Media (2d)	2-3	Music/Repair
		4	Tourism
		5-9	Movies
		10	New Books
		11-12	FLGS
18	Information (3d)	3-4	Printer
		5-6	Entertainer
		7	Employment Agency
		8	Law Firm
		9	Bank
		10	Internet Connection/"Magic"
		11	Cell Phone
		12	Income Tax
		13	Real Estate
		14	Detective
		15	Insurance
		16	Prestidigitator
		17-18	Publisher
19	Municipal (2d)	2-3	Symphony
		4	Sports Involvement
		5	Education

	6-7	Local Sports Team
	8	Environment
	9	Library
	10	Museum
	11-12	Zoo
20	3	Veterinarian
	4	Funeral Home
	5	Physiotherapist
	6	Police
	7	Chiropractor
	8	Doctor
	9	Pharmacy
	10	Medication *
	11	Eyeglass
	13	Health Club
	14	Eye Surgery
	15	Dentist
	16	Hospital
	16	Audiologist
	17	Sun tanning
	18	Mortuary
21-22	1	Depression
	2	Marital Problems
	3	Teen Problems
	4	Cancer Awareness
	5	Ad against Prejudice
	6	Anti-smoking
23-24	2	Hotel
	3	Motel
	4-5	Moving Company
	6	Condominiums
	7	Security Systems
	8	Home Repair
	9	Clothing
	10	Landscape
	11	Inn
	12	Apartments

Sub-Tables

1d Junk Food

1	Candy Bar
2	Chips
3	Cola
4	Ice Cream
5	Other Soda
6	Flavored Ice

1d Food

1	Beef
2	Cheese
3	Chicken

- 4 Eggs
- 5 Juice
- 6 Milk

1d Health Food

- 1 Diet Milkshakes
- 2 Energy Bar
- 3 Energy Drink
- 4 Healthy Cereal
- 5 Soy
- 6 Vitamins

1d Cleaners

- 1 Automotive
- 2 Carpet
- 3 Furnace/Ductwork
- 4 Medical
- 5 Windows
- 6 Street

1d Medication

- 1 Back Pain
- 2 Cold
- 3 Contraceptive
- 4 General Painkillers
- 5 Itching
- 6 Stomach/Heartburn

"Mooshi! Mooshi!"

-- Sarah the *Astroburger* Spokescow, [Transhuman Space Toxic Memes](#)

Other Channels

An alternate method may be to use the first two tables above, then roll on the "[What Happened Today?](#)" table by Matt Riggsby, and turn it into an ad. A roll of "Fugitive" could be a wanted poster, "Nosy Official" may be a political poster. If nothing logical springs to mind, it could be an ad for a local theater group doing a play on it.

Transhuman Space Toxic Memes is a great read if one is interested in roleplaying ideas involving structured thoughts, including commercial PCs. (See also *GURPS In Nomine* Ethereal characters for personified ideas.)

Pyramid Link

- "[Influencing Groups and Societies in GURPS: Playing to the Crowd](#)" by Matt Riggsby

The Omniscient Eye

When Buying a Kingdom, Who Do I Make the Check Out To?

The [9/17 Omniscient Eye column](#) mentioned that six carts of pure gold would be enough wealth to buy "a mid-size Medieval kingdom." How would PCs go about making such a purchase--could they just stroll up to the local monarch and make an offer? What would happen to the original owner?

--Adrienne Traxler

The local monarch wouldn't sell, so the question is moot. The Omniscient Eye hopes you've found this answer useful. Next time, we'll be handling a question about how effective four-sided dice would be puncturing tires during a high-speed chase . . .

What, you want more detail? Oh, okay. To say that six carts of gold (or any amount of treasure) would be enough money to buy a kingdom was probably misleading. It could buy enough small, individual territories to make up a reasonably sized kingdom, but that's not quite the same thing. To pose a modern analogy, buying a few shares of stock in a few large companies means a brief phone call to your broker; buying *all* the shares, even if you've got the cash to buy them at their nominal price, means fluctuations in stock prices, tense negotiations with major stockholders, and long talks with the nice folks at the SEC. Transfers of land in many societies, particularly on a large scale, are tied up in legal, political, and social implications. Since the answer for the first question was based on economic conditions in Medieval Europe with some reference to classical antiquity and the edge of modernity, we'll attempt an answer here based on political, legal, and social conditions prevailing for the same area and period.

You're unlikely to find someone willing to sell his entire kingdom for cash, no matter how desperate; there's no record of such a thing having happened in the ancient or Medieval period (although the British arguably purchased sovereignty from some rulers of subject territories in the 19th century). Even if we ignore the unlikelihood of someone voluntarily giving up a position of power in any society, real wealth and financial security are, in most low-tech societies, represented by land. The first thing someone with money but no land would do would be to try to acquire land, making the whole thing an exercise in futility. The story of King Lear draws a vivid picture of the reception a king without a kingdom might receive. It's fictional, but it's also probably what a king would expect to happen to him. Those few individuals who are willing to give up positions of power, and there have been some, generally want to become monks or otherwise leave the trappings of wealth and power behind. Money, in that case, will be the last thing they want.

This is not to say that you can't exchange money for land and/or power. Monetary exchanges were a common feature of Medieval diplomatic settlements. But the hows and whys were complicated by the ways land and its ownership were regarded. We'll start with considering how terms we might take for granted (like ownership and purchase) might be seen in a very different light.

First, there's the question of ownership. For a large chunk of the Middle Ages in much of western Europe, land didn't "belong" to someone. At least, not in the way we'd understand it today. A variety of rights and privileges can be attached to any piece of land: the right to farm the land, graze animals, build (which could be subdivided into building types: someone might be allowed to build a house but not a mill or a castle), collect various rents, fees, and payment in kind and/or labor, deliver justice, dig mines, and so on. Each right might have some obligation attached to it: paying monetary rent, a share of produce, or providing more or less specified kinds of service to an overlord.

Why Buy When You Can Rent?

Not only are large-scale purchases of land rare for the period in question, there was actually a trend *away* from owning land that wasn't dependent on someone else. We have a number of records of owners of free land entering into feudal relationships by "giving" their land to a lord and having it awarded back to them

Ownership might be regarded as having a large bundle of rights without quite so many obligations.

The problem with this idea of ownership, particularly in early Medieval France and Germany and to some extent in post-1066 England, is that rights rarely came without matching obligations, and each of these rights could be held separately and might be "rented out," so they were distributed among different people. A peasant with the right to cultivate a particular field, a local lord with the right to collect rent from the peasant and settle disputes between him and his neighbor, and a king with the right to collect taxes from the lord and exercise other kinds of jurisdiction over the territory, could all claim the land in some way, none of which was exclusive ownership in the modern sense.

as a fief. Why? Because along with your obligations to your lord, your lord has obligations to you. Being plugged into a large system where you have more powerful allies to call on was, in those uncertain times, often a greater benefit than having legal authority over a patch of farmland.

There were, of course, exceptions. More unified property rights remained in parts of Italy (which retained vestiges of Roman legal traditions), Spain (Spanish kings granted colonists broad rights over land taken over from Muslim kingdoms during the Reconquista), and the non-feudal Byzantine empire. For much of Europe, though, more recognizable ownership rights slowly revived later in the Middle Ages.

So, then, there were degrees of ownership, and PCs interested in buying territory must decide whether they want political authority (the right to call on feudal military obligations, try cases, issue currency, etc.), more purely economic benefits (rents from fields, fees for animal grazing, proceeds from monopolies over milling and other industries), or a combination. Rich, powerful people would have both, but people who weren't members of the nobility could nevertheless obtain broad economic rights.

Then there's the question of buying. For much of the Middle Ages, again mostly in France and Germany, property rights were, in a word, sticky; the technical term for these rights is *seisin*. If someone had exercised rights to a piece of land in the past, it was difficult to completely alienate (that is, permanently assign to someone else) those rights, making purchases a risky proposition for the buyer. If there were a dispute about the terms of the agreement (or, more likely, succession after the buyer or seller's death), someone who could demonstrate having or using the land longer or farther back (that is, claim *seisin*) would have a significant advantage in court which could easily take precedence over later written contracts.

And even assuming the potential buyer and seller can come to an agreement, other people may have a say in things. In many places, the seller's relatives could object to the sale of land and, if the purchase went ahead anyway, could take it back by refunding the purchase price. Also, in the Medieval system, in order to do anything particularly interesting or novel, one often had to get permission from someone else. "Getting permission" usually meant "paying a fee," but that can raise the effective price, and refusing permission is a possibility if the overlord doesn't like the buyer. Even bigger fish might step in: the Byzantine empire maintained a class of peasant soldiers who were awarded land in return for military service. About the only right these soldiers didn't have over their land was the right to sell it, and occasional surveys by the imperial government would forcibly return control over that land from local magnates (who might have attempted to take the land over as repayment for debts incurred) to the soldier families.

The usual way around problems of purchase was to rent out one's rights. Someone with money could get practical use of the land, but the original landholder nevertheless retained a tie to the land as well, even though the lease might be nigh impossible to break and of theoretically infinite duration. The original owner (or his descendents) retained an interest and under certain circumstances could take it back, so it's not quite ownership.

So, then, how do you go about buying a kingdom (or a dutchy or a county)? Specifics vary, but we can sum up the process in four principles:

1. Get in the game.
2. Hide the purchase.
3. Plan to buy part, not all.
4. Take, don't buy.

Getting in the Game

Since land in these settings is closely tied to political and military power, transfers of land don't begin or end with handing over a sack of cash. Instead, giving land to another person is usually a means of establishing or consolidating an alliance. So if you want to get land from someone else, you'll have to establish yourself as reliable and useful, not just rich.

The reason getting close to a ruler is so important is that in Medieval Europe, and, in fact, many other societies, power and privilege travels along personal lines rather than through abstract, impersonal offices. Rather than carrying out something like a modern job search, a ruler who wanted something done would often find someone close to hand and say "You, there! Take care of this." History is rife with examples of habit turning the most trivial functionary into a powerful officer of the court in this fashion. The Carolingians, rulers of what became the Holy Roman Empire, started out as high domestic functionaries for their Merovingian predecessors. Likewise, at [the Byzantine court](#), a great many important officials had titles reflecting their original personal and domestic functions (master of the bedchamber, keeper of the wardrobe, etc.).

So how do you get a busy ruler to bring you into his inner circle? That's a fundamental problem of social engineering, but martial ability is generally well thought-of, both the ability to fight and the ability to raise and lead troops. The European feudal system grew out of arrangements between a ruler and "his men," a group of companions and retainers which generally equated with the core of a military force. Even as a ruler's retainers moved out of the royal household itself and into feudal domains under his authority, they remained his most important military assets in an age where "government" was often little more than a support system for a scattered military force.

As it happens, military prowess is a trait that PCs tend to have in spades, so they're probably already prepared to move into a position of some prominence. And once the heroes are in that position, they can make themselves appealing candidates to become subordinate holders of property. Even more good news for the heroes is that the powers that be may approach *them*. As early as 1302, when the French crown was in dire need of cash, royal officials canvassed the kingdom in search of wealthy men who might be willing to exchange money for a noble title and attached lands. If the ruler of whatever kingdom the PCs live in has thought of this fund-raising scheme, it's particularly likely that PCs will be approached. And since, again, feudal nobility form the core of the nation's military and PC treasure hunters have a demonstrated ability to kill things, the king can get both an injection of cash and a very effective soldier (or group of soldiers) at the same time.

But even being rich, by itself, can attract attention. Medieval rulers, like modern governments, encountered budget shortfalls to be made up by going to lenders. With carts full of gold, wealthy adventurers become potential lenders who may be approached by the crown. Better still for ambitious PCs, one frequent way of repaying creditors was to temporarily assign rights to various territories to them, making them, if not feudal lords, then at least people with a certain position of authority in the system. There's even historical precedent for adventurer-turned-lender-turned-royal-agent. Bertran de Castellet, a Catalonian knight of the mid-12th century, apparently acquired a lot of loot fighting Saracens in his early days and loaned significant sums to the nobility. His name appears repeatedly in the kingdom's financial records as he did increasingly important business with the sovereign (rising to a position of considerable trust, handling a large survey and audit of a large part of the kingdom), pausing every now and again to return to the battlefield, where he served valiantly, for fresh infusions of cash.

Hiding the Purchase

Our very few historical examples of buying nations aren't quite what they sound like on the surface. The most famous is when the Roman senator Didius Julianus "bought" the Roman Empire at auction in 193 AD. After his predecessor, Pertinax, was assassinated, Didius realized that in order to become emperor, all he really needed to do was to bribe the Praetorian Guard, who were at the time aggressively playing the muscle behind the throne, and have them recognize him as emperor. Pertinax's father-in-law, Titus Sulpicianus, figured that out as well. The two engaged in a bidding war which Didius won, but it did him little good. His crass method of attaining the throne inspired popular revulsion, the Senate resented him for bypassing them, and he lacked the support of legions in the field. No less than three provincial

armies set out for Rome, each declaring its own general as the new emperor; they met and settled their differences before reaching the capital, united by their desire to see Didius gone. Didius lived a trifle over two months after buying the empire. All of which, we suppose, serves as an object lesson in how not to acquire power.

A great many attempts to buy power fall into this category. It's not outright purchase of somebody else's position; it's a bribe to people who can legitimize your position. That is, the people you're paying don't own whatever it is you're buying; they're just in a position to say who *does* own it. This took place at all levels of the hierarchy, from pretenders to noble authority paying a fee to a court so that they wouldn't have to document their pedigree to Charles V of Spain paying off the German electors who eventually named him emperor.

Didius's story also illustrates an ambiguous attitude towards monetary purchase present through history. Money was useful, but in many ways seemed the wrong medium for dealing with something as important and personal as land. Taken together with conservative property rights, it was therefore often important to make it look like land wasn't being purchased. Rather, it was a good idea to make it seem like the land was changing hands because of more important bonds.

Land generally traveled along family lines. If you're not fortunate enough to be directly related to a major landholder, there's always marriage. Marriages at many levels of society were accompanied by a transfer of land. It's generally believed that at least some marriages were a cover for the real transaction, trading authority over a piece of land for money. For this to work, both parties need to bring plausibly marriageable relatives to the table with them in addition to their money (on one side) and land (on the other), a task which may be complicated by local standards. For example, marriages across religious lines may be frowned on, and remarriage after divorce or the death of a spouse can be problematic (as it was, for example, for Henry VIII, although not everyone can seize control of their own church). Compatibility of the prospective couple was rarely an issue.

There are also future risks. The giver still retained some claim on land granted through marriage. The original owner might be able to demand it back in the case of divorce or death of the spouse, and the owner's family retains a claim in case of a disputed succession when the buyer dies. If the buyer isn't the one getting married (for example, if the buyer is already married and therefore using a child or cousin as a pawn), there's always the chance that his surrogate will, at some point, want to exercise his own control over the land rather than acting as a figurehead. And, finally, the spouse may serve as a spy for the seller's family in the buyer's house.

Wills are also a dodge around the problems of direct purchase. Among the few examples we have of true transfers of real estate in the early Middle Ages are bequests to the church. From time to time, landholders would leave property to a monastery, a cathedral, or some other institution (the practice went well beyond Europe; mosques and Hindu and Buddhist temples were benefits of similar bequests). This was in part an insurance policy for the afterlife, but like marriages they probably also hid monetary transactions. The church might pay now for land later; a relatively young church leader might cut deals with relatively old landholders as a long-term strategy to build up the land he has power over. One individual might try to leave a bequest to another as a means of hiding a purchase, but if they aren't related or at least closely associated (for example, a faithful retainer or important vassal), the bequest might be contested by family members. This is another situation where a convenient marriage can be a useful aid.

Buying Part, Not All

If you're trying to buy power, the best you're likely to achieve is to be able to buy part of what someone else has. After all, if land is granted to solidify alliances, it makes little sense for the one dealing it out to have no power base left. If you want to buy a kingdom, go to an emperor. If you can only find a king, the best you're likely to get is a barony, and so on down the scale.

But there can be ways around that. If your PCs are fortunate enough to be in an expanding kingdom, they may be able to obtain relatively unencumbered property rights by moving into newly conquered lands, as happened in Spain during the Reconquista or in the Middle East during the Crusades. Technically,

But I Want It!

Okay, so we've demonstrated that buying a kingdom is ahistorical. But does that mean it's absolutely impossible? It'd be exceptional, certainly, but exceptional things happen from time to time, particularly to PCs. So under what circumstances might one

this might not be regarded as *buying* land, since what they're likely buying is the opportunity to conquer new land (which takes nothing away from the "seller"), but buying the license to expand their own holdings keeps them under the legal protection of the ruler in question.

There may also be ways of playing an existing system. The feudal system was never an exclusive arrangement (at least, not until the end, at which point it was largely obsolete and challenged by new institutions outside the traditional framework), with each member of the hierarchy owing all of their allegiance to the next person up the ladder. Instead, feudal ties meant specific and limited obligations and benefits. In return for his fief, a knight might owe his lord two month's military service every year, a fixed sum of silver, and a pair of cows every Michaelmas, and that was where his obligation ended. It was entirely possible for someone to owe fealty to more than one lord. Extremely clever and personable PCs might be able to build alliances with multiple overlords, owing each different duties for different pieces of land and gathering authority over multiple territories. If they can get enough land and authority from enough different sources, they may be able to cobble together a single large domain of their own.

Take, Don't Buy

Ultimately, a kingdom may not be something you can just pay money for. It's something you must achieve. PCs can use money to position themselves, to garner attention and influence, to acquire assets with long-term value, but taking a crown will require more decisive action. This leaves a rich PC with four options if he wants to become a king once money alone has taken him as far as it can.

First, political expediency may, on rare occasions, make the creation of a new kingdom a viable option. Again, the purpose would be for a ruler to establish a useful alliance, and in this case try to realize some benefit from territory he doesn't actually control. For example, the Roman empire would sometimes recognize native chieftains as the rulers of disorganized border regions. This helped the Romans by giving them a ready-made ally they could work with and helped the chosen chiefs by legitimizing any royal ambitions they might have. This was often a prelude to conquest, but was occasionally an attempt to cut losses, as when the collapsing empire recognized a kingdom in Dacia, which the Romans had previously abandoned (or, since we're talking fantasy, like when Cirion granted abandoned Gondorian lands to Eorl the Young after the Rohirim saved his bacon at the battle of Celebrant). A wealthy would-be ruler who can establish himself as a political player on the border of a powerful country might conceivably buy recognition. He'll still have local enemies, but it might be enough to make at least some neutrals and potential enemies fall in line.

Second, he can wait for the current king to die (or have him assassinated) and, like Didius Julianus, bribe the people who decide who the next king is to pick him. In many societies, the crown didn't necessarily go to the king's closest relative. Support by influential people and formal election processes might intervene. However, just one death may not be enough to get an upstart PC plausibly in the running. A few more candidates might need to be taken out as well.

Third, he can make a more direct bid for the throne: use the money to raise troops, attack the current king, and seize the throne. It might throw the kingdom into turmoil, but the right of conquest was fairly widely respected. If a PC can take a throne (and keep it against any other powerful noblemen or neighboring kingdoms inclined to take advantage of the situation until things calm down), people will be likely to take his claim seriously.

conceivably purchase a kingdom?

The circumstances would probably be completely unique. Say, a mildly insane king who wants gold more than legal authority and an independent aristocracy who wants an ineffectual figurehead on the throne. And despite prevailing attitudes towards land and money, it's just possible that governing a region might be more trouble than it's worth. A ruler desperately strapped for cash could conceivably sell all his rights to an area which ties up far too much of his time, energy, and money, essentially creating a new kingdom. If it's *that* much trouble, no one is likely to make a counter-claim, so the purchasing PCs can safely call it their own. Of course, they're also buying the problem: barbarian raids every summer, a constantly rebellious population, desperately poor tax revenues, or (again, since we're talking about fantasy) a dragon demanding annual tribute from the king or a curse on the province. The PCs might make themselves lords of Brigadoon, but what good does that do them if they can only collect taxes on one day every hundred years?

Fourth, he can gather up as much power as he can and simply declare himself king (or emperor or whatever). It takes a strong and loyal base of support in his subject territories and followers without a vested interest in retaining ties to any other rulers. It sounds inelegant, but ultimately that's how just about every kingdom has started. If you say you're a king and nobody's in a mood to contradict you, then congratulations. You're a king.

--Matt Riggsby

Sages theorize that the Omniscient Eye might actually be composed of a panel of Experts chosen through mysterious and arcane means. Regardless, the Omniscient Eye is benevolent, and every other week it is willing to share its lore to all. Or, at least, to all with valid *Pyramid* subscriptions.

The Omniscient Eye seeks to answer questions that are tied to knowledge of the real world, providing information with a perspective that is of use to gamers. The Omniscient Eye does not concern itself with specific game systems or statistics.

Do you have a question for the Omniscient Eye? Feel free to send it to pyramidquestions@yahoogroups.com, and the Omniscient Eye might answer it!

Designer's Notes: GURPS Fantasy

by William H. Stoddard

GURPS Fantasy has the same name as one of the very earliest *GURPS* supplements: the one that introduced the world of Yrth as a standard setting for fantasy campaigns. But its concept is entirely different. Essentially, it's an entirely new book. It was meant to do for fantasy what *GURPS Space* had done for science fiction: offer a guide to developing new campaigns in its genre, without being tied to any specific setting or campaign concept.

But doing that job meant that, in some ways, it had to be a different style of book. Science fiction is set in the real world; even if it's in "a galaxy far, far away," it's supposed to have the same natural laws that apply here and now -- or a reasonable extrapolation from those laws. Fantasy isn't tied to natural law at all. A fantasy writer can make up a different world, with a different set of laws, as long as it allows him to tell good stories.

The stories are what's important. People have been telling stories ever since the first language was spoken, and a lot of things keep turning up in different stories, over and over. Cultures all over the world have legends about dragons and ghosts, shapeshifters and faeries, magical spells and mysterious omens. They capture our imaginations. So a fantasy roleplaying game has to be able to capture all of them in its rules.

I wanted to offer a comprehensive look at the possibilities of fantasy gaming. Existing fantasy games were one of my reference points. But they weren't the only one. I wanted a book that could be used to create a campaign based on myths, legends, and folklore, or on the latest novel or film. So when I worked out rules and game mechanics, I was constantly thinking about all this material, and asking myself, "Can the rules of *GURPS* do this? Is there a way to tweak them so they will?"

Writing this was a long process, long enough so that *GURPS* started down the road to a new edition while I was working on it. *GURPS Fantasy* ended up being the first supplement to the new edition. Making everything fit the new rules was a demanding job; it would have been impossible if Sean Punch and David Pulver hadn't been infinitely patient with my questions and confusions. But it was also rewarding. The new rules took a lot of haphazard improvisations from past supplements and put them all together into a much more coherent system, one flexible enough to do almost anything. Writing *GURPS Fantasy* gave me a chance to figure out some of what it could do.

Of all the things I worked on, the most challenging was the treatment of magic. Standard *GURPS* magic is designed to make mages effective in combat. This style of magic is very common in roleplaying games, all the way back to the first appearance of *Dungeons & Dragons*. But it's not the only style in fantasy, or even in fantasy gaming. Treatments with different assumptions can be found in games such as *Mage: The Ascension*, *Ars Magica*, *Amber*, and various games based on fantasy books or films. For *GURPS Fantasy* to be generic and universal, it had to provide ways of handling many different styles of magic. At the same time, I didn't want to make up a lot of new systems, or even one new system; that would have been reversing one of the main design goals of the Fourth Edition, one that its authors struggled hard to accomplish. So I explored three main paths to alternate magic systems: adding optional boosters to the core system; changing one of the assumptions of the core system; or taking a different system that already existed in *GURPS*, and interpreting it as a form of magic. For example, interpreting psionics as magic gave me the concept of trance magic, usable by shamans, yogis, and people from similar traditions.

But for reasons of space, I discussed such variations at a somewhat abstract level. I had ideas for more detailed variants of magic, based on specific cultural traditions, but not enough space for all of them, even in a 240-page book. So here's one of the ideas I didn't have room for: a treatment of the supernatural in medieval European terms, focused on priests and other holy people. Medieval Europe, and fantasy worlds modeled on it, including Yrth in the forthcoming *GURPS Banestorm*, are still the most common setting for fantasy campaigns. A GM who wants a more mystical Yrth, or an original fantasy campaign with clerics can borrow this material. It illustrates how to apply some of the magic system design approaches that *GURPS Fantasy* discusses, and how to fit them to a specific type of story setting and image of the supernatural.

In a medieval European campaign, the dominant form of Christianity will usually be Roman Catholicism, or something parallel to it. Any treatment of the supernatural needs to be compatible with Catholic theological ideas, as developed by such thinkers as St. Augustine, St. Anselm, Pierre Abelard, and St. Thomas Aquinas. Here are three different "clerical magic" systems that work within that framework: a directly religious treatment of the supernatural, a synthesis of religious and magical approaches in a school of Christian white magic, and a Christian spirit magic tradition of calling on angelic aid.

The Operation of the Church

The Roman Catholic Church is a vast administrative hierarchy, with a system of internal ranks. Being granted one of these ranks is called ordination. The ceremony of ordination must be performed by a bishop. Anyone who has been ordained has a Religious Rank. Priests are Religious Rank 3 and above, up to the Pope, who is Religious Rank 8. Deacons are Religious Rank 2, and various minor orders are Religious Rank 1. It's also possible to devote one's life to prayer and worship, as a monk or nun, without being ordained; treat this as Clerical Investment (in effect, Religious Rank 0).

The primary function of the church is to perform religious rites. Catholic doctrine distinguishes two kinds of rituals through which divine grace can be granted: sacraments and sacramentals. The distinction is akin to the one in the *GURPS Basic Set* between two versions of the Symbol Drawing skill (p. 224). A sacrament is inherently effective because God promised that it would be. A sacramental is effective because God chooses to respond to certain kinds of appeals instituted by the church.

There are seven recognized sacraments, all said to have been performed by Christ during his ministry: baptism, confirmation, communion (or the Eucharist), penance, matrimony, ordination, and extreme unction (sometimes called last rites). These basically affect the legal and theological relationship between the worshiper, the church, and God. Many of them serve as "rites of passage." Because they're divinely ordained, an ordinary failure doesn't prevent them from working; the benefit of a successful Religious Ritual roll is that the congregation is moved by the ritual, seeing it as a sign of God's presence. On an ordinary failure, the congregation is not moved. On a critical failure, some necessary element of the ritual was omitted, and the sacrament was not actually performed. As a rule, this should only apply under stressful circumstances; regularly performed rituals would have +5 to effective skill and normally would not require a skill roll at all.

There are not a fixed number of sacramentals; the church can institute new ones. But there are several standard categories: benedicens, or blessings; confessus, or public admission of sin; dans, or giving alms; edens, or meals; orans, or prayer; and tinctus, or the use of fluids such as holy water and consecrated oil. A failed Religious Ritual roll means that the sacramental was ineffective, but again, standard rituals give +5 to effective skill and don't normally require skill rolls.

One important sacramental for game purposes is exorcism, or the casting out of demons. This is classed under orans. Any priest can attempt an exorcism; the skill of Exorcism defaults to Religious Ritual-3 or Theology-3. Some priests are specifically trained in Exorcism, and there is also a minor order of exorcists (Religious Rank 1). Exorcism is a Will-based skill, reflecting its dependence on faith; a failed Exorcism roll can lead to problems, as described in the *GURPS Basic Set*.

Sacramentals can also produce objects or substances with supernatural powers, such as holy water. Demons and monsters may be afraid of these, unable to approach them, or even subject to injury from contact with them. The blessing of a church and its grounds is a sacramental, which has these effects on the entire site, and raises its Sanctity Level (discussed in *GURPS Fantasy* as a parallel to Mana Level) from Normal to High.

Holy Powers

In addition to the normal operations of the church, certain people are strongly devoted to God and are granted special abilities in His service. In *GURPS* terms, they have True Faith. The benefits gained from True Faith fit into the same

general categories as the sacramentals. However, they're not limited to fixed forms proclaimed by the church; they gain their power from the belief of the individual worshiper.

One thing that a person with True Faith can do is to bless other people. Such a blessing lasts until it's needed, but then is used up. One possible blessing would be one use of the Heroic Feats version of Blessed. Another is Armor of Faith, defined in *GURPS Fantasy*: a single use of defensive Luck, with a Pact requiring fulfillment of a minor vow (for example, paying for a mass of thanksgiving).

True Faith can also be used to pray for a miracle. Then the GM rolls for God's reaction. (Depending on the world, an actual miracle may require a Good, Very Good, or Excellent reaction.) Having True Faith grants +3 on this roll. What kind of place the prayer is offered in affects the outcome, with a modifier of 0 on consecrated ground, -1 in a hastily consecrated site, -2 on unconsecrated ground, or -3 in a ritually desecrated site. Contact with a holy relic gives an added +1.

(God can choose to grant other prayers as well, especially those made in holy places. *GURPS Fantasy* provides rules for this. But people who have a single prayer granted aren't set apart as saints.)

True Faith aids in the performance of exorcisms. An exorcist who doesn't have Blessed, Power Investiture, or True Faith is at -4 on his skill rolls. At the GM's discretion, being blessed by a person with True Faith can avoid this penalty for a single attempt at exorcism.

At the GM's discretion, True Faith may also aid in the performance of sacramentals, giving +4 to Religious Ritual rolls made under stressful circumstances.

Finally, many holy men also have one or more levels of Charisma. This can enhance their ability to move a congregation by performing a religious rite. It won't affect the chance of God answering their prayers; this sort of Charisma is a gift from God and can't be used to influence Him!

Christian White Magic

Christians may take up the practice of magic, as the lawful exercise of gifts granted to them by God. A Christian mage may even see magic as his calling, and Magery as a gift of the Holy Spirit.

This view of magic makes a distinction between black magic and white magic, akin to the Zoroastrian distinction between *magia* and *goetia*, or the arts of truth and illusion. Spells that reveal the truth, protect the innocent, heal the sick or injured, or command the real forces of nature are white. Spells that conceal the truth or create illusions, that affect only the senses, or that inflict harm or take away freedom or choice are black. Other spells can fall into both groups, depending on how they are used. Many Christian mages have a version of One-College Magery for white magic spells only; because there are only two "colleges," this is only a -10% limitation.

If Magery is a divine gift, it may be acquired and maintained through religious observance. Treat this as a Pact limitation, usually based on Disciplines of Faith (Mysticism) for -10% or Disciplines of Faith (Ritualism) for -5%. If the mage lapses in his devotions, he loses his ability to work magic -- unless he turns to a different source of power and makes a different sort of Pact!

For a more restrictive treatment, a mage may precede every session of spell-casting with a period of prayer. Until he has prayed, he can't work magic at all! Treat this as some version of the Preparation Required limitation.

Note that all of these cost reductions affect only the mage's levels of Magery, and not the basic Magery 0. However, if the mage fails to perform the required observances, he loses even the basic ability to cast spells provided by Magery 0. At the GM's option, he may retain the ability to perceive magic.

A Christian white wizard goes through a process of spiritual purification in casting spells, and is protected from the appearance of demons when the spell casting roll is a critical failure. At the GM's option, a Christian holy man may provide a one-time version of this protection by blessing a spell caster. As with protection from mundane harm, the

blessing remains in force until the first time it is needed. Either sort of immunity is forfeit if the mage casts a spell that is classified as black magic.

Christian Spirit Magic

St. Paul wrote, "Do you not know that we shall judge angels?" and some Christians believed that it was possible to achieve supernatural powers by summoning angels to their aid. It's possible to create angels as characters using the Spirit meta-traits in the *GURPS Basic Set* or the expanded ones in *GURPS Fantasy*. But for most campaigns, this won't be needed. Angels won't actually appear on stage as allies; they'll remain in the background, invisibly or discreetly aiding their mortal allies.

In *GURPS* terms, this kind of relationship makes the angels into a Contact Group. The effective skills provided by this group are skills in dealing with the supernatural. Effective skill depends on how high in the hierarchy of angelic choirs the mage's appeals can reach: 15 for angels, archangels, or principalities, who deal mainly with human concerns; 18 for powers, virtues, and dominations, who deal with the natural order; 21 for thrones, cherubim, and seraphim, who deal mainly with God. Because angels of all types have supernatural knowledge, their base point value is increased by 1, to 3, 4, or 5 points, respectively. They are either usually or completely reliable; they will never lie. (Demonic contacts can never be better than somewhat reliable, which makes them less trustworthy.) They can't be bribed. So a very basic angelic relationship might grant effective skill 15 (3 points), be usually reliable (¥2 cost = 6 points), and be available on a 6 or less (¥1/2 = 3 points); a Contact Group providing such relationships would be worth 15 points.

Angelic contacts can provide information and answer questions. They can work small miracles, providing benefits at the Perk level. At the GM's discretion, a Christian spirit mage can ask the angels to protect another person, granting a one-shot equivalent of the Blessed advantage.

Some spirit mages may gain a greater benefit from their angelic relationships: the ability to "cast spells" by calling on the angels to intervene in the natural order. This is a form of Modular Abilities, with the Spells Only limitation (-20%). It works as a version of the Spirit Trapping form of the advantage, defined in *GURPS Fantasy*. Cost is 6 points base + 4 points per point of spell knowledge. Spells are gained from the spirit mage's angelic Contact Group. Only white magic spells can be learned from angelic Contacts; this is a -10% limitation on the Modular Abilities advantage. Prerequisites can be ignored, but the caster must still have either Magery (limited to white magic only) or Power Investiture.

Medieval Stories

What role can each of these approaches to clerical magic play in a campaign?

Holy powers are the basis for saintly characters. The expanded benefits of True Faith allow a Holy Man character type, who can cast out demons, protect others with blessings, and work a variety of miracles by praying for divine aid. This is the most freeform approach to the supernatural and needs GM judgment to make it work.

Christian spirit magic supports a view of the world in which angels are invisibly present and able to grant help when asked. This form of magic is much like what some real-world sorcerers thought they were doing, so it's good for a historically authentic campaign of ritual magic.

Christian white magic embodies a more technical view of magic. It represents magic as a skill, somewhere between a science and a craft, in a milieu where the practice of a craft can easily be taken as a religious vocation.

Combining holy powers with either spirit magic or white magic is straightforward. The holy man appeals to God directly; the spirit mage or white

Black Magic

If there's white magic, there must be black magic, and Christian mages may spend a good part of their time opposing various sorts of black magic. Black magic in a medieval setting can be portrayed as a blasphemous parody of white magic, with Satan in the place of God, devils in the place of angels, and lies in the place of Truth. Unlike angels, demons can be bribed, not by money, but by blood sacrifices or the opportunity to possess a mortal body. (Sacrifices have no effect

wizard casts spells and spends much of his time in study. Creating distinct roles for the latter two is a bit trickier. In most campaigns, it's better to pick one or the other: spirit magic if mages are supposed to communicate with the unseen, white magic if they're supposed to use it as a tool.

In addition to their use by player characters, such abilities can also be told of in the legends of a medieval setting. An entire medieval literary genre, hagiography, was devoted to the lives and miracles of saints. Churches can house relics of saints or be built on the sites of historically recorded miracles. And a lower-key religious influence can pervade daily life, with an occasional critical success or Excellent divine reaction to a prayer leading to a miracle.

This same approach can be used to develop **GURPS** versions of the magical arts of many other faiths. Hindu ascetics developing siddhis, Jewish rabbis practicing kabbalah, or voodoo houngans summoning the loa to their aid are all possible. Choosing the right set of options from the existing rules can represent such magic traditions in **GURPS** terms and encourage players to roleplay the form of magic that best suits a campaign and setting. Attaining this kind of match was one of the goals of **GURPS Fantasy**.

* * *

Many thanks to M. A. Lloyd for advice on the doctrinal content.

on angels; the one sacrifice that counts for them was made at the Crucifixion.)

In the view of some medieval thinkers, rival faiths such as Islam and Judaism were forms of devil-worship, and Jews and Muslims will be idolaters and black magicians. Most GMs won't want that much authenticity! Other monotheisms can instead be treated as alternate paths to the same relationships with God and the angelic hierarchy.

Pyramid Review

Paranoia XP

Published by [Mongoose Publishing](#)

Written by Allen Varney, Aaron Allston, Paul Baldowski, Beth Fischl, & Dan Curtis Johnson

Art by Jim Holloway

Edited by Allen Varney

256-page b&w hardcover; \$39.95

It's been too long since anyone's heard the clarion call of The Computer, demanding its Troubleshooters report for one hazardously entertaining duty or another. Mongoose Publishing still serves Alpha Complex faithfully with *Paranoia XP*.

If you've lived in an underground cavern for the last 20 years: In *Paranoia*, Man is driven underground by [not available at your security clearance], but the computer overseer is completely around the twist. Convinced the "Communists" constantly threaten Alpha Complex, it enforces strict, Orwellian rules of hierarchy and behavior that make everyone guilty of some form of treason. The very people The Computer depends upon to solve its most pressing problems -- the "elite" Troubleshooters -- are guilty of secret society membership and possession of mind- and body-bending mutations, among other illicit activities. Catch-22-riddled missions invariably end in disaster, some or all of the participants dying as accusations of neglect, dereliction of duty, and treason fly (along with grenades, laser beams, cudgels . . .). Oh, and it's funny.

Now the next generation gets to join the killi . . . er, fun. Dispensing with the game's iffier bits of history (*Crash of The Computer*, the *Secret Society Wars*), *Paranoia* has returned to all of its roots. There are three styles of play: Classic, Straight, and Zap, depending on the body count you want, how much darkness and satire you inject, and the pop-culture influence desired. The original system is scrapped; in its place is a painfully simple process that captures the Spartan nature of Alpha Complex and still manages to be a functional way of hose-jobbing . . . er, adjudicating the action. There's no dexterity, intelligence, etc. Instead three Action skills -- Violence, Management, and Stealth -- and three Mental skills -- Hardware, Software, and Wetware -- take over where the old skill trees left off. Success comes when you roll under your skill on a 20-sided die. Common specialties customize characters, like psychotherapy (a skill under Wetware), Moxie (Management), or Surveillance (Stealth). Everyone gets "laser beam" for some reason. Specialties overlap, and players must creatively wheedle the GM about what can be used how, a freewheeling method that serves *Paranoia* well. Specialties are balanced by weaknesses, so proficiency repairing transbots may mean you're completely inept dealing with food dispensers (and if you think that's not fatal in *Paranoia* . . .).

Specialties taper down to silly skills called narrow specialties. These are almost, but not quite, completely useless. Maybe you know "Find the Unmonitored Vent that Lets You Slip Unnoticed from the Barracks" or "Coax Spare Change from a T-38 Taxibot's Meter." If those aren't enough, various subversive parties offer treasonous and secret skills ("I can survive in the wilderness? What's that?"). Troubleshooters also have Access and Power. The first is a generic determinant of how well you navigate the complex's bureaucratic, well . . . complexities, and the second limits your mutant powers. Players aren't privy to either number -- it would only worry them.

Scheming secret societies and the service groups are still here, but now your job requires actual work. The Computer has instituted service firms, quasi-companies that do the group's work. CPU members may work for, say, a Facility Surveillance Control firm called Eye in the Skypanel -- now it's your job to keep cameras on-line. Those you find. That aren't sabotaged. Or hijacked. Or booby-trapped. Really, it's yet another conflicting interest to get PCs into deep doin's when the plot slows down. Finally, Perversity points are the true coin of the realm -- these points change die rolls, get you first pick of the snacks, improve Troubleshooter scores, and ingratiate you with the GM.

For referees, new tools make their game harder or easier. Locations have tension levels, a measure of how careful monitored an area is. Fines can punish agents without resorting to rolling up new PCs, but modest fees can also secure new clone six-packs. The otherwise furious combat system, sadly, shoots itself in the foot with the Min-Boost-Max stat -- the least and most damage weapons do, surrounding a number that divides the success margin to see if you do added steps of injury. Clever, but hardly elegant. All this, plus some surprises that can't be mentioned in a public forum without executing some INFRARED-level readers.

It wouldn't be old home week if Jim Holloway, the seminal *Paranoia* artist, hadn't come back on board to do the artwork. A lot is culled directly from the line's original run, but many pieces have been retouched -- same pictures, still fun, but with differences. They aren't huge changes, so the reasons why aren't apparent (perhaps a George-Lucas-like nod for the game's satirical Petri dish?). The textual layout is unremarkable, which is bothersome in that sections change with little fanfare. The material runs together subtly, with only page headers or a thin title line to distinguish one chapter from the next. Then again, considering the subversive way the layout is treated . . .

The game is still funny, but much of it is a seamless transplant from earlier books and various articles that appeared over the years; a lot of the new writing's humor becomes tiresome. This may be because the book reads *long* . . . so much in one book is good, but again, it blurs together. Service firms and their "service services" are a great addition, but even after the reader gets the idea (or the joke) they just . . . keep . . . going. The introductory adventure is just that; it's exceedingly simple and old hands won't get much out of it. It's a good jumping-off point for newcomers, and if you only want a reason to kill things, it won't matter what the adventure is anyway.

Paranoia XP runs the joke and the word count into the ground -- in some ways a towel that gets wetter as you go -- and could have benefited from smaller, digestible chunks (or farming the whole-cloth work out to more authors). But the revamped system, service firms, and contemporized outlook also make it a blunt instrument in the best sense, getting the *Paranoia* job done in a direct, effective manner that puts the play first and hand-waves the needless conventions of other (non-fun) RPGs.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Pick

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Illustrated by Jason Engle

1.12 Meg 45-page full-color PDF; \$6.95

Fourth Millennium: Science Fiction At The End Of History is the first third-party publication for the *d20 Future SRD*, written by Kevin Brennan and James Maliszewski as a personal project while they worked on other projects, including the thoroughly excellent *d20 System* fantasy treatment of India and South East Asia in Green Ronin Publishing's *Mindshadows*, and Maliszewski's interesting near future setting *Emissaries* for Microtactix's *Simply Roleplaying!* Originally, *Fourth Millennium* was to have been published under Guardians of Order's *Magnus Opus* imprint, much like the recent [Hearts, Swords, Flowers](#). But instead it has undergone a radical change of format. Now published by Ronin Arts, the plan is to release it as a series of individual PDFs rather than as a core book and line of supplements. The first of these is the *Campaign Model*, which serves as an introduction to the setting.

It is set in the Year Of Our Lord 3001, when mankind has spread itself not across the galaxies, but over multiple parallel Earths. FTL travel has proved impossible, but telepaths facilitate the transfer of ships through Node Points from one solar system to another. So far, no other species have been discovered on the worlds explored and settled. Instead, the biggest threat faced by mankind is neo-humanism.

Humanity has advanced through the Genetic Age and into the Nanotech Age. It had gone from rewriting and cleansing the human genome to the use of nanotech systems that could re-write a person's own DNA, enhance himself physically, and even rewrite his own memories! At worst, nanophages were used to overwrite the memories of others, a phenomenon that could literally eliminate whole human cultures. The advent of the cultural nanophages triggered the outbreak of history's bloodiest conflicts, the Culture Wars. While no scientist had been able to build the A.I., the expert system has been perfected, and it was inevitable that some would link the human brain directly into such dedicated computers.

The result is "Emergence," the birth of an intelligence beyond the mere human. Radically different in viewpoint, ethics, and instincts, the emerged are capable of understanding things that humanity cannot, including themselves. The most notable example of emergence are the "Psaikhailou," neo-humanists that had pursued technological rapture with religious vigor, achieving what they call "singularity" though means unknown, but spreading it via a nanotech virus. Beginning on Earth, the Psaikhailou virus absorbed both other neo-humans and worlds before humanity united to stop them, employing scorched Earth techniques that halted the evolutionary threat. Now an uneasy peace exists between the Psaikhailou and humanity.

The Svobodan League was founded as an alliance dedicated to maintaining the Stasis, protocols and directives that limit the use and spread of advanced technology that could cause Emergence. Its members are not nation states, but "Phyles," groupings that share a culture and history, the largest of which are spread across several worlds.

Dozens of other Phyles are associate members of the League, but major organizations under its umbrella are the Syndicates. Not so much Phyles as regulatory bodies, they take no interest in League politics, only concerning

themselves with the maintenance of Stasis. The major Syndicate cultures are the Biotechnology Syndicate, the Cybernetics Syndicate, the Eugenics Syndicate, and the Psychiatric Syndicate. Outside the League exist many different Phyles, some like the Mordovi agree with and stringently enforce the Stasis, but others prefer to remain independent of the League, if not actively opposed to it. The League refers to these dismissively as the "Shards," but continues to monitor them for potential Stasis violations. One such method used is the Voodoo teams, deep cover agents, often crewing small merchant vessels and reporting directly to the co-ordinator of the League's Security and Intelligence Service. With their independent, but wide remit, the Voodoo team is the default set up for playing *Fourth Millennium*.

This first release for *Fourth Millennium* is actually quite light on rules and mechanics for the *d20 System*. It adds several new occupations, such as the Activist, the Educator, and the Newslogger, a type of independent journalist. It lists those Advanced or Prestige Classes suitable to the setting and adds just the one: the Procuracy Field Agent, which monitors other Syndicates for potential Stasis violation. Four of the five new feats are tied into the *d20 System's* Allegiance rules, while the fifth is an Armor Proficiency feat for Reflex armor.

While a few samples of actual technology are given (the rest saved for future releases), the *Campaign Model* goes into not just what technology has been invented, but also what is allowed under the Stasis enforced by the Svobodan League. A list of equipment suitable for the setting from the *Future SRD* is included, but technologies unique to *Fourth Millennium* setting are also discussed, including Expert Systems, Nanoforges, and Nanotechnology, Diamond Armor, and its spacecraft types, the High-G capable military wetships, and the ordinary dry ships.

Before rounding out the book with a short but very useful glossary, the authors take the time to explain what *Fourth Millennium* is about in the section on Game Mastering. These three pages are in effect *better* than other 200-plus-page science-fiction RPGs recently published, and explains that the setting is one of choices. Between keeping our humanity and rescinding it in favor of becoming something more than human. Between residing under the reactionary hegemony of the Svobodan League, or reacting against it while remaining within the bounds of Stasis. The section also suggests how each of the six major Phyles can support a particular science fiction game as possible starting points. They include a combination of cyberpunk and special operations, conspiracies and political intrigue, high tech power games, empire building and maintenance, military campaigns, and exploration and commerce.

Yet despite the inclusion of these sub-genres, *Fourth Millennium* is very much an attempt to move away from the traditional models of science fiction found in gaming, as was Maliszewski's *Emissaries*. Eschewing such elements as anti-gravity, alien life forms (bar, it would be argued, the Psaihailou), FTL, and artificial intelligence, it instead concentrates on other elements, particularly the societies of the 31st Century. These are taken beyond the nation state, placing an emphasis on both cultures in the form of the Phyle, and also on the resurgence of faith and religion. The setting can also be read as being anti-Transhumanist in making the Psaihailou its big threat.

Physically, *Fourth Millennium* is a cleanly presented PDF that beyond the cover is very light on illustrations. It packs a lot of information for its size, and is written in an easily digestible style. The aforementioned glossary is a nice touch that rounds off the document.

In many ways it is a shame not to see *Fourth Millennium* released as a book of its own, but this format has its advantages, such as being made available in affordable chunks. Some may be put off by the authors' decision to release *Fourth Millennium* for the *d20 System*, but as with the best of the titles released under the *d20 System* banner, it is the setting that counts, not the mechanics. Such detractors should adapt it to the rules of their choice. As a campaign setting, it serves as a very effective introduction to the end of our history, when we face the threat of becoming something more. Some may find its ideas too deep, but *Fourth Millennium* is not the frothy fantasy that is space opera; it is science fiction. And while it is a setting in which to game, it would be just as fascinating to read the novel.

--Matthew Pook

Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Random Thought Table: Help Me Genre, Yeah

This is the first time I'm writing my column using a voice-recognition software package. In theory it might speed up my writing and give my hands a much-needed break after weeks of typing at the computer. In practice it means that when I go back to read what I wrote, I find myself wondering if I was very drunk at the time. Regardless, this should treat you all to a variety of new and interesting typos and no doubt paved the way for carpal vocal syndrome.

Anyway, last week I wrote my column about genres. More specifically, I talked about how they don't really exist. Of course I primarily did that to overstate the case, because that always generates an interesting table of contents blurb. The primary idea behind last week's column was that we think the most circumstances as a genre is actually one or two discrete plot elements put together. For example, but we normally think of as fantasy is in fact usually a quasi-historical setting utilizing magic.

However, perhaps more important than these genre elements is the idea of focus. For example, the *Fvlminata* RPG and the *Hercules and Xena* RPG both have roughly similar mandates: a bronze-era historical setting with magic. However, the focus of these elements – bronze era, historical, and magical – helps to define what the setting is. Both settings have roughly equal attachments to the trappings of the bronze era (garb, weaponry, and the like) complete with some technologically achronological items (gunpowder or steel weapons, depending). Both have roughly equal amounts of magic (a useful tool, but not the be-all and end-all of a high fantasy world). But they vary on their fidelity and focus on history. *Fvlminata*, being an unequivocally alternate history, adheres fairly faithfully to the facts -- up to the point where its history diverges, of course. *Hercules and Xena*, on the other hand, has absolutely no focus on facts; geography and history are all vaguely Greek-y, while realism and accuracy are all vaguely nonexistent-y.

The upshot is that it's possible to have two campaigns, using the same genre elements, and still make them completely different, depending on what elements you focus on and the intensity with which you use them.

Let's take an example – something different. Let's combine quasi-historical martial arts (say, a 16th-19th century/*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* sort of thing) with mystery.

Let's first crank the "martial arts" all the way up, and the mystery down low. We might end up with a band of trained martial artists charged by the Emperor to go from town to town, investigating problems and seeking adventure. Here, the "mystery" aspect would serve as the catalyst for the adventure: "You're charged with finding out what happened to the Master's daughter." The heroes learn early on that the daughter was kidnapped by ninja, exciting battles ensue, and the martial arts serves as the narrative thrust (no pun intended). There isn't much mystery-solving, per se, outside of the heroes' mandate.

Now let's turn the "mystery" up to 11, and put the martial arts on a flicker setting. Here we might have a Victorian England historical setting, with a band of Sherlock-Holmes-esque investigators, charged by Scotland Yard to investigate crimes; one of the PCs knows martial arts (and perhaps one of the other PCs is a student of this expert). Here the thrust of most adventures would be the mystery solving, with martial arts serving as a special effect or possibly a means of shaking up the end-of-session combat. Here the martial arts would serve as a bit of extra flavoring to keep adventures from resembling the standard Victorian mysteries.

Now, let's turn both dials to "roughly equal." Here we might have a setting where the heroes all know martial arts, and their primary objectives are to solve mysteries. Again, let's go to our Victorian England setting. Perhaps the heroes are all emigrants from Asian countries, forbidden from returning home for some reason (having fallen out of political favor, perhaps?). Facing racial discrimination, the heroes manage to save the Queen one day, who – in gratitude – gives them a supposedly ceremonial job at Scotland Yard. The heroes, however, are able to contribute by solving strange mysteries in their own unorthodox ways. In this campaign, the heroes will approach the world's genres with roughly equal vigor: sometimes they would get clues through conventional Victorian means, sometimes using martial arts special abilities. Sometimes they roam the foggy London beat, looking for information; sometimes they're hopping rooftop to rooftop, chasing black-clad suspects running impossibly fast. Sometimes the villain is a mundane murderous doctor; sometimes it's a band of ronin opium smugglers.

And as a final example, drawing from the real world, I'll note that stories with Superman have traditionally been superhero-action with a dash of romance. The television series *The Adventures of Lois & Clark*, however, flipped this around, making it a romance show with superhero-action elements. (And the current *Smallville* series turns this formula around even more, making it a superhero series without any "superheroes.")

Even if you're committed to putting in various genres into a game, don't fall into the trap of assuming that there's only one way those genres can manifest. Even within a few seemingly narrow genres there are still plenty of opportunities to tinker and innovate.

And when in doubt, add ninja.

* * *

Have you ever wanted to talk to someone about making fantasy happen?

Well, if you're reading this Friday afternoon or earlier, you can! This Friday – November 19th – at 7 p.m. CST in the [Pyramid Chat](#), William Stoddard will be discussing *GURPS Fantasy* and fielding questions on all things fantastic.

So if you haven't frequented the chats, and want to learn about one of the most requested *GURPS* books ever, stop on by!

--*Steven Marsh*

Shandy Xaxa Dack

for Transhuman Space

by Phil Masters

Shandy Xaxa Dack is the only child of a moderately wealthy Fifth Wave couple -- a company administrator and a civil servant. They could easily afford the Alpha Upgrade genetic package which they gave their offspring, but limited themselves to one child for a number of personal reasons.

While they were reasonably affectionate parents, they were a little distant and uncertain how to bring up their daughter, trying one slightly faddish "system" of childcare after another, and she grew up mildly alienated and reflexively rebellious. She had long had a taste for exploring the Web insofar as her supervising AIs would permit her, and at the age of 16, she discovered a simple way to evade most filter software; she left the house to find interesting stuff in person. Her parents, under the sway of a strong "freedom for adolescents" meme, did little to prevent this apart from insisting that she should always wear an AI which was programmed to ensure her safety.

Thus, their daughter fell in with a distinctly eccentric crowd -- devotees of a small-scale fashion-cult known as Loomzoomismus (see the box). While the LAI she was wearing eventually recognized the dangers of this "hobby," tried to warn her, and then notified her parents, it was too late to prevent her becoming obstinately fascinated, and she now utterly refuses to abandon the peculiar practices promoted by the meme. In one flamboyant gesture, she declared that she was abandoning her birth name, adopting instead the whimsical and random-sounding "Shandy Xaxa Dack." She now sleeps at home only one night in two, although being shrewd enough to avoid pushing her parents into some kind of radical response, and wise enough to care about her own safety, she keeps the "chaperone" LAI provided by her parents somewhere around at all times, albeit with its sound output disabled.

Meanwhile, she is progressing remarkably quickly in the informal hierarchy of practitioners of Loomzoomismus. Although she is a relatively recent convert, "Shandy" is gaining a name within the movement for what appear to them to be deep and impressive mystical insights gained while under the influence of even the simplest VR feeds. The sheer intensity of this experience, combined with the sense of personal worth she derives from the admiration of her new friends, is leading her into ever deeper involvement in the movement. Fortunately, the unusual ease with which she achieves the necessary trance states has so far saved her from use of more intense, dangerous Loomzoom VR recordings.

As part of this activity, she has also taken to publishing her poetry on the group's publicly-accessible Web space. (Perhaps as a result of its third-hand derivation from Sufiism, Loomzoomismus has considerable respect for poetry as a limited but valid way of expressing some of the non-rational "insights" granted by its form of "meditation.") Her work is actually reasonably good, after its fashion, and has further enhanced her reputation.

Her parents are still consciously seeking to avoid alienating her, being rationally aware of the nature of adolescent rebellion (which has proved stronger than any Alpha Upgrade mental stability) and the need to maintain lines of communication, as well as emotionally attached to their child. However, their growing concerns, and their daughter's increasingly

Loomzoomismus

Loomzoomismus is widely regarded as a quasi-religious cult, although it has no formal hierarchy, doctrine, or organization, and bears as much resemblance to a fashion-driven pop culture meme. In essence, it is an anarchistic form of Mathirism (p. TM23); devotees claim to gain unique insights into the universe, up to and including direct communion with God, by bombarding and overloading their own senses with chaotic virtual reality inputs. (A few use slinks, but most cannot afford this; Loomzoomismus is mostly a street-level movement.) However, unlike Mathirites, who employ carefully constructed, generally highly abstract VR structures as their meditation aids, "Loomzoomers" use amateurishly-edited sequences of random or arbitrary material, usually derived from whatever InVids catch the creators' fancy or happen to come to hand.

monomaniacal pursuit of mystical insight, almost guarantee that some kind of crisis will arrive at some point.

Scenario Seeds

Go and Sell That Thou Hast: After a blazing argument, Shandy walks out of the family home without her chaperone LAI and with every sign of intending to stay away for keeps. Her parents, naturally worried, seek out professionals or qualified friends to locate her and make sure that she's okay. They *don't* want her brought home by force -- she's old enough that this would be illegal under local law, and in any case, they know perfectly well that this would merely alienate her even further. However, they do want her kept safe.

In many ways, this would be a conventional missing person case. Ensuring the girl's safety without annoying her, and ideally without her knowledge, could be a little tricky, especially if the problem drags on into the long term, but some ingenuity with hidden microbot swarms, smart dust, and computer hacking, can achieve a great deal. What makes it slightly more complicated is that the subject is surrounded by people who are not only fairly smart and technologically aware -- they actually regard her with respect verging on veneration, and will be doubly unwilling to lose her. It may also be desirable for her hidden guardians to secretly check any InVid material that she and her friends acquire for safety problems -- quite a complicated trick.

Poetry in Motion: Maria Holtz, a freelance Edgearcher (p.TM131), has recently been analyzing the Loomzoomismus movement, and in the course of this routine research, ran across material created by Shandy Xaxa Dack. One of Holtz's AIs studied Dack's poetry and concluded that the girl has genuine talent and considerable potential. According to its analysis, in 10-15 years, given the right experiences and just enough teaching and guidance, Dack could become one of the leading poets of her generation in her native language.

Serious poetry is not a major economic activity, but like any niche cultural form, it has some potential as a source of income. Perhaps more to the point, Holtz is something of a devotee. She therefore wishes to ensure Dack's safety, while ensuring that Dack receives both the formal education and the life experiences that will bring out her full potential. Holtz goes looking for people who can see to all of this.

The first problem, of course, is that Dack is a surly, rebellious adolescent who will probably react badly to direct approaches. In any case, merely helping her to adjust better to life, and to look after her own health and sanity properly, would be missing the point; her talent as a poet arises partly out of her disaffection, confusion, and search for insights. She may well need to suffer for her art -- in controlled doses. PCs working for Holtz may eventually find themselves in conflict with her parents.

Land of Lost Content: The PCs, possibly in the employ of a media company, are working to discover how weirdly mangled but compulsively fascinating copies of various short but valuable InVids came onto the market with all digital rights protection deleted. (The cryptographic protection involved was supposed to be fairly bulletproof.) Tracking various bootleg operations across continents and through several levels, they trace the source to a bunch of weird

It's unclear how Loomzoomismus developed; it's probably a "street level" offshoot of Mathirism, but it's possible that it evolved independently, perhaps among InVid users with mild mental problems. Even the origin of the name is uncertain, although it is probably derived from Berlin street slang of the early 2090s. It is primarily a European phenomenon, but it has followers in most Fifth Wave communities, and is spreading to Fourth Wave regions.

Loomzoom InVids are complex constructions, in an anarchic sort of way. They have sometimes been compared to experimental "cut-up" literature or "sampled" music from the 20th Century, and analyzed as an art form. Unfortunately, devotees of the movement rarely pay much attention to questions of safety, and there have been cases where Loomzoom creations have induced epileptic seizures and possibly other brain dysfunctions when run on hardware with insufficient protective features. Given that the whole objective of these works is to induce radically altered states of consciousness, this is hardly surprising.

Insofar as it has a theology, Loomzoomismus borrows heavily from Mathirism, and hence indirectly from Sufi thought and Zen Buddhism. (Mathirites regard it with exasperation and sometimes barely contained rage.) Its exponents claim to be pursuing experiences which cannot be described verbally, and its associated style is based on the creation of confusion in its own

cultists selling this stuff into the black market for petty cash. Eventually, they find that a single member of this group of "Loomzoomers" is responsible for assembling the unprotected recordings. However, she lacks the sort of resources that such an operation should involve.

In fact, Shandy Xaxa Dack has developed an extraordinary intuitive facility. In a self-induced trance state, she can edit together snippets of an InVid from partial copies, taster extracts, and memory, recreating the original with minimal resources. While the various middlemen can be sued and fined for their involvement in all this, she and her friends lack the resources to be worth pursuing -- and in any case, it'd be bad PR. The PCs may, however, be instructed to find some legal way to persuade her to stop.

Possible complications here include the involvement of organized crime; not only are they likely to have been profiting from the original bootlegging, but once they realize how clever Dack was being, they may look to make her a job offer she can't refuse. For that matter, while her talent may just be a matter of natural flair and concentration, it's bizarre enough to raise questions about whether her Alpha Upgrade gave her slightly more interesting neurological wiring than usual.

Shandy Xaxa Dack

Age 17; 5'9", 135 lbs.; A rather unprepossessing teenager, dressed in whatever red clothes she has available. Her carelessness about grooming and diet and her odd dress sense negate the benefits of her Alpha Upgrade appearance.

ST 8 [-15]; **DX** 12 [10]; **IQ** 12 [20]; **HT** 11 [0]. Basic Speed 5.25; Move 5. Dodge 5.

Advantages: Alpha Upgrade [35]; Autotrance [5]; Ally (Father, 150 points, 12-) [20]; Charisma +1 [5]; Deep Sleeper [5]; Reputation (among devotees of Loomzoomismus, for wisdom, +3 on 10-) [2]; Status +1 [5].

Disadvantages: Delete Attractive from Alpha Upgrade package [-5]; Addiction (Loomzoom VR recordings: cheap, hallucinogenic, legal) [- 10]; Combat Paralysis [-15]; Unfit [-5]; Youth (17) [-2].

Quirks: Absolutely refuses to wear any color but red; Mildly shy, except around fellow Loomzoomismus devotees; Refuses to even mention her real name; Thinks of her poetic talent as mystical insight. [-4]

Skills: Acting-10 [½]; Bard-11 [½]; Computer Operation-13 [2]; Holdout-10 [½]; Literature-10 [1]; Poetry-13 [4]; Savoir-Faire-14 [0]; Stealth-10 [½].

Languages: Native Language at 12 [0]; Two others each at 10 [½ each].

followers, never mind outsiders.

Practice of Loomzoomismus is actually mildly stressful as well as potentially dangerous, and devotees specifically refuse to describe its benefits. It is thus probably doomed to remain a marginal street-level movement, although radical, dangerous behavior always has its appeal to some disaffected or alienated individuals. Although it is mostly a youth movement, Loomzoomismus has a few *much* older followers, who may be seeking to escape the stresses of a rapidly changing world by reverting to the solipsistic radicalism of their youth.

61 points

Icosahedron Adventures: Custom Characters

Game Mechanics For Building Specific Character Concepts *D20 System*

by Owen K.C. Stephens

At its core, the *d20 System* gives players very limited options when creating or advancing a character. Ability scores are determined randomly. A small, finite set of races and classes are available. Special abilities are automatically assigned based on class and race, or selected from a list only occasionally (as is the case with feats). For characters starting at first level there aren't many background choices available, in part because money is limited and determined randomly and in part because starting competence is so low it's difficult to justify having done more than one thing prior to the start of a game.

In many cases these limitations are seen as benefits by some gamers. Because there are a limited number of possible character concepts, it's more likely that all the characters in a group are appropriate for and useful in a typical adventure designed for the game's core concepts. A *d20 System* game geared for fantasy combat adventure is likely to have classes and races that work well within that setting. A character is unlikely to be able to make a character that's totally inappropriate. Further, because there's a limited number of things the characters can do, the GM is more likely to be able to consider them all when designing opponents and challenges. When viewing the game as an exercise in tactical combat or a complex boardgame with roleplaying elements, this aspect of the *d20 System* is a considerably strength.

Many groups place pure roleplaying higher on their list of priorities than game balance, however, and such groups often chafe at the restrictions inherent to the system. Player might be excited with the idea of playing a damsel in distress, or a farmhand, or a warrior who depends on his ability to absorb damage because he's not a particularly smart or strong person, but find the game system resists their efforts to build a specific character concept, especially if it varies considerably from what's expected within the game setting.

Further, there's nothing in the *d20 System* as written to protect the role each character does end up taking. Everyone could choose to be a fighter, for example, and all specialize in the use of two-handed weapons. Even worse, two different characters could proceed on different paths for many levels, then suddenly converge. For example, a group might include a very efficient melee fighter and a less adept character who has a role to play largely because he has specialized in the use of ranged weapons. After several levels the fighter could decide to take up ranged combat, taking away the non-optimized character's previously unique role. Not all groups desire to protect such character niches, but those who do get little support from the *d20 System* rules.

This article tries to present some variant rules that can provide tools to assist groups with these styles of play to get more out of *d20 System* games. The suggestions below are all designed to be short of converting a *d20 System* campaign into a complete point-buy, which has already been covered by such things as *Mutants and Masterminds*, *BESM d20*, and even "[CLUDGE](#)." This article tries to present ways to modify how *d20 System* characters are created without changing the basic class/level structure of the game or its fundamental play mechanics.

Even beyond the issues mentioned above, using these rules can change the tone of a *d20 System* campaign. Players given more say over their characters' attributes and powers expect more input in other aspects of the game, and are more likely to get involved in other aspects of the game. Players given more options are also more likely to come up with more original (and potentially more powerful) character concepts as well. Campaigns run using these rules are likely to have more oddball characters, which may or may not be seen as a bad thing.

Ability Scores

Ability score generation is one of the most influential parts of character creation. Nearly all a character's attributes, and

all her skills and combat maneuvers, are influenced by ability scores. How you allow players to generate their characters' ability scores not only affects the power level of the characters, it sets the tone for the campaign as a whole. The random methods normally proved in *d20 System* games often prohibit players from choosing specific character concepts, and can create an imbalance between the power levels of different characters.

Auction

An ability score auction ensures one character has the highest rating in any given ability score. For some groups, this kind of definitive role and inter-player competition is considered helpful in determining character roles, while other groups find it antagonistic and disruptive.

Each player is given 10 auction points. The GM names each ability in turn, auctioning off an 18 value and then a 16 value for that ability. Players bid auction points, with the highest in each round getting that score. Once all the abilities have been auctioned off, players may buy scores for abilities they didn't win auctions for, with 1 unspent auction point equaling a +1 modifier. Players may grant themselves an ability score of 8 or 6 to gain 1 or 2 additional modifier points, but these points can't be used during the auction. No ability score bought after the auctions may have a base higher than 14 (though racial modifiers could raise an ability to a 15 or more).

For example, Mark, Tom, Stephanie, and Michelle are making new characters for a game Jayne is starting. Jayne begins the auction with Strength, offering up an 18. Mark and Stephanie both plan on playing fighting characters, so they begin bidding. Stephanie is willing to pay 4 auction points, while Mark is only willing to spend 3, so Stephanie gets the 18 Strength. Jayne now repeats the process for a 16 Strength. Since Michelle and Tom don't care to have Strength scores that high, Mark manages to spend just 1 auction point for his 16. Now Stephanie has 6 auction points left, Mark has 9, and Tom and Michelle both still have 10.

Jayne repeats the auction process for all five remaining ability scores. When all is said and done, Mark bought a 16 Strength for 1 point and a 16 Constitution for 2 points. That leaves him 7 auction points with which to buy ability scores. He can't buy anything above a 14, so he spends 2 points on Dexterity (a +2 modifier is a 14 score), 2 points on Intelligence, and 2 points on Charisma, leaving 1 point for Wisdom. His final scores are Str 16, Dex 14, Con 16, Int 14, Wis 10, and Cha 12.

Stephanie spent 4 auction points on an 18 Strength and 5 auction points on an 18 Dexterity. That leaves her only 1 auction point for her remaining 4 abilities, but she knows no one else will have 18's in her two primary stats. She gives her character a 14, 10 Int, 10 Wis and 8 Cha, totaling her +1 remaining auction point.

Heroic Arrays

Many groups prefer characters to have even more heroic scores than provided by any of the standard ability generation methods, but are unhappy when one or two players' characters end up with significantly better ability scores. Groups such as this should consider using the three heroic arrays, a set of pre-determined ability scores the players may arrange as they see fit. The heroic arrays are much more powerful than standard ability generation methods, but still within the range of what's theoretically possible.

When using the heroic arrays, each player decides which set of ability scores she wishes to use, then assigns each score to an ability of her choice. Racial modifiers are added in after the ability scores have been assigned. Resulting characters are powerful, but not so much to unbalance a game. Feel free to use more extreme encounters when running a group using the heroic arrays, which is exactly what such groups generally prefer.

Rather than require players to use one of the listed heroic arrays, you may allow them to determine any stats that have a total modifier of +12, as long as no ability score starts at a value lower than 8 or higher than 18 before racial modifiers and level increases.

Table 1: The Heroic Arrays

- **Heroic Array 1:** 18, 16, 16, 12, 12, 10
- **Heroic Array 2:** 18, 18, 16, 14, 10, 8
- **Heroic Array 3:** 14, 14, 14, 14, 14, 14

Player's Choice

You can opt to allow players to decide what ability scores their characters start with. This method tends to result in very powerful characters, but that's not a problem with all groups. Obviously, characters need to have some limits, but you may allow any ability scores possible for starting characters (*i.e.*, any score of 18 modified by race).

The advantage of this method is players get exactly the kind of characters they wanted. The drawback is that there's no penalty for deciding you want to play a character with straight 18s (and if anyone actually does this, it's a good sign that player doesn't get the point). Yet among mature groups that are more interested in playing specific roles than struggling to maximize characters, this can be a very fulfilling option.

Random Rolls by Class

The idea behind random rolls by class is to ensure a player making a fighter has a good chance at getting high Strength and Constitution scores without allowing him to determine exactly what scores he gets. This option allows the unexpected results that many groups prefer, while maintaining player choice and influence over character type. It's also useful for GMs wanting to determine NPC ability scores randomly — using this system, most NPC fighters are stronger than NPC wizards, but occasional exceptions do occur.

For each class, players roll the indicated number of dice and take the highest three results, discarding the rest. Thus, a player making a fighter rolls 7d6 for his Strength score. If his results were 6, 5, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, he takes the highest three and ends up with a 16 Strength.

Characters made using this system end up being slightly more powerful than those of the standard method of roll 4d6 and drop the lowest die. This difference is intentional, as it helps produce a more extreme range of ability scores, which helps differentiate characters. Players also have no choice over assigning their ability scores: whatever is rolled for a given stat must be taken, making it more difficult for players to min/max characters and encouraging roleplaying the unusual combinations that result. If a set of ability scores doesn't have at least one ability score of 14 or higher, or has a total combined modifier of +2 or less, the player may re-roll all the ability scores.

Though dice are given for NPC classes as well, they produce less exceptional results. If you want more heroic NPC-classed character, use one of the die combinations for a related heroic class (rolling fighter dice for a warrior, for example).

A variant of this rule is to allow a player to decide how many dice to roll for each ability score, limiting him to a total pool of 28 dice. No ability score may have more than 7 or fewer than 3 dice assigned to it, and all ability scores must have their dice assigned prior to any ability score being rolled. This works well for groups that frequently multiclass, or who may want to play less traditional characters. For example, a player wishing

Another variant rules usable for this system is to increase a character's starting ability score by 1 for every "6" he rolls beyond the first 3. Thus a player rolling 7d6 for Str and ending up with five 6s, a 4 and a 2 starts with a 20 Str.

Table 2: Ability Score Rolls by Class

	Bard,	Cleric,		
	Barbarian	Sorcerer, Druid,	Fighter	Monk
	or Wilder	or Witch		
Str	7d6	3d6	4d6	7d6
Dex	5d6	6d6	3d6	5d6
				6d6

Con 6d6	4d6	4d6	5d6	4d6
Int 3d6	5d6	4d6	4d6	4d6
Wis 4d6	3d6	7d6	3d6	5d6
Cha 3d6	7d6	6d6	4d6	5d6

	Paladin	Psion	Psychic Warrior or Soulnife	Ranger	Rogue	Wizard
Str	6d6	3d6	6d6	5d6	4d6	3d6
Dex	3d6	5d6	4d6	6d6	7d6	6d6
Con	4d6	5d6	6d6	4d6	4d6	5d6
Int	4d6	5d6	4d6	4d6	5d6	7d6
Wis	5d6	5d6	4d6	5d6	4d6	4d6
Cha	6d6	5d6	4d6	4d6	4d6	3d6

	Adept	Aristocrat	Commoner	Expert	Warrior
Str	3d6	4d6	3d6	3d6	5d6
Dex	4d6	3d6	3d6	4d6	4d6
Con	3d6	4d6	4d6	3d6	4d6
Int	4d6	4d6	3d6	5d6	3d6
Wis	5d6	4d6	4d6	4d6	3d6
Cha	4d6	4d6	3d6	4d6	4d6

Eliminate Ability Scores

Another possibility is to eliminate ability scores entirely, creating a simpler game (there are fewer numbers to add) with an entirely level playing field. The only ability scores that have any function other than to provide modifiers to other rolls are Strength (which gives carrying capacity) and the primary ability of spellcasters (which determine what level spell they are allowed to cast). Some feats and classes have ability score prerequisites, as well.

If you allow players to assign any reasonable carrying capacity based on character concept, grant spellcasters access to any level spell, and eliminate ability scores as prerequisites, the *d20 System* works fine with no ability scores at all. The complete lack of ability modifiers tends to cancel out (while a fighter gains no bonus to attack rolls from a high Strength, his targets gain no bonus to AC from a high Dexterity).

There are two noteworthy problems with this method. First, characters of the same class and race tend to be more alike without ability scores to differentiate them. Second, pre-written foes and monsters have their ability score modifiers added in. If you don't strip out such bonuses, the ability-free characters become significantly weaker compared to their traditional foes. Neither of these limitations is overwhelming, but they can eliminate the benefit of a simpler game by requiring constant adjustments during play time.

A similar idea is to replace all ability scores with a universal bonus value (+1 for lower-powered games, +2 for more typical games, +3 for heroic games), while still eliminating spell level limits and ability score prerequisites. This keeps characters more on par with generic opponents, but isn't all that different from just assigning heroic ability score arrays.

Customizing Classes

While ability scores have a strong impact on a character, class is the most important element to define a character's abilities. Without turning the game into a pure point-based system that allows a player to modify every aspect of his character if he's willing to sacrifice elsewhere, it's still possible to modify the strict class system to allow more options.

The Auction

Much like the ability score auction, the class auction is designed to ensure that every character has a protected niche that other characters can't impinge on. This is the only sense in which this system is balanced. Characters may be radically more or less powerful than one another, but each has attributes and powers other characters cannot match.

The basic progressions for each character are auctioned off at character creation, with other attributes auctioned as they are purchased.

The GM first holds an auction for d12 hit dice, and then one for d10 hit dice. After those two auctions, players may buy d8 hit dice for 1 point, d6 hit dice for 0 points, and d4 hit dice for -1 points.

Then the GM holds an auction for class skills and another for skill points per level. There are 4 skill progressions available, each giving a number of class skills or skill points per level (once a player has a given number of class skills, he may select any he wishes to be class skills up to that maximum). The GM auctions off the great and good skill ratings for both categories. Characters may buy the fair progression for 1 point, or take the poor progression for free.

Skill Rating	Skill Points/Class Level	Skills
Great	8	30
Good	6	24
Fair	4	16
Poor	2	8

The next items up for auction are attack progressions. These are broken into three categories: Strength-based, Dex-based, and spells. The Str-based attack progression is used for any weapon that gains an attack bonus from Strength, and the Dex-based is for any weapon that gains an attack bonus from Dexterity. The spell attack progression is used for all spells, spell-like and supernatural abilities and psionics (if such powers require attack rolls). In each case, the only progression bid on it the best, a +1 base attack bonus per level. A character may buy the second-best progression for 3 points, or take the poor progression for free.

Finally, the GM auctions exclusivity on core classes and prestige classes. A player need not bid on these, and no character may have exclusivity on more than one core class and one prestige class. If a character is granted exclusivity in a class, no other PC may take any levels in that class. The NPC classes (warrior, adept, etc.) are not bid on, and always remain open to all classes. Core classes are bid on first, in alphabetical order, and then any prestige class players indicate an interest in. If no one bids on any class, all remain open to all characters.

Regardless of what class a character takes, he uses the hit dice, saves, skills, and attack progressions won in auction or bought from lesser options. For example, a character who wins the Str attack progression can take levels in rogue, monk or wizard, but still has a base attack progressions of +1 per level for Str weapons.

Swaps

A much simpler system than the class auction is to allow ability swaps. Under this system, a character can give up his special abilities at a given level to gain the special ability another class gains at a lower level. The swap is only allowed if the character's current class gains an ability at his current level (a fighter can't exchange his special ability gained at 3rd level for a sorcerer's familiar, because the fighter doesn't gain anything at 3rd level).

A special ability gained only increases in power if it is not spellcasting related, and the ability given up increases in power. Otherwise, the special ability must be selected again to increase. The increase in power is figured as if the characters level was his current level minus the level the ability was gained at.

For example, a sorcerer decides he has no interest in a familiar, but would like an animal companion. Druids gain animal companions at 1st level, so the sorcerer is allowed to exchange his familiar for an animal companion starting at second level. Since both familiars and animal companions increase in level, the sorcerer treats his sorcerer level -1 as his druid level when determining what animal companion he can have and what special abilities it gains. If a fighter had exchanged his 2nd level bonus feat for an animal companion, it would be treated as the companion of a 1st level druid, even after the fighter gained levels.

Racial attribute swaps may also be allowed on a 2-for-1 basis. Thus a halfling could sacrifice his bonus to attacks with thrown weapons and his bonus to saving throws for low-light vision. A GM may allow attributes from sources other than player character racial options, but should also make sure new attributes allowed are close to these PC races normal get in terms of power level.

This system can easily produce characters that are much more or less powerful than baseline characters, but it also allows a quick, easy and flexible system for customize characters to more closely match a player's concept.

Ye Olde Majik Shoppe III

Five More Odd, Strange and Just Plain Weird Magical Items

by **K. David Ladage (with thanks to Chad Underkoffler)**

Did [Kendalge](#) actually live? Was this man [the Titan](#) that history has recorded? It may seem odd to question the existence of a man that has his signature on no less than 23 treaties and trade agreements that are still enforced 300 years after his death, but some respected and learned men do. Bravarix Calyuran, the great historian and sage, remains the most vocal advocate that the legendary Kendalge was no more than myth. In his masterwork, *A Definitive History Of The Realms Of The Second Age*, he wrote: "A man named Kendalge lived in the second age and he was important as well as influential; that much is not in dispute. But that man is not the Kendalge that we all read about, tell stories about, and study in our houses of learning. That man is a figment. History, lacking a truly epic figure in the second age, was forced to invent one."

Lord Calyuran has created ripples in scholarly circles, but most still believe that Kendalge was the man that they read about, told stories about and studied about in their youth. Still, no matter how you dissect his life, Kendalge remains the most interesting, most colorful character of the second age. In our previous two installments, we have seen 11 glimpses into the mind of this legend. Below are five more examples of his unique view of the world.

Little Dragons

Scholars agree that, with Kendalge's penchant for golem creation, the Little Dragons were obvious. Creating one for each of his children, Kendalge made between 20 and 63 Little Dragons. Each Little Dragon is a masterwork of sculpture. The head, body, and tail measure 12 to 15 inches; the thin, bat-like wings span twice that. The wings are functional, and Little Dragons fly much like hummingbirds.

What the Little Dragons are made of has never been determined. The material is tough (able to withstand a moderate blow from a broadsword without being damaged) but soft, smooth, pliable, and with a somewhat translucent quality. Each of the dragons is of a color chosen by the child it was created for. Most are monotone (the most common colors being rose, sky-blue and black); but a few are said to be rather eclectic: white with pink polka-dots, orange with yellow and green specks, and even a strawberry pattern of red and black.

Little Dragons were created to be part playmate, part nanny; thus, they are intelligent, non-aggressive, and docile. If unowned, a Little Dragon will seek out a child (ages 4 to 16) with which it can form a bond. The bonding process takes 12 to 48 hours. From that moment on, the dragon will consider itself the property of that child. It will take orders and will generally do whatever the child asks. However, it will not do anything that could result in harm for the child -- including sit idle while the child could come to harm¹. No Little Dragon has ever bonded to an adult; they do, however, remain bonded as a child enters adulthood. They will remain bonded to the same person until either the individual dies or upon the birth of the individual's first child. If the individual dies, as stated above, the dragon will seek out a new child to bond with. If the individual has a child of their own, upon the birth of that infant, the

¹ One of the most famous Little Dragons was the sky-blue construct known as Cloudchaser. Cloudchaser was created for Elizabeth, the eldest child of Kendalge and Queen Chelsea V. As a youth, Princess Elizabeth was rarely seen without her beloved companion. In a surviving portion of her diary, she wrote: "Cloudchaser seems to instinctively know who has authority over me: be it mother, father, any of my aunts and uncles, even the Chancellor. If anything I ask her to do contradicts what she has heard them tell me (or her!) then Cloudchaser will not do as I ask. The Chancellor has gotten to the point that he will not pass on any message from my parents unless Cloudchaser is present."

Little Dragon will begin withdrawing its attention from the individual and start bonding with the child. In this circumstance, the unbonding/rebonding period is 12 to 48 *months* (instead of hours). By age 4, the child will command the Little Dragon's sole allegiance.

Little Dragons appear to understand all forms of spoken communication; they cannot speak, however. Instead, they have a high-pitched, bark-like yip. Even without words, they have amazingly emotive faces and can easily convey their meaning. Some claim that the dragons are empathic, at least with their bonded child, and thus can alert a parent or guardian of any need the child might have. These two traits have led many to speculate that the dragons can both read and project emotions; others go so far as to claim that they are telepathic.

Other surviving entries suggest that Little Dragons can, and often do, shed their non-aggressive natures when the child they are bonded to is threatened. Some records claim that the dragons can be outright vicious; how dangerous they can be is debatable, considering that they have no claws, teeth or other natural weapons.

Mirror Of Stone And Sand

More formally known as the *Lautumiae Tabella* (Stone Tablet), the Mirror of Stone and Sand is currently located in the Imperial Palace, on a large table set before the throne and has been there for the last 212 years. Before that it was within the fortress glade of Verhais, the Grand Druid; the stone was moved shortly after his death. It is not known exactly when Kendalge created the stone, but some of Verhais' writings suggest it was the last item he ever enchanted.

The Mirror of Stone and Sand is a massive slab of shale measuring 19 feet by six feet, topped by three inches of very fine white and black sand. While the stone sits idle, the white sand settles to the bottom, leaving a dull black surface on top. Any attempt to remove the sand from the slab fails.

When activated the stone vibrates. The sand mixes into shades of gray. After a few moments, animated mirror images form in the sand². The vibration of the table strangely produces sounds corresponding to the images, often lending a tinny, muffled, or smothered quality to the audible aspects of the scene. Most images last for two to four minutes, after which the vibration stops and the sand separates.

In the two centuries since the stone was moved, it has produced images over a thousand times. Still, none have been able to deduce what causes it to activate. Thus, for the last 150 years or so, there has been a team of scribes assigned to stand watch over the stone and keep a record of any images and sounds that it produces. There are three rooms in the palace dedicated to the scrolls that describe these images.

Although the writings of Verhais suggest that the stone can produce images that are predictions of events that have not yet happened, all of the images on record have been of a scrying nature, or what sages call *far sight* (in other words, they are images of events that are taking place elsewhere at that moment). These images have ranged from events taking place within the walls of the palace, to those that are taking place as far away as the Isle of Gethimium, more than 5,000 miles away. The stone has warned of enemy ships landing at the port of Chestion during the Khorvan Revolution, the siege of Avendale that started the War of Seven Moons, and even a meeting between would-be assassins as they plotted to kill King Augustus III.

² The images that the stone produces are mirror images, like a reflection. Sometimes the images are perfectly clear as though on polished glass, other times they are wavy as though on a rippling pool of water, still other times they are distorted as though on curved metal. This has led to some speculation as to where the images come from.

One popular theory is that the Mirror of Stone and Sand is magically attuned to all reflective surfaces, and can (only?) reproduce images that are currently being reflected on one. If this is true, then it may be that the stone cannot be activated manually, but is instead activated by something particular to the reflection at its source. Although never proven, this theory has given rise to many of the current superstitions dealing with the nature of mirrors and reflections.

Naos Sanctum

Nearly 300 years ago, on the south side of a small island in the midst of Lake Vinitok, a marble keep towered over the lush greenery. Standing over 200 feet tall, the Naos Sanctum was created by Kendalge to serve as a retreat; a place where he could collect his thoughts in solemn solitude.

In the weeks following his death³, several people headed to the Northern Realms to loot the sanctum; none of them were successful. The entire 150 square miles of Lake Vinitok -- including the island and the sanctum -- had vanished; in its place was a barren and broken patch of land.

Since then, all over the known world, there have been sightings of the Sanctum. People report seeing a flash of green light, followed by the sudden appearance of Lake Vinitok, the island, and the sanctum. It always happens around midnight, during the new moon. Whatever used to be where the lake now rests is gone; displaced. Seven to 12 days later, people report a flash of blue light, followed by a complete restoration of the original topography. Those within the restored region report no time having passed from the moment they disappeared to the moment of restoration. Some would not even believe that anything had happened, were it not for the fact that a waxing moon now sits in the sky where the new moon had been.

The same cannot be said for those that are on the lake, on the island, or within the sanctum when the flash of blue light comes and the region disappears. When the sanctum is next spotted (usually many years later), those caught by this effect are simply *gone*. Where they go is a mystery that may never be solved. Since Kendalge died, none have ever entered the Sanctum and returned to tell about it; thus speculation as to the contents of the Sanctum are futile.

The only writings that describe the inside of the Sanctum are from Halvord, former apprentice to Kendalge and Grand Wizard to the throne of King Augustus III. But even he was invited into the sanctum only twice. In one passage he explains ". . . each and every stone of the keep was enchanted in some way to enhance the functionality of the place. Some would glow with light to eliminate the need for lanterns or torches; others would alert Kendalge of the movements that took place within the walls; still others seemed to transport items and persons from one place within the sanctum to another, such as the elaborate waste disposal system that aided in keeping the entire place immaculately clean."

A full rendering of the various enchantments and curiosities that Halvord describes is beyond the scope of this work. Halvord wrote 3 massive tomes dedicated to the Sanctum in his lifetime, and as a footnote to the last volume admitted to only having scratched the surface. This is evidenced by the fact that nothing he described could come close to explaining why the Sanctum vanished in the first place, let alone why it keeps coming back every few years.

Orlantha's Shields

³ Kendalge died between 300 and 350 years ago, assassinated by his own Grand-daughter. Kendalge reigned as Lord Protector of the Northern Regions for 36 years (including the last 27 years of the reign of King Beaufort VII, and the first 9 years of Queen Chelsea V's reign). When he married the Queen, he relinquished his title. A year later, Princess Elizabeth was born. When Chelsea died, Elizabeth assumed the throne as Queen Elizabeth III. Elizabeth is universally regarded as the most beloved monarch the Old Realms had ever known.

Queen Elizabeth's reign, although long, peaceful, and prosperous, ended in a bloody revolution. Princess Zoheret, the Queen's third child and oldest daughter, killed her parents, her grandfather, three of her five siblings, and the majority of the Royal Court. She single handedly ended the era of the Old Realms and ushered in the Age of the Empire. Many go so far as to say that Zoheret's rise to (and fall from) power marked the end of the Second Age.

Even in his younger days, Kendalge was a man that demanded attention. He and his band of adventurers went on dozens of quests, and vanquished many a deadly beast. It was an eclectic group, to say the least, consisting of six people from all walks of life. But the fair-haired beauty (and the *face* of the group) Orlantha, was the one that stole the heart of Kendalge. Depending upon the source, Orlantha was Kendalge's first wife, his fifth wife, or was both⁴. However, they all agree that at some point in their adventuring days, long before the first marriage, Kendalge created a pair of magical shields for her. Only two sources give a physical description of the shields (Ghorik Shadowvale, Earl of Gyersetok, and Queen Alexandria II), and neither one describes them as shields in the traditional sense.

Physically, the shields were octagonal in shape, measured eight inches across and 1/8th inch thick. They were made from some sort of tangerine-colored crystal. They were each attached to finely woven metallic cloth sashes. Ghorik claims that the shields were worn like a belt, with the sashes tied around the waist; Queen Alexandria describes them as being worn over the shoulders, with the crystals on the upper chest. Once in place, the shields created a protective barrier. The effect was two-fold.

The first effect, Ghorik tells us, ". . . the left crystal will prevent the name of the wearer from being uttered by anyone. The person can be thought of, visualized, even described in detail. But nothing will allow that name to escape their lips. In fact, the name cannot be written, or even thought of, so long as the crystal remains in place . . ." Some of his writings suggest that an attempt to read the name would even fail, but he is never specific on that point. Later in his work, he speculates that the wearer is unaffected by the crystal.

Queen Alexandria, who owned the shield for 22 years, wrote that she often wore the left crystal when she was not in court. This, many believe, explains the fact that, although she reigned for over three decades, there is very little written about her that she did not pen herself.

The second effect, Ghorik writes, ". . . comes from the right crystal. This cloaks the individual from the soul, heart, and mind. You can see the one that wears the shield, but you pay them no attention at all. They blend in to their surroundings like a plant, a pillar; they are like servants at a Royal Banquet and given as much regard . . ." Not surprisingly, there is little written about this effect.

Penumbra Cloak

Although legends have often included items that involve shadows in some form, few have created as much interest over the years as Kendalge's Penumbra Cloak. The

⁴ It is interesting to note that Kendalge may or may not have married Orlantha. His first wife, in most sources is not named; the few records of her simply state that she was "a fair-haired beauty." Some go as far as to say that she was Kendalge's first love. Since many primary and secondary sources tend to describe Orlantha the same way, it is often inferred that she was his first wife.

The problems arise when one starts reading about his fifth wife. Some sources claim he was only married four times, others go as high as 11; most center on the range of 4-7. However, of those that include a fifth wife, nearly all of them give the name as Orlantha. Strangely, the description of the fifth wife is divided into three camps: "a fair-haired beauty," or "a dark-haired raven," or "a silver-haired enchantress." Thus, many scholars have speculated that this is a different woman altogether, concluding that Kendalge either (a) never married his old adventuring partner, or (b) married two women named Orlantha. Still, there is one camp that suggests Kendalge actually married Orlantha, divorced her at some point, and then married her again later in life. Reasons for this supposed divorce are never given.

⁵ Very few originals of the scrolls penned by Kendalge exist today. Most were destroyed in the

Penumbra Cloak is one of only a handful of items created by Kendalge that have original records written by him that describe it⁵. Its purported abilities astound, and often amuse, scholars and sages.

The cloak is made from thin, translucent, black and silver, silk-like material. Even during the stillest (or most turbulent!) of weather, it is described as "rippling and flowing as though struck by a gentle summer breeze." Once the cloak is donned, the wearer's shadow will become darker than usual, and take on a liquid-like quality. Via mental command, the shadow can be re-shaped. The total surface area of the shadow cannot be made larger or smaller; but the shape can be made into anything the wearer desires. Many children's stories describe people using the cloak to put on fantastic shadow-puppet shows.

The air within the shadow of the cloak is cooler and drier than the surrounding area. Kendalge's notes suggest that this drop in temperature is about one to six degrees. Other writings claim that this drop is much more dramatic.

Living beings that are touched by the shadow experience a rush of calm. "The individuals are unable to feel the stronger, primal emotions. Instead, the primal emotions are repressed, soothed, and held at bay; they experience complete clarity of mind." Although these are his words, later in the same text he explains that the cloak cannot cure maladies of the mind. "If the mind is damaged such that there is no clarity to be had, it is not going to be found within this shadow."

The clarity offered by the shadow does, however, make those within its effects much less susceptible to magical trickery. They can see through illusions, as well as resist mental control and manipulation. The effect on animals is just as dramatic: even the most agitated beasts are calmed, and magical manipulations of the animal are countered. It is unclear if the one wearing the cloak is given the same clarity of mind.

six months or so following his death; Zoheret was evidently blinded with rage, and determined to ensure that all of her grandfather's work was obliterated. She was less than complete in her endeavors, as some 6,000 pages of his work remain to this day. Granted, the vast majority of these documents are copies of copies of copies . . . and many copies of the same document have discrepancies and variations between them.

There are easily triple this many forgeries that attempt to pass themselves off as original works; most are woefully lacking in any real skill or insight. Of the hundred or so pages of accepted authentic originals that have survived the ages, only a handful of his creations are described: Aaron's Sword, Gemmomarmor, the Houseplant, the Naos Sanctum, the Penumbra Cloak, and the Seven-Jeweled Crown are the most written about. Of these, only Gemmomarmor is given any real detail.

At least two-thirds of all Kendalge manuscripts of accepted authenticity are currently owned by the scholar-knight Sir Chaddwyke Earl of Overcliffe, and are kept in the tower that was once Kendalge's personal library while he served under King Frederick XIX. One interesting work that is a part of this collection is an ornately bound book that remains unread -- and unmoved -- to this day (see FLY PAPER). Since it is unknown if anything is penned on those pages, it is not generally regarded as one of the accepted authentic original works.

Second String Goes Cosmic

by Brian Rogers

Not all super-heroes are created equal. [Super-teams](#) often have some members with cosmic abilities while others rely on skill and determination. Ordinarily GMs who accept those power disparities work within them to keep all the players equally involved, even when Omniman, conduit to a higher plane of reality, works alongside Dr. Sun, the team's science advisor. Sometimes, however, you want to [change direction](#) and give the PCs something really dangerous. Something cosmic. But if you're straining your powerful heroes to their utmost, how do you keep the second stringers involved?

Here are five possibilities, with three such "second stringers" illustrating how to use them.

#1: Abilities only used in a certain environment

Sometimes a second stringer is actually a "fish out of water": the hero is very powerful in his own environment but only moderately powerful out of it. The classic example is a water-breathing hero, but other environments (high magic, space, etc.) are equally likely. If the player constructed the character with this in mind, your job is easy -- put part of the cosmic problem in the environment and let the hero kick butt. If your player didn't build the PC with environment-specific powers, you can still give him a boost -- if the hero has never been in space, how do we know that unfiltered cosmic rays won't triple his powers?

Certainly the person playing the "fish out of water" will appreciate the opportunity to show off what his character can really do, and it might change the public perception of the hero. If the other players see their water breathing teammate as a second stringer, having the forces of hell emerging from the Laurentian Abyssal will show them how much *they* suck outside *their* environment, and maybe putting the fish bowl over the water breather's head last New Year's wasn't a great idea.

#2: Ability is not used often, if at all

Some heroes have powers that they seldom use. Usually these are quirk abilities (Iron-Man's rocket skates and Hulk's ability to see astral forms come to mind), but sometimes they're significant (Snowbird can compel others to help her in her battle against the Great Beasts) and can upgrade the hero to the cosmic conflict if he chooses to employ them.

Alternately the power is used frequently, but never to its full extent: a character who makes mental contact with her allies may be a powerful telepath who finds contacting unfamiliar minds distasteful; the [ruler of a small country](#) has enormous resources that take some time to mobilize; a vigilante who raises fogs in his war on crime could manipulate *any* weather, but at a [terrible cost](#) to the ecosphere. When the world or universe is threatened, however, all bets are off.

#3: Ability has not been used creatively before.

The PC regularly uses these powers, but never to their full versatility. One of the classic comic book tropes is the fledgling hero learning to use his powers, or the experienced one discovering that his limitations were self-imposed. Do you have someone playing a pyrokinetic? Could he act as a catalyst for chemical reactions? If he can quench fires, why can't he freeze things by eliminating heat? Does the power need to be targeted to a single point, or could the PC ignite every inch of an alien craft at once?

The DC universe had a great run of such heroes in the late 1980s. The best example may be Grant Morrison's *Animal Man*, where his ability to borrow the powers of nearby animals grows via a broader awareness of what animals can do ("A moth's sense of smell is as far beyond a dog's as a dog's is beyond a human's"), a comic-book sensibility ("I knew

I could use the life cycle of a bacteria to my advantage!") and ultimately overcoming the "nearby" limitation, giving him the power of any animal, anywhere.

#4: New powers emerge.

As the grand struggle falls upon the Earth, the second-string hero develops new powers. This can be a cop out ("here, have 50 more points or you'll get your butt kicked") to balance the scales, but doesn't have to be. Methods as diverse as experiments by enemy agents, a near-death experiences opening up new powers, or mystical revelations that this is the war the hero was destined to fight can provide a super-rationale for the power upgrade. Alternately, the PC could swipe his teammate's (or enemy's!) devices, as Hawkeye did to become Goliath during the Kree-Skrull war.

These new powers may fade after the cosmic threat disappears, or could be the basis for a revamp of the hero -- creatively applying new powers can shift a second stringer into the top tier (as Alan Moore did in *Swamp Thing*). Both are equally acceptable. If after the war the Velvet Fog wants to go back to fighting crime in Las Vegas, perhaps its best if the extra weather control powers burn out or fade away.

#5: Why yes, I am outclassed. What of it?

Sometimes the hero is simply out of his depth. Just because his powers don't equal his companions, the character can still contribute [emotional viewpoints](#), knowledge, support, and determination. The outclassed hero symbolizes the normal man among gods, and the insights of such normal men are often instrumental.

To keep the players involved, develop tasks that don't rely on raw power. Maybe the crisis has a scientific solution that the outclassed hero could pursue. There could be valuable detective work to be done on the threat's origins while the cosmic heroes hold the line. There are likely friends and [loved ones](#) to defend during the crisis, providing a thematic parallel for the conflict. The second-string hero could be a liaison to the United Nations/NATO/Spirit Realm, with strong roleplaying opportunities in getting reluctant allies to commit forces.

Mountain Man

"Are you ready to feel the Mountain Rumble?"

--Mountain Man

No one knows what made the bears so intelligent. Some suspect that it was fallout from the Nevada nuclear tests settling over the Rockies. Others blame the chemicals released during strip mining. That it happened, however, is undeniable, and the latter half of the 20th century saw a breed of Grizzly that was indeed, smarter than the average bear . . . or human. These highly cerebral ursines felt their innate ability to locate each other, and congregated to discuss many things: dealing with humans, advancing technology, resource management strategies, and controlling their psychic powers. Eventually there were too many spread across too much area for a direct democracy, so the Grizzly Republic was born.

On that day many ursine sensitives felt the birth of their eventual leader, and one albino grizzly tried to derail destiny by killing the child. He was stopped (and turned out as a nameless renegade) but all were surprised to learn that his intended victim wasn't a Grizzly at all, but a human

Tri-Stat Stats The Mountain Man (175 pts)

Body 8 Mind 11 Soul 11
ACV 11 DCV 8 Health 95

Attribute Characteristics

Attack Combat Mastery (1)
Growth (1) grants Superstrength 1, Immovability 1, Armor 1, +5 damage melee, ×2 move.
Highly Skilled (1)
Organizational Ties (8) Grizzly Republic

Power Characteristics

Power Flux -- Animals (6) 30 Flux points, Flux per round. Gain powers of animals amplified up to a hundredfold (i.e., Strength of 100 grizzlies,

child, orphaned by the White Bear's attack. The Republic raised the child as one of their own, and he grew large and strong. Whatever gave the Grizzlies their talents for telepathy and technology gifted the human with the ability to take on a hundred times the power of an animal -- he could have the strength of a hundred grizzlies, or the endurance of a hundred wolves. This power made let him face those who would drive the Grizzlies to war with their human neighbors.

He came to understand the Grizzlies from both inside their culture and as an outsider, forging bridges between them and directing them against the White Bear. When pressed to be their leader, he demurred, saying that he needed to experience his own kin for a time. With that he divested himself of his technology and hiked into Denver, taking the name John Bear. He has taken a human as mate, the girl Daisy-Mae (who, over the course of [their relationship](#) is occasionally amnesiac and sometimes dead.) Circumstances forced him to use his powers, so he adopted another identity to continue his research of humans unobserved. Hence the Mountain Man was born, and he has become a occasional member of the world's superhuman community.

Mountain Man is a second stringer in the super-human community. His one power is often used in goofy ways ("I have the climbing ability of a hundred squirrels!"). He spends much of his time fighting battles in the Rocky Mountains, and operates out of a city that isn't a normal super-hero venue. None of this should hide the character's raw potential, which can be explored by using some of the methods mentioned earlier:

Method #2: Mountain Man's connections with the technologically superior Grizzly Republic could be made public, or he could accept the position as their leader. In either case Mountain Man could start sporting advanced technology and call on a small army of psychic and/or genius Grizzlies to face any cosmic threat.

Method #3: Technically, Mountain Man has the "power of a hundred animals" and his penchant for sticking to individual powers of mountain fauna is just a crutch. He *could* adopt the flight speed of a dozen hawks, the strength of thirty elephants, the venom of eighteen spitting cobras, the reflexes of twenty cheetahs and the durability of twenty turtles. Plus, in a comic book world, you need to grant considerable leeway in real vs. proportional measures: if a hamster can hold a 1/1000th of its body volume in a cheek pouch, Mountain Man could use the cheek pouches of a hundred hamsters to hold 1/10 of his volume in his mouth. At 7+ feet and 400+ pounds, that's a lot of cheek! Other oddities could be the spiritual sensitivity of a hundred cats or even the intelligence of a hundred humans!

Method #4: No one really knows whether the Grizzly Republic origin's really lie in scientific mutation. The caves of the Rocky Mountains could hold mystic wellsprings, alien outposts, or anything else that could cause a radical re-thinking of Mountain Man's origins. Likely power boosts: animal control, magical powers or alien technology.

Monarch

climbing of 100 squirrels, etc.). This does not allow for changes in form but he can still, for instance, fly w/o wings.

Natural Weapons (1) Mountain Man's fingernails are very hard and slightly sharp, acting as claws.

Defects

Always on -- Growth (1) Stands at well over seven feet, weighs over 400 lb.

Nemesis: White Bear (3) The psychic ursine who killed his family and wants his throne.

SO: Daisy Mae (2) His occasionally dead/amnesiac girlfriend/wife. If currently dead, make Nightmares (2)

Skeleton in Closet (2) Existence of the Grizzly Republic

Skills

Animal Training -- Cougars (3)

Area Knowledge -- Rocky Mountains (3)

Cultural Arts -- Grizzly Republic(2)

Intimidation -- Political(2)

Management -- Small Republic(3)

Stealth -- Camouflage(2)

Wilderness Survival -- Mountains(3)

Wilderness Tracking -- Mountains(3)

Unarmed Attack-Strikes(2)

"Things. things are coming from tomorrow. Listen."
--Monarch

We can't pronounce his name, but we do know that he was royalty among his people, the people of the lost fifth planet. He was testing his wings in deep space when his world literally collapsed and something threw him into a torpor. He awoke millennia later as the sole survivor of a world that was now rubble. He spread his wings wide, detected the radiation from the third planet, and saw no choice but to make it his new home. Of course, it took him some time to communicate with the locals, who were not prepared for an attenuated (and antennaed!) winged man, and misunderstood the [warnings of events](#) he foresaw through his tachyon awareness. The situation would have been worse had some [government agents](#) not forged a bond with the alien.

Despite having some friends, the being named Monarch (both for his royal blood and his wings, which resemble those of the terrestrial butterfly) finds much of humanity incomprehensible, and often returns to space to mourn his lost world. A combination of noble obligation, his camaraderie with "super-heroes" and the clear cut nature of the situation pushes him to fight crime, even if he attracts increasingly [bizarre foes](#) like flames to a moth. Monarch wields a iron mace: once used to disrupt the wings of an adversary, he find it equally effective in deterring more terrestrial threats.

Despite his greater-than-human strength, speed and durability, Monarch's main power is his wings, actually a pair of energy fields that redirect gravity and act as solar sails. They are solid enough to repel kinetic attacks, and absorb energy to heal him. They burn to touch, making them effective weapons. He can also reflect and amplify energy striking them. He does need to actively block kinetic attacks with his wings -- more of a limitation on earth than in space, where they spread a half a kilometer per side.

The sole surviving alien is usually a powerful archetype in comics, so it's strange that Monarch is often regarded as a lesser hero. This assumption is far from the truth.

Method #1: Monarch's natural home is space, and when in Earth's atmosphere he's extremely limited: his wings only extend meters; his access to solar energy is reduced; his flight is limited to hundreds of kph. Hence he seems a capable enough hero, flying across a city, blocking attacks with his wings and reflecting light to blind his foes. In space, however, he flits between planets, can protect starships with his kilometer-wide force fields and obliterate enemies with unfiltered solar radiation.

Tri-Stat Stats Monarch (200 pts)

Body 14 **Mind** 9 **Soul** 7
ACV 10 **DCV** 10 **Health** 105

Characteristic Attributes

Gadgets (1) One minor gadget always an iron sword or mace.
Combat Technique (1) Block Ranged Attack
Highly Skilled (3)
Extra Attacks (1)
Defense Combat Mastery (2)

Power Attributes

Flight (4) fly at 500 kph
Force Field* (5) 40/80 pts, Offensive for 20/40 damage, Limited (kinetic only), Shield (in Atmosphere) Area PMV 2/5
Damage Conversion* (8) Convert 4(8) of each 20 damage taken to Special Attacks. Only vs. energy. These can raise damage or generate new special effects.
Damage Absorption* (8) absorb 40/80 damage per hit to health. Only vs. Energy
Hyperflight (1)
Sixth Sense -- Precognition* (5)
Special Attack* (6) 20/100 damage, Flare, Spreading, Low penetration
Special Defense (4) Does not breathe, functionally photosynthetic, Adapted to space

Defects

Less Capable -- Charisma (1) Soul counts as 4 for charisma purposes.
Marked (3) glowing wings, feathery ears and eyebrows, attenuated form
Minimum Force (4) Can only use top 4 ranks of *'s powers in space.
Unappealing (3)
Unreliable -- 6th sense (1) has -2 on Mind checks to control power.
Wanted -- Theme Villain Rogues Gallery (2)

Skills

Architecture -- 5th world designs (3)
Area Knowledge -asteroid belt (1)

Method #2: Monarch's wings are able to filter any sort of particle, and that includes tachyons moving backwards through time. This gives Monarch precognitive powers, but he has abandoned their use due to his inability to convey his meaning to humans. Still, he could develop this, using it either to outmaneuver threats or to gain advantages in combat.

Method #3: Likewise, that filtering applies to energy amplification. Monarch restricts himself to light, but he could just as easily amplify and redirect electricity, hard radiation or even gravity if he wished.

Method #5: Despite these advantages, Monarch might still be outclassed inside an atmosphere. This would not keep him from being involved. He can contribute a unique, alien viewpoint to discussions, flit in and out of the atmosphere for rapid world-wide support, and might be the lynchpin for any stratagem that involves luring opposition into his preferred environment.

Dr. Sun

"I sometimes look at my side job and think 'How did I get here?'"

--Dr. Sun

Dr. Sundya Shrinivasen is quite likely the world's greatest expert on biochemical toxicology. She's written books, taught classes, and developed dozens of techniques and formulas that help in everyday life as well as in esoteric surgery. When she hit a wall in what she could learn with the existing equipment, she branched out and started constructing scientific instrumentation based on innovative theories that were useful not just for her own work but for everyone from police to astro-physicists. This led to another round of books and classes, and then to an unexpected request: Earth's mightiest heroes needed her assistance when dealing with an alien toxin that had infected the atmosphere.

Dr. Shrinivasen (Sun, to her friends) stepped in and helped the heroes prevent this calamity. In doing so, she proved to them just how talented she was. When invisible extra-dimensional beings threatened River City, the Blur sprinted to Bangalor to ask for some help. A designer drug that gave people the heads of animals led Ominman to her door. Then Vigilance sought help upgrading his own sensory devices. That case led to her being attacked, and defending herself with some specially designed neurotoxins. Next thing she knew, Dr. Sun had her own signal device and chair at the meeting table.

While still *just* a normal human, Dr. Sun is not to be underestimated. Her ability to design and apply both advanced sensory equipment and designer toxins "on the

Melee Attack -- Mace (3)
Melee Defense -- Wings (2)
Piloting -- Spacecraft (1)
Ranged Defense -- Personal (3)
Ranged Special Attack -- Flare Effect (2)

Tri-Stat Stats Dr. Sun (125 pts)

Body 7 Mind 12 Soul 8
ACV 6 DCV 9 Health 75

Attribute Characteristics

Highly Skilled (5)
Gadeteer (6) Restricted: sensory/transmission or chemical/medical devices, ×60 speed
Gadgets (4) 5 advanced and 10 regular items
Wealth (3) easy access to 5 million
Defense Combat Mastery (2)

Power Characteristics

Item of Power (1) Coat gives Armor (10/30 vs. chem, unprotected areas) & Features (tons o' pockets)
Item of Power (1) Multi-scanner. Normally has IR/UV/X-Ray/ht. Vision ×2; Defect: Concentration (1)
Item of Power (8) Bio-Chemical equipment, this is a scad of devices throughout jacket pockets.
Special Defense (4) Immune Own Attributes, resist pain and toxins
Healing (1) heal 20 damage per target per day, no range, 1 target at a time.
Special Attack (4) Incapacitate (Body check), Area (4m rad), Melee (drop or throw), Toxic, No damage

fly" makes her a very versatile character, and her knowing exactly how human she is means that she's not one to take foolish risks. Even still she isn't as strong as her teammates. But she could be.

Method #3: Dr. Sun is already hip deep in creative uses for her abilities, but you should give her every opportunity to design more. She routinely carries around "base components" for toxins, which let her use her Gadgeteering to tailor special attacks, protect or heal her allies or alter the field of battle (such as with her sensory-deadening, radio-wave-absorbing smoke grenades).

Method #4: It would be a violation of her character concept for Dr. Sun to develop a power-inducing drug, but it might happen in an emergency. Better would be her unveiling a remote controlled probe with broad spectrum sensory and projected toxin capabilities, or an armored battlesuit stocked full of even more varied and powerful chemicals and equipment than will fit in her Kevlar lab coat.

Method #5: Dr. Sun is the archetypical outclassed hero. She's simply *not* superhuman, and her lifetime of education hasn't included decades of combat training. She is, however, a brilliant theoretician and engineer who is well connected with both scientists and law enforcement and is a world famous, passionate public speaker. She's already proven that if lives are in jeopardy she won't hesitate to act, and to find some way to make those actions meaningful.

* * *

*Special thanks to the **Pyramid** boards for their help and inspiration on this article. Specifically, thanks to Bill Stoddard for "the Cheek Pouches of a Hundred Hamsters."*

Secondary Special Attack (3) Drain Body (3 pts), Irritant (-3 Body check), Spreading, Short Range, Toxic, No damage
Secondary Special Attack (3) 80 damage poison, Burning (8 dam/rd), Stun (can't kill), Melee, Toxic
Sensory Block (1) Visual, scent, radio, Area 3 (10 m), Range 1(10 m), Duration 3 (1 min)

Defects

Less Capable -- Str (1) Body only counts as 4 for Strength purposes
Famous (2) "That scientist who hangs out with super-heroes"
Ism (1) Normal Human Among Supers, Indian Woman

Skills

Biological Sciences -- Bacteria/Viruses (4)
Computers- Networks (2)
Electronics -- Sensors (4)
Management -- Small Business (1)
Medical -- Pharmacy (3)
Melee Attack -- Epi-pen (1)
Performing Arts -- Oratory (1)
Physical Science -- Physics, Chemistry (3)
Poisons -- Synthetic (4)
Police Science -- Forensics (1)
Ranged Special Attack -- Gas Sprayer (2)
Writing- Technical (1)

Pyramid Review

Dracula's Revenge

Produced by [Human Head Studios](#)

Published by [Green Ronin Publishing](#)

Designed by Matt Forbeck

Box Cover Art by Brian Snoddy & Tommy Lee Edwards

Cartography by Matt Forbeck

32-page Rule Booklet, 20 square Map Tiles, nine six-sided dice, 12 Mist Counters, 12 Doors, 36 Character Cards, 36 Action Cards, two Reference Cards, & two Die Screens; \$29.99

Just as he has proven popular on the big and small screen, Dracula has been a popular subject for games from TSR's *Undead* and Steve Jackson Games' *Vampyre* to licenses such as *Bram Stoker's Dracula: The Board Game* from Leading Edge Games. The latest comes from Human Head Studio by way of Green Ronin Publishing. This game also has a tie-in; a two-issue comic series from IDW written by game designer Matt Forbeck.

Dracula's Revenge takes place after the events of Bram Stoker's novel, the central villain having faked his death at the climax of the book. In 1898, Dracula returns to London and establishes a coven beneath its streets. In response to this threat to both city and empire, Van Helsing has once again assembled a fearless band of stake, crossbow, and crucifix-wielding stalwarts; together they will enter the Vampire Lord's labyrinth, and put an end to this menace to Queen and country.

The game's components are all of a decent quality. The Map Tiles depicting the tunnels and spaces below London are marked in 3-cm squares. The two Reference Cards are lighter card stock, while the Action Cards and their corresponding Character Cards are done on user-friendly plastic card. The two Die Screens are also sturdy. Everything is done in full color, except for the small rulebook, which is generally well written. If there is a problem with all of this, it is getting it back into the box, which is solid and compact but a little tight.

Dracula's Revenge is a two-player game, with one player controlling the Hunters and the other the Vampires. The Hunters have numbers, weapons, and faith on their side, while the Vampires have strength and the supernatural. This includes the ability to transform into mist, enslave or mesmerize Hunters (turning them into minions), and growing in strength and ability. Dracula's forces include, in ascending level of power, minions, She-Wolves, Nosferatu, and Vampiresses, while Van Helsing leads Stakers, Crossbows, and Priests.

Each type has a range of bonuses in three areas: Close Attack, Ranged Attack, and Defense. Vampires have 9 Action Points to spend per turn, while Hunters have 6. The core mechanic is simple, and consists of opposed rolls of a single die each, the higher result determining the winner. The Defense Bonus is used to stop all types of attack, with Close Attacks only possible into adjacent squares, and Ranged Attacks needing at least a square's distance to be effective.

Where the mechanics and game play begin to get interesting is in determining play order each turn. At the beginning of a turn, players take it in turn to lay down an Action Card to create an "action time line." A player does not have to put down an Action Card, but if both pass, then the last card put down must be turned over and the corresponding

character counter must take its actions. Once he has done so, then both return to laying down the Action Cards until both participants have emptied their hand and all counters have taken their actions. Initially it is better to refrain from playing cards, the aim to get your opponent to activate his characters first, leaving you free to act later in the turn.

While each character has a limited number of Action Points per turn, both players have reserves of Reaction Points that vary from turn-to-turn. Determined by a roll of 1d6+6, the number is recorded on two dice, called the Tally Dice and kept hidden behind a player's die screen. Further as an active character moves or takes his actions, any inactive character that sees him can move or do something. This can be a character controlled by either player; the inactive character is allowed a single action. Thus for example, a Vampiress could move through a doorway past an inactive Nosferatu, who could react by closing the door, allowing the Vampiress to continue her actions. Likewise, an inactive character could react by attacking the currently moving character.

Both the rules for Action Cards and Reaction Points add a degree of complexity to *Dracula's Revenge*. Not a high one, but possibly enough to attract the more dedicated gamer. That said, they are not as clearly explained as they should be, and in some ways are easier to understand in the practice than in the read.

Dracula's Revenge is played in scenarios that employ the 20 Map Tiles. Five simple scenarios are included that start out with the introductory "Into the Breach," and culminate in "Destroy Dracula." They are designed to teach the game through facing increasingly powerful foes, and presumably follow the plot of the comic.

Point Values for each of the characters shows that the Vampires have the edge on the weaker Hunters in terms of power and ability. The Point Values also suggest that it is possible to design scenarios of your own, but this is a little supported aspect of the game. Further, neither the rules nor the plainness of the Map Tiles really help with this aspect, as they do not really provide much in the way of inspiration.

Dracula's Revenge is a game of pluses and minuses that balance each other out. It is a little expensive for what it offers, but then the components are all very high quality. Play and design is probably a little too simple, but it is a solid design. The game is enough, then, to attract the young gamer or someone wanting a lighter game, but really *too* light for the dedicated gamer, who will want something more to tinker with. The game is also the first of the designer's *Gothika* line, and it might be enough to draw players to *Dracula's Revenge*, because otherwise, the game really does lack that hook that will attract them. Solid a design *Dracula's Revenge* may well be, but future releases will need more depth.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Election USA

Published by [Mongoose Publishing Ltd.](#)

Designed by Martin Wallace

Edited by Ian Barstow

Layout by Alexander Fennell

Art by Jim Brady

Full-color mounted game board, 107 cards, 90 player pawns in five colors, five markers, 50+ money counters, rules sheet, boxed, three to five players; \$24.95

Once every four years the United States picks a president, and every four years you can count on at least one company putting out a game to take advantage of this. Oddly, this year it's a British company, and unlike most such games, this one isn't awful. Mongoose Publishing is the company, and the game is called *Election USA* (probably to make the distinction to their local fans that it isn't a Tony Blair simulation).

Unless they can take a joke, conservatives might want to approach this game cautiously. Three to five players are duking it out for the Republican nomination (these games are always about getting the nomination instead of the presidency itself), and the GOP takes it on the chin accordingly. The object is to secure the nod by having the most Victory Points (VPs) at the end.

Starting with some pawns (representing your influence -- the rest of your tokens wait in a general pool), a little war chest, and some Sincerity points, you build support across the country. The board is a map of America, broken up into six general areas (such as the South or the West Coast), and each offers varying VP values. The board also has a track for keeping score of everyone's Sincerity. Action cards are placed face up around the edges of the board.

The active player either increases his Sincerity or takes a face-up card. Action cards have a number in the corner, and you add that many points to your Sincerity when you pull from the deck. If you go for a face-up card, it's a little more complicated. Fund Raising adds to your coffers, but your opponents may also get an infusion of cash. Policy cards (like "Annex Canada" or "Deport Michael Moore") let you take more of your pawns from the general pool if you win the bid -- the bid here is paid in Sincerity points. You also bid on Advertising cards, but you spend money and it's a silent auction. Advertising cards list an area of the board, and the high bid places tokens in that area, increasing his influence.

But when you choose a face-up card you have to replace it, and the new card may be Blackmail or Journalist. If a Blackmail card is drawn, the active player must pay the stated amount or take a Skeleton. Skeletons are dragged out of your closet to embarrass you, though the effects vary. Some scandals force you to lose a pawn from your stash or, worse, from the board. Other humiliations may be a mixed bag -- the porn video that surfaces may lose you a vote in the Midwest but *give* you one on the West Coast. If the active player pays, the person to his left must pay or take the Skeleton. Once someone has taken the Skeleton, the process stops. Journalist cards work the same way, but you lose Sincerity to avoid the scandal.

Unlike a real primary, this one ends when one player has collected four Skeletons; when one person places his last pawn on the board; or when the Action deck is exhausted. Points are tallied. The highest VP value in each area goes to the candidate with the most pawns there, the second-highest to the next most popular contender, etc. Any players tied for number of pawns in an area remove their tokens and are out of that area's running. This adds another layer of strategy to placement, but at the same time...why? It might make more sense if this happened to those tied for last (to simulate giving one's support to someone else when it's obvious you have no chance to win). If a player ended the game with four Skeletons, he is penalized. The highest total overall wins.

Substandard materials are about the biggest problem with the game's presentation. The cards aren't busy, so there's room aplenty for the simple text and graphics, and the board is a mounted, folding item that has space enough for the many little tokens you'll place. But the box depends more on its layered construction than on strong cardboard for its stability, and the cards are really thin. They shuffle well, but you pay the price for the stock they've used.

However, given that it's an import, all these pieces and components are coming in at a reasonable price, and better materials might have jacked that up a bit. The game mechanics are quite clever and provide some good strategic options. Some rule oversights -- do lost tokens return to the pool or the owner? -- are to be expected given the odd way in which the rules are presented. It's almost as though they were written in reverse, and you end up reading them at least twice. It also lacks a certain magnetism, in that it's hard to get personally invested in the mechanics. But in light of the poor track record for presidential bid games, *Election USA* is altogether too representative of the system: The pickings may be slim, but if there's one option that stands out, you may as well get behind it.

--Andy Vetromile

Paradise Paved; Parking in Rear

- Carl Barks.
- Shareware games.
- Bathtub appliqués.

What do these items have in common? Stay tuned, gentle reader . . .

As I write this, today is Thanksgiving here in the States. I may or many not have mentioned it before (and I'm too darn lazy to get online to check), but Thanksgiving is one of my favorite holidays. It is, in fact, quite possibly my favorite. The economic forces of the universe have yet to figure out how to make more money out of it; really, grocery stores notwithstanding, there isn't much moolah to be made, and there's a human limit to what we can buy for the holiday known in scientific circles as the Gut-Clutching Moaning-Pitifully-About-Poultry-and-Carbs Threshold. The closest the corporate masterminds have done is couple the holiday with the Christmas, but then my ire is directed at that holiday.

No, Thanksgiving is a holiday where you're just supposed to be thankful for what you have, and think about those who are less fortunate. And -- having received a degree in Creative Writing -- navel contemplation is a holiday I can really get behind.

So as I was lying awake last night, I realized I was trying to think of a different spin for a Thanksgiving column . . . preferably one I could tie into gaming, although that's not a deal breaker. And that's when I started concocting a list, consisting of the items above.

I am a Carl Barks quasi-fan. Carl Barks, for those of you who don't know, was an artist for various Disney comic books. He worked on Donald Duck tales, and created many characters and elements that are still part of the "duck canon" today (including Scrooge McDuck, the Beagle Brothers, Gyro Gearloose, the town of Duckburg, and many others). He had a brand of easy storytelling that gave his tales real depth; his characters didn't exist merely to deliver a gag or promote a brand -- they were *people* (well, ducks . . . you know what I mean).

Carl Barks was also very old for a very long time. When I first started working at the comic and game shop, he was in his 90s then. So I was sadly anticipatory of the day when I would learn of his passing. Anyway, a couple of years ago (in late 2002 or early 2003, I believe) I learned he had died . . . in 2000. Somehow I had missed news of his passing. I found myself in a strange emotional frame because of this. I wanted to grieve for his passing, but he had been dead for years; most people with whom I would have commiserated had done so back in 2000. ("Oh, yeah; you didn't know he was dead?" was the usual response from my like-minded circle of friends. Thanks, guys.)

<DERAIL> A couple of week ago I bought a new computer, to replace my old one, which had been utterly compromised by the most debilitating piece of malware I'd ever encountered (which, as I understand it, experts have dubbed "Windows XP"). So, since I had a snazzy new system and wanted to test it out a bit, I thought I'd try to find a few fun shareware games that might flex its muscles a bit. After a bit of searching, however. I came to the conclusion that the shareware scene -- as I had understood it -- was pretty much dead. Yes, the same marketing force that gave us *Doom* and *Doom II*, *One Must Fall*, *Epic Pinball*, and jillions of other games has gone the way of the dodo.

Oh, sure, I find any number of *Tetris* variants or "collect the coin" clones, and there are still some gems (such as the too-violent-for-words *Crimsonland*) but nothing on the scale of what existed back in the early and mid-1990s.

Data Point #3: A few months ago, back when I was playing the role of Mercutio in *Romeo & Juliet*, all the male members of the cast were wearing quasi-period-appearing boots, which were basically a thin cloth wrapped around our feet and sewn in a boot-like shape. For most of the cast, this style of footwear was completely fine. However, Mercutio jumps and runs around onstage a lot (especially when played by a spastic, balding red-head), and the boots were slippery on the wood tile floor. Couple this with the fact that I couldn't wear my glasses (since Flexon frames and high index of refraction lenses weren't invented until the Victorian era), and I had a recipe for literally breaking a leg.

So I thought I would give myself some extra traction by buying some of those rubber flower-things which go in bathtubs to keep you from slipping. They're sticky (so they'd adhere to the boots), they're cheap (always good for a community theatre budget), and I thought they were commonplace.

The day before the dress rehearsal told me how wrong I was on this last point. After searching six different places for them (grocery stores, drug stores, convenience stores, Wal-Mart's), I came to the conclusion that they just didn't make 'em anymore -- or, at the absolute least, they just didn't exist in my part of the country. (I might have become convinced that I'd hallucinated the whole thing if I didn't keep running into clerks, friends, and coworkers who knew exactly what I was talking about.) I eventually needed to tape rubber gloves to the boots, having exhausted all other reasonably convenient possibilities.

Anyway, the point behind these three anecdotes is not merely that we should appreciate what we have -- which is, admittedly, a pretty commonplace theme on Thanksgiving. Rather, it's to try to realize what we might *not* have, ideally at a time when we can still do something about it or at least appreciate it in its time left.

So many things that we take for granted now have a real possibility of ending up a fond memory. This is especially true in the computing world: USENET, while still extant, is a dying force, smothered by web-based newsgroups. (I can do a Google search of USENET posts from a decade ago, but in the transitory world of webgroups, posts from even a month ago can be gone forever.) Once it was possible to assume that, because of its text-based nature, most websites could be indexed and searched indefinitely. Now, because of the prevalence of websites heavy with Flash and Shockwave, which aren't easily searched or distilled, it's much harder to assume you've found all the relevant sites on a topic.

And, of course, this is true in the world of games. Boxed wargames were huge for a long time, killed primarily by computer wargames. *Choose Your Own Adventure*-style gaming books were omnipresent; now they're a novelty. Boxed sets, once a breeding ground of full-color poster maps, ready-to-use handouts, GM and Player information books, and many other goodies, are now so distant a memory that any serious game publishing house will guffaw at the notion of releasing one outside of an "Introductory Players" set at best.

We shouldn't necessarily mourn these bygone products; many had valid reasons for falling to the wayside. But it's sobering to realize those childhood wargames in your closet may represent all that remains easily available of that product type. And if you someday wanted to introduce your kids to gaming using books like *Warlock of Firetop Mountain*, you probably won't have any other choice but to give them your own 20-year-old dog-eared copy.

It's easy to be thankful for what's still around and in front of us. It's much harder to know what we should have been thankful for once it's too late to recognize that it's gone.

--*Steven Marsh*

Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Heroes for the Holidays

by Brian Rogers

For any game set in the modern day US, the end of the year is a special time: It's when the cultural mass of Christmas warps the social fabric like a black hole in space-time, altering everything near it. Even if you manage to avoid December 25th, the end-of-year landscape is littered with other holidays that have either been expanded to new importance or simply aggregated into existence into the December Holiday Gravity Well. The simple fact is that being true to American serial fiction means the eventual holiday story . . . even if it's not always the [same holiday](#).

The Season

Even if you don't use any particular event, December has become an event itself. In the United States, Thanksgiving traditionally marked the outside boundary of the holiday season (though commercial interests are [changing that](#)) and can extend as far as [Twelfth Night](#). It boasts the largest, most heavily attended private and professional parties that can be crashed (ala *Die Hard*). It sees the greatest volume of travelers who may be held hostage (ala *Die Hard 2*). Communities hold public festivals that can be central to crimes or incidental scenes to major events or disasters. Retailers call the day after Thanksgiving as Black Friday as it is often the first day of the year in which their balance sheets are "In the Black": such bulging coffers make enticing targets for theft.

GMs would be wise to include the social side of the season. Groups of PCs [reunite with loved ones](#), or hold or attend parties. While such events may be small, informal affairs, some might be as complicated as your [average wedding](#) and provide as many opportunities for picking up clues or dropping straight lines. The holiday season is seen as a time for re-evaluating one's place in society, so any story about a hero experiencing a crisis of faith (ala *Lethal Weapon*) has solid thematic grounding. It is also about peace and safety, making any disasters feel that much more [horrific](#).

Christmas

For Capitalist Western Culture, this is the Big One, the holiday of holidays. Religiously it commemorates the birthday of Jesus Christ, but its societal position is strongly bolstered by the traditions of celebration and gift giving. Concentrated efforts throughout the 19th century turned Christmas from a secondary holiday known for its drunken debauchery into the family oriented festival of today. Many of these story hooks are chestnuts (adding to the [existing hoard](#)), but well worth roasting to get into the spirit.

Seeking Shelter

The heroes encounter a couple out in the harsh weather. Worse, the woman is in early labor. Can they get these people to shelter with everything else going on (be it a heavy blizzard, crime spree or just their regular lives)? In the classic version of this the family are Latinos named Joseph and Maria, opening up the "patented humorous ending" when they name the child something other than Jesus. Freeze the frame with everyone having a good laugh and roll the credits. For darker versions of the story, the one or both are being hunted by someone (perhaps even the PCs), either for mundane crimes or to prevent any magical correspondences.

[What's Wrong With Santa!](#)

One of the many people hired to act as [Santa](#) in the city is having trouble, be it personal or physical. The heroes either have the "shoe on the other foot" experience of giving gifts to Father Christmas or have to find one Santa amongst dozens before a midnight deadline. Classic versions have 'Santa' in an existential funk because he's losing his job tomorrow, and may be planning something criminal to gather funds before that occurrence. This easily blends with *Seeking Shelter*, where Joseph/Santa has agreed to something foolish to secure Maria and their unborn child shelter.

Dangerous versions have criminals of all stripes dressing up as the Jolly Ol' Elf during their nefarious deeds.

Change of Heart

Anyone of an anti-social/self destructive bent dedicates themselves to being good - or at least to not killing themselves. Classics have supernatural aspects, with inexperienced angels or [ghostly trinitities](#) explore alternate universes or timelines. Clever GMs can foreshadow in such visions: Imagine the PC's Christmas Day response to discovering that not only will he lose all his friends if he doesn't change, but that Boston is the domain of the Deep Ones in 10 years! The supernatural can crop up without alternate worlds -- conversations with the [Wandering Jew](#) or La Befana, the Christmas Witch (cursed with immortality for not joining the wise men in visiting the nativity) would have a similar effect, even if the PC never realizes with whom he's sharing a drink.

"Wake Up And Feed Me"

Legend has it that at the moment Christmas Eve becomes Christmas Day a miracle occurs: Animals can talk. GMs can use this as a one session joke where the pets offer up sage advice or humorous quips, or as something more serious: What if Sparky the Wonder Siamese is desperate to give you warning of a catastrophe? Or if the Heir of Sam is getting canine advice for his yearly target? Or the apes are making use of this vital moment to [plan their attack](#)? Do we really want to talk to the animals?

Hanukkah

A minor Jewish holiday, Hanukkah has assumed a seeming of importance among Gentiles due to its timing and among Jews who expanded the gift giving from Gelt (gold-wrapped chocolate coins) & Driedl (gambling tops bearing letters recalling the miracle) as a Christmas-gift analog. The holiday celebrates the victory of Judah Maccabee against the Syrians and the Jewish reclamation of their Temple in Jerusalem. The Menorah symbolizes the miracle in the Temple's rededication, where oil that should have been sufficient to light the N'er Tamid -- an Eternal Light that should never be extinguished -- for one day lasted for eight. While images of smugglers fumbling to regain Kruggerands accidentally swapped for Gelt will be left to the GM's imagination, here are some other Hanukkah story hooks.

Time is Running Out

The heroes are in some desperate situation where some critical resource is running in short supply: fuel for maneuvering thrusters, life support, water in the desert, etc. As they contemplate their eventual demise they discover that their supplies are lasting far longer than expected. While this is the Jewish equivalent of the *Seeking Shelter* plot for its menorah-to-the-forehead subtlety, the Justice League does owe their lives to their satellite's environmental systems lasting impossibly long in the forgotten classic "Miracle at 22,300 Miles" so it can't be all bad.

Struggle For Freedom

Conquerors stand triumphant, and the heroes struggle to restore their freedom and culture. Just as Christmas is for reflecting on the birth of a peaceful prophet, Hanukkah commemorates a battle fought for the preservation of a faith. While the lights are a miracle of that faith, the events leading up to it are the columniation of a three and one half year struggle, and make as good a thematic backdrop for a resistance war as Christmas does for changes of heart.

What Can We Keep, What Have We Lost?

A PC is questioning the retention of part of his culture; this can be as obvious as a Jew deciding to stay with the faith or an exiled alien losing touch with his planet's traditions. The Maccabee's struggle protected the Jewish people from a forced Hellenization and the holiday remains a time of questioning of how a culture can adapt without losing itself. A far more internal conflict than the *Struggle for Freedom*, it still cuts to the heart of the holiday.

Oh Driedl, Driedl, Driedl!

The heroes encounter a poor-but-faithful man gambling to raise the money for some worthy cause when a "miracle" occurs. This can be as simple as the police PCs arresting the grifters before the man gets fleeced, to a string of impossible luck that sets the city's mobsters on his tail. What is important is the intervention of some outside (if not necessarily divine) agency that protects the gambler and his cause.

Kwanzaa

[Dr. Maulana Karenga](#) fashioned Kwanzaa as an African-American holiday in 1966. It uses the model of Egypt's "First Fruit" celebrations to embody the communal African philosophy Kawaia, which strives to synthesize the best in African thought and practice with the rest of the world. Kwanzaa specifically reinforces positive principles to improve lives and community. The principles are Umoja (Unity), Kujichagulia (Self-Determination), Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility), Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics), Nia (Purpose), Kuumba (Creativity), and Imani (Faith). It traditionally occurs between December 26th and January 1st. Tempting as it is to have a hero whose power word anagrams the Kwanzaa principles, you might want to consider these story hooks instead:

Pride of Place

Legal shenanigans by some unscrupulous force will give them ownership of a neighborhood or community center on the first business day of the New Year unless the heroes can stop them. Their claim rests not just on finances but on the area's "dilapidated state." The PCs have a week to turn the area around and prove that their opposition's claims are untrue. The short deadline means they can't do it alone, and must rouse the community to protect itself. This can range from "Let's put on a show to save the old church!" to facing down armed thugs while rebuilding key Feng Shui sites.

More than the Sum of Your Parts

Urban adventurers in the seasonal spate of self-examination could draw comfort from the Kwanzaa principles. Those who question the necessity of their cause can have their faith and purpose, their ties to the community and their sense of responsibility, restored by the holiday without outside intervention (as befits the tenet of Self-determination) or through exposure to the strength and needs of the greater community. If any holiday argues that with great power comes great responsibility, it is Kwanzaa.

Dangerous Gifts

Traditional Kwanzaa gifts are books and African heritage symbols. Such gifts are just asking for trouble in investigatory horror games (assuming they aren't actually the usual priceless relics from the wrong bag in airport checkout). Several Mythos monsters and cults have a strong presence in Africa and [Egypt](#) in particular. In the unlikely event that your nephew gets a book of Mythos lore, faith, creativity and community support will prove critical.

Deepavali, the Festival of Lights

This Hindu festival's name comes from the Sanskrit root -- *Deepa*, meaning "Lamp," for the oil lamps used during the holiday. As with most things associated with a religion as varied as Hinduism, [Deepavali](#) (or [Diwali](#) or [Diviali](#)) is hard to pin down: Even its duration varies, though five days is common. Two constants are its celebratory nature and use of lights -- Deepavali falls at the Lunar calendar's end and consequently during the darkest days of the year. The lights drive away the spirits in the dark and spread knowledge and understanding. Its position at year's end makes Deepavali a time for closing old accounts and looking to the future. During the festival housecleaning occurs, gifts are purchased and fireworks exploded. Deepavali contains elements similar to many Western Holidays but it has a spirit all its own, lightly touched on with these story hooks.

New Years Observances

Any Indian heroes (or heroes with Indian friends or enemies) can get caught up in the reflective and accounting aspects of Deepavali. The festival make a perfect opportunity for flashbacks, resurfacing plots or rededication to causes. While the interpretation of closing accounts is usually fiscal, PC foes could see it as a final chance to settle old scores before burying the hatchet. Have a nemesis announce that no matter how today's battle goes tomorrow his vendetta ends and see how the players respond.

Death Come No Closer

One Deepavali story concerns a son of King Hima, prophesied to die by snake-bite once married four days. On that day his wife laid a heap of ornaments, gold and silver in her husband's door, illuminated them with lamps and passed the day singing. When the Death god Yama arrived as a serpent he was dazzled and could not enter, instead climbing the heap to hear the songs and leaving in the morning. Anyone facing a similar prophesied death (either by magical divination or medical diagnosis) would find Deepavali an auspicious time for holding it at bay.

"Lead Me From The Unreal To The Real, Lead Me From Darkness To Light"

This is the prayer offered during Deepavali. Such an entreaty makes the festival a perfect time for [new life-changing revelations](#). It is also a good time for confronting the forces of ignorance, be they natural confusion or the cover stories of a secretive illuminati. If those forces have a supernatural bent, confronting them in Deepavali is symbolically attacking them in their place of power, using the festival's light as ammunition against the shadows.

The Seasonal Theme (Villain): Belsnickler

Belsnicklers, or Masked Mummers, traditionally travel from house to house masked during the twelve days of Christmas, ringing bells, making noise and demanding candy unless they are properly identified. If only the cops of your city had it quite that easy . . .

Belsnickler is a [theme villain](#) obsessed with December festivals. Dressed in bulletproof mummer's robes and carrying her trademark bell (the chimes of which are powerful enough shatter glass, stun opponents and in one case overturn a parked mini-van), she will appear on the scene one Christmas season. Armed with an array of gadgets and backed by her henchmen Mistletoe and Holly, she'll engage in thefts based on the Twelve Days of Christmas -- starting with a partridge and a pear tree and ending with kidnapping of members of the Royal Ballet. Once the PCs put her away they'll likely think the problem solved.

Until next year, when she shows up with Judah and Maccabee in a series of eight crimes based on Jewish culture or light-generation (ending with ransoming the city's power grid). Or the next year, when she engages in five crimes over Divali. Or the next . . . This can either become a lovely running joke or a humiliating defeat that your players spend the year plotting to avoid, wondering what angle she'll take this year. She has so many choices!

And when it comes to end of year holidays, so do you.

* * *

Special thanks to [Bob Dushay](#), Asha Shipman and A. V. Srinivasan for their assistance in this article.

Baby Blood Dolls

with stats for *GURPS Third Edition*

by Elizabeth McCoy

*These little creatures are suitable for any setting which has magic or technological bio-engineering, such as **Technomancer** or **Transhuman Space**, or the **Vorkosigan** universe worlds of Jackson's *Whole* and *Cetaganda* (though only by a very rogue element). Baby Blood Dolls fit best into a modern day setting, but a high-magic variant of Rome (for example) might also have the right mindset to create them.*

Known by many names, such as "homunculus" or "familiar," a Baby Blood Doll is a semi-intelligent toy favored by attitudinal punks, gangs, and a number of the more violent goth or wanna-be vampire sorts (or, in a world with more magic, actual vampire or werewolf gangs). Dolls are frequently banned from nightclubs and most public schools, in a modern-day setting, and any other "civilized" location will at *least* look upon one -- and whomever brought it -- with disdain. Some cities, states, or countries might pass laws against their creation and sale, or even ownership. Others might merely demand that they be licensed (with little doggie tags) and checked yearly to ensure they are neither carrying any diseases nor are too psychotic to live.

They are created and sold in an inert state, akin to hibernation, usually in a little plastic baggie that has a poorly-translated-into-English (or the local language) set of instructions on how to care for the Baby Blood Doll. The typical cost is between \$5 and \$25, with a unique one going for as much as \$500 to the right buyer. The default form is a somewhat anime-looking humanoid, about as long as a woman's palm, and with minor "demonic" features such as tiny wings (usually nonfunctional), little tails, bird-claw hands or feet, pointed ears, itty-bitty horns, or all of the above. (Cat-girls are also popular, and some "angels" or "aliens" have been seen.) They have sharp teeth, and nails or claws on their hands and feet. Hair, skin, and eye color are likewise fanciful, and while most are female-formed, at least half of those are actually hermaphrodites. A few start out with piercings or tattoos of various kinds, but that sort of customization is more often left to the ultimate owner's whim. Very few of them are capable of speech, since the teeny squeaky voices aren't hardcore enough for the intended customer base, but they can be taught sign language, reading, and a little writing or typing by a patient owner. Their overall intelligence ranges from chimpanzee or dolphin through a four- or five-year old child.

Once you open the bag, the Baby Blood Doll within will start to wake up. It has a rudimentary personality -- of a mean and mischievous sort -- and a desire to imprint upon an owner. (Even the "angelic" ones.) This is done by biological means; the Doll must ingest something from its owner, such as blood, flesh, bodily fluids, or excretions. Once imprinted, it will take orders from that person, and pretty much that person only. While it can be told to "play nice" with anyone else, it doesn't really comprehend "do what this person tells you" with any reliability or persistence of memory.

Naturally, its early training and treatment shape how it behaves. "Taming" one from its initial, strangely innocent and semi-feral, viciousness requires patience, but it can be done. It's far easier to teach them to steal small items, bite people who get too close, and generally be little anti-social nuisances who have to be kept on a chain lest they run off and bite people. (A common fashion statement among gangs with Dolls is to put a safety-pin through the doll's body somewhere, and attach the end of the safety-pin or paper-clip chain to a jacket, shirt, earring, ear, or cheek.) Even a "tame" one, brought up kindly and with instructions on how to behave, will tend to steal small objects to present to its owner -- such as items it can reach in a jewelry store, or bubblegum and candy from the supermarket checkout aisles. This habit makes them frowned upon by "polite, law-abiding" society, but a few people have the patience and presence of personality to thank the homunculus, remind it that stealing is bad, and put the item back without garnering more looks than the parents of a precocious toddler.

A Baby Blood Doll requires more food than most owners realize -- but they scavenge for themselves more than most owners realize, too. Their little stomachs will attempt to process anything biological, from normal human food, through

pet food, through flowers, grass, leaves, and even some of the biodegradable plastics. Their little teeth chew up chickenbones so splinters won't damage them. The default brand of Doll does not require regular infusions of its owner's DNA (e.g., blood, skin, etc.) though many get it anyway, especially if the culture is capable of engineering enough to confuse the "familiar" about its owner's smell and taste. (Or if the owner has the Baby Blood Doll performing intimate and/or degrading services.)

They're a little stronger than they look, but not much. They're rather fast, and need about as much sleep as a human adult -- though they often catch it in short catnaps instead of all at once. Their only code of ethics or morals is "Do what Owner tells me to do, and don't hurt Owner." One which is abused can bite and scratch its owner a little, after a while, but they can't intentionally *seriously* harm or kill their owners. Indeed, they have a hard time understanding "dead," especially as pertaining to humans. They will try to get to, and stay with, the corpses of their owners, and show no comprehension that a non-Doll body will not wake up from hibernation later. (They also cannot be "weaned" from one owner onto another, and quickly pine away and die within a year without special care -- which usually involves computer/magical simulations of the owner explaining that the Doll has to wait for him to come back from his trip. This can extend the Doll's lifespan up to seven years, with reasonably good quality of life.) Some seem to understand that Baby Blood Dolls can die, while others are bewildered by the concept.

A Doll lives anywhere from one to 50 years, depending on how well it is cared for. They're tough, heal fast, and can stand a lot of abuse, but a perforated intestine is a perforated intestine and infection. Large dogs, aggressive cats, and their own owners (or owners' gang) are all common causes of death.

Unless given special shots (or fed a not-as-secret-as-people-wish diet for several weeks), Baby Blood Dolls are infertile but capable of mating. (Even the improbable endowed hermaphrodites can find compatible mates, since the creatures are constructed with such physiology in mind . . .) If given the right chemicals, however, they can interbreed for a while. They lay one to five eggs, which hatch into little grubs with a penchant for manure and rotting meat, or other trash. Once they reach the appropriate size, they spin a cocoon, and emerge as Baby Blood Dolls who seek an owner to imprint upon. The physical characteristics of the thus-bred Dolls appear to be a random selection of the characteristics of the parents -- with the exception of hair, skin, and eye color, which *seem* to blend about half the time, a Doll either has a characteristic, or it does not. There are no recessives in their genetics. A Doll with little wings and a Doll without little wings produce a fifty-fifty chance of offspring with wings. But if you mate the wingless offspring to each other . . . never wings, for as far as amateur breeders' patience has been able to discern. Likewise, a pale Doll and a dark Doll will have pale, dark, and medium offspring -- but the pale offspring will only produce more pale ones, and the medium offspring, even crossed back to each other, will never do more than medium, while the dark offspring will always be dark.

It may be that the companies that sell Baby Blood Dolls breed them (probably in larger batches, from specially-designed breeder Dolls) and then cut them out of their cocoons before packaging. (In a bio-magical setting without plastic, they are probably sold in cocoons, instead, or little coffins.) Or they may be created via other mass-production means, in glass tubes or from special plants . . . The main company (which puts a TM after Baby Blood Doll on the wrapper, unlike other companies which produce similar, knockoff Dolls) is a somewhat shady and mysterious place; everyone can get hold of their products, by mail-order from cheap and badly-printed advertisements next to ones for Sea Munkies, if nowhere else. However, no one is quite sure where the company is based, what it's named, or anything about it. For people who care about conspiracy theories, it's a big question. For most of the owners of Dolls, it's a non-issue.

GURPS Third Edition stats

ST 1-3; ***DX*** 5-12; ***IQ*** 3-8; ***HT*** 14

Advantages: Decreased Life Support 2; Universal Digestion. (Sometimes Fur, Prehensile Tail, Strikers, or very rarely Winged Flight (Gliding). Catgirls may have Acute Hearing up to +3.)

Disadvantages: Inconvenient Size (small); Odious Personal Habit: filches, vicious, and innocently malicious; Presentient; Social Stigma (Property). (Almost always, Mute and Unnatural Features.)

Skills: Stealth (DX+2); Running (HT); Gesture (IQ+2).

Adventure Seeds

- **The Conspiracy Theory.** A bunch of small, mean, tough, and discounted semi-sentient little creatures (with odd genetics) are all over the country. What's not to conspire? What loyalties are writ into their genes? Are they *really* infernal demons or imps? What might they be able to sabotage? What might they be able to hide, and where? The only hitch is that they're not well-mannered pets of rich people's kids, who might get more freedom of movement. But perhaps that's to lull suspicions . . .
- **Gotta Breed 'Em All.** There's a rare specimen being shipped to Breeder A. Breeder B would like to get her hands on this subject (a hermaphrodite; unique appearance up to the GM) first and have it impregnate several of her Dolls before it makes its way to A, preferably without A knowing. She'll pay a lot for this. Of course, A might pay a lot to make sure this *doesn't* happen, too. The Doll is going to be delivered to the local Doll-dealer sometime on Tuesday before closing, and goes to A on Thursday. No, Breeder B doesn't want to imprint the target Doll, with all the complications that implies. Add other elements as desired: Breeder/Dealer C, D, or E? The new clerk who mis-files the Doll with the generic ones? The kid who buys it from the new clerk by accident? The shoplifter who walks out with a coat-full of stolen Dolls? The Doll (owned by a PC or NPC or strayed from its owner for the moment) who falls in love with the rare one and drags the bagged Doll home?
- **Dolls Are Pets Too.** The DAPT group, a spin-off group from the SPCA, is attempting to legitimize Doll ownership (with appropriate regulations, laws against abuse, etc.) and responsible breeding. Conspiracy Theorists think they're just trying to get Dolls into positions of "power." Even if they're just well-meaning people, it's hard to get people to see past the "punks own these" image -- not to mention that the first instinct of a newly-awakened Baby Blood Doll is to bite someone and thus imprint on an owner. PCs can be activists, or hired to protect a carefully trained Baby Blood Doll and its owner as they travel to various functions to show off how well-behaved a Doll can be. Why do they need to protect this activist? Good question.
- **Red Doll District.** It is sad, but true, that there are people who will pay to watch Dolls mating -- especially Dolls trained to do so in entertaining ways. There are also people who will pay for their "familiar" to get laid (while the owner watches), often with Dolls trained to be submissive and who get beaten up a lot. Doll snuff-films exist. Live snuff-shows, starring Dolls, also exist -- in some places, you can have one done at your table for the right price. (Other depravities are up to the GM's imagination.) When there are laws against this -- or even just against soliciting a hooker who happens to have a couple of well-trained pets -- cops will have to manage sting operations, or random patrols to bust the more obvious ones. For that matter, Baby Blood Dolls make annoyingly hard-to-catch drug-runners . . . (They can, after all, be trained to give someone a small drug, in return for getting the money.)
- **Dollnapping!** For some reason, someone is capturing Baby Blood Dolls! This is probably either for illicit breeding (such as someone might want to do in order to start a Doll company), or Blood Doll snuff-shows. (Sacrifices in demonic rituals might be equally plausible . . .) A far-fetched theory would have a radical Dolls Are Pets Too activist capturing them from their "evil owners" and trying to "free them from the unwholesome influence." The PCs might be police, finally brought in when someone with enough influence (a local breeder?) loses a Doll, or be seeking their own Doll or Dolls.

Other Uses

Aside from pets, toys, and petty thieves, Baby Blood Dolls can be trained to help repair devices -- even the stupidest can learn to fetch tools that have rolled exactly beneath the car. (A well-trained, intelligent one could be invaluable on a starship.) They can be used, as conspiracy theorists fear, as little spies, to plant listening devices and cameras. The most intelligent can also be trained to act, putting on little plays. (This requires voiceovers, of course.) Inventive PCs can probably figure out even more uses . . .

Eustace Gillibrand

For *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Phil Masters

*Note: This character is intended for use in the setting described in chapters 7 and 8 of **GURPS Dragons**.*

Born in the last years of Queen Victoria's reign, Eustace Gillibrand is a child of the British Empire; his family lives in one of the new suburbs of London, from where Mr. Gillibrand commutes by steam-train to his job as a clerk in the City, while Mrs. Gillibrand looks after the house and her children.

Eustace is an intelligent boy, with just two problems: a sense of responsibility to his younger sister along with the rest of his family (a problem which all brothers with younger sisters will understand), and a capacity for curiosity which has always far exceeded his wisdom.

Four years ago, that curiosity could have led Eustace into bad trouble, as he was, all else aside, possibly guilty of trespass -- although he had entered the grounds of the big house at the bottom of the hill through an unlocked gate, and no one had actually told him that he could not go around that house to the back, or look through the conservatory window. The big house at the bottom of the hill, readers should understand, belonged to the strange Mr. Cholmondley, who Eustace's sister Marjorie believed was a German spy. Eustace was unconvinced by that idea, as there was no evidence in its favor save for Mr. Cholmondley's occasional eccentricities, such as rarely talking to the neighbors, and the way that he let the trees in his garden grow thick and tangled, making it hard for a curious lad to peer in without entering the garden first.

When Eustace *did* look into the conservatory, however, what he saw caused him to become quite frightened, and not just of being accused of trespass. He turned to run, and tripped straight over a flowerpot with a great clatter, grazing his knees quite badly. And then Mr. Cholmondley, who was (and is) in fact a dragon, and who was resting in his natural shape among his favorite pot plants, heard the clatter. He pushed his head out of the conservatory door, and saw Eustace, and then said "Oh dear" and invited Eustace in for tea.

Over tea and cakes (made by his housekeeper, who, it turned out, wasn't a German spy either, but who was simply a nice lady who had worked faithfully for Mr. Cholmondley for many years), Mr. Cholmondley explained that, yes, despite all of the firmly-worded letters in the daily newspaper, dragons were indeed real. However, they preferred to keep their existence as secret as possible, as people were sadly prone to misunderstanding them. Still, Mr. Cholmondley wasn't unduly worried that Eustace had found him out, because, as he pointed out quite kindly, no one would believe a nine-year-old lad who had been guilty of trespass, however well his teachers thought of him. Then Mr. Cholmondley sent Eustace on his way, even promising to tell him some stories about dragonkind if he wanted at a later date.

Eustace did indeed want to hear stories about dragonkind, and has often had tea with Mr. Cholmondley since, even once he started at grammar school. The teachers there think well of him, too, and he is currently considered a model pupil with a fine prospect of a scholarship to Oxford or Cambridge.

But Eustace's secret had always been a terrible strain to him, and a year or so ago, he finally found a solution of sorts. He realized that he had never promised Mr. Cholmondley that he *wouldn't* tell anyone about dragons; he had merely admitted that the likelihood of him being taken for a foolish untruthful child made telling his tale pointless. By now, his regard for Mr. Cholmondley made him disinclined to betray that dragon in particular -- but he had heard many wonderful tales about dragons in general. He also knew that his teachers said that he had fine handwriting, which could well be taken for the work of a grown man. Finally, having become interested in dragons, he had read various large books in the local library, and come to the conclusion that there were some quite clever adults who took the subject seriously.

Hence, Eustace wrote a letter to one of these adults, a gentleman who was a scholar at King's College Cambridge, explaining some of the ideas which he had acquired from his conversations with Mr. Cholmondley, but not explaining how he had come to know such things. He did not give his own age or personal history, reasoning that merely not mentioning the truth was not the same as telling lies (which he knows to be wrong). He wanted a reply, of course, but didn't want to worry his parents by being seen to receive strange post. Fortunately, a school-friend of his had a father who looked after the local post-office, and who understood about post boxes and so on, and Eustace was able to arrange to have replies held there for him.

The gentleman-scholar replied in some excitement, and after a short exchange of letters, invited Eustace to join a correspondence circle of which he was a member. Eustace accepted the invitation, and is now a member of the Circle of Pliny (p. DR110). He signs his letters to the Circle simply "E.G.," which is generally thought most appropriate, as he provides many useful examples of dragon behavior for discussion (although the other members do think that E.G. can be a little naive in his ideas).

So far as Eustace can establish, no one else knows about his strange triple life, although some of his school friends know that he has some kind of secret hobby which they really do not understand, and Marjorie, whose curiosity is almost as impertinent as Eustace's own, thinks that something strange is going on, and knows that it involves Mr. Cholmondley. (Eustace tries to reassure her that Mr. Cholmondley is not a German spy, but she fears that her brother is rather gullible.) Eustace's parents occasionally worry that their son spends so much of his time either shut up in his room (where he is actually writing his letters and reading about dragons) or out on his own, but his school reports remain good, apart from the fact that he is not very interested in sport.

Campaign Uses

In a children's story-style campaign, Eustace could be a personal acquaintance of the PCs, and probably their introduction to the secret world of dragonkind. He's not actually terribly physically adventurous himself, but he's very clever and incredibly knowledgeable about dragons for his age. His rather gullible approach to the subject could lead him to mislead PCs by accident, but his advice will *usually* be sound. Other characters may well be drawn into plots by Eustace's increasingly complicated efforts to preserve his various secrets, which can make for a few chapters' worth of relatively mundane comedy before things become weird. Marjorie Gillibrand might become a prime mover in some plots, perhaps seeking aid when she thinks that her brother has become involved in something unfortunate.

(For that matter, given +10 points in Attributes or Advantages, Eustace could be a starting PC in a 50-point campaign.)

In a darker, more serious game, Eustace is in fact being used as a tool by Mr. Cholmondley -- albeit that the dragon may also have some genuine affection for the lad. Mr. Cholmondley knew *exactly* what he was doing when he failed to extract a promise of silence from Eustace, and has since been providing him with *very* carefully calculated information and misinformation, and even mentioning human scholars who studied dragons with a view to engineering precisely what has befallen. Eustace has become Mr. Cholmondley's means of influencing the Circle of Pliny, and of leaking information about his enemies and rivals to the world at large. While those enemies could certainly trace the connection back through Eustace to his mentor if they tried hard enough, Eustace provides an extra layer of complication in the chain -- and may well become useful for more complicated plots as he grows older and goes on to university. Dragons are well used to thinking in the long term, after all.

Adult PCs associated with the Circle of Pliny might eventually try to trace the eccentric, secretive, and knowledgeable "E.G.," and may assume at first that Eustace is simply a courier, taking letters to and from the post office. If they eventually contact him, Mr. Cholmondley will certainly hear of it, and possibly move against them (or perhaps just go away for a while). If the PCs are clever enough to watch Eustace from a distance, they might eventually identify Mr. Cholmondley -- but by then, the sharp-eyed Eustace, his imaginative little sister, or some of his school friends, may well have noticed *them*, and perhaps spoken to their parents or the local constabulary about these suspicious characters.

Eustace Gillibrand

40 points

A rather thin and lanky, not very athletic-looking, 13-year-old English schoolboy, usually dressed neatly and often with a book under his arm. Dark-blond hair, gray eyes.

ST 7 [-30]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 10 [0]

Secondary Attributes: SM 0; Dmg 1d-3/1d-2; BL 13; HP 7 [0]; Will 11 [-5]; Per 12 [0]; FP 8 [-6]; Basic Speed 5 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8.

Social Background: TL 6 [0]; CF Edwardian England [0]; English Spoken (Native)/Written (Native) [0]; French Spoken (Broken)/Written (Accented) [3]; Latin Spoken (None)/Written (Broken) [1]; Classical Greek Spoken (None)/Written (Broken) [1].

Advantages: Ally (Father, 150% of starting points, Available 15-) [30]; Contact Group (Members of the Circle of Pliny, Scientific Skills, Effective Skill 15, Appears 12-, Usually Reliable) [40]; Patron (Mr. Cholmondley, Extremely Powerful Individual, Minimal Intervention, Available 9-) [8]; Reputation (+2 as a smart lad, among his teachers and his parents' friends, 10 or less) [1].

Disadvantages: Curious (12) [-5]; Dependent (Marjorie Gillibrand, 50% of starting points, Loved One, Appears 6-) [-5]; Poor [-15]; Post-Combat Shakes (12) [-5]; Secret (Triple life, as ordinary schoolboy, dragon-friend, and member of the Circle of Pliny) [-5]; Sense of Duty (Family and Close Friends) [-5]; Social Stigma (Minor) [-5]; Squeamish (5) [-5].

Quirks: Assumes that most dragons are basically benevolent; Generally law-abiding, but doesn't pay much attention to the details of the law, or let it restrain his curiosity much; Likes to share what he knows, if it's safe; Somewhat gullible. [-4]

Skills: Area Knowledge (Home Suburb)-12 (IQ, E) [1]; Bicycling-10 (DX, E) [1]; Expert (Dracontology)-12 (IQ, H) [4]; Hidden Lore (Dragons)-11 (IQ-1, A) [1]; Observation-11 (Per-1, A) [1]; Sports (Cricket)-9 (DX-1, A) [1]; Stealth-9 (DX-1, A) [1]; Writing-11 (IQ-1, A) [1].

Note: Eustace's wealth level reflects his *personal* resources and funds, which are in fact severely limited, arguably coming closer to the Dead Broke level; he's a *schoolchild* in a society which doesn't give children huge amounts of material stuff. His parents have Average wealth (albeit with some additional resources -- savings and so on), but this is unlikely to come into play, except in that it defines Eustace's lifestyle.

Eustace's father is a rather ordinary middle-class clerical worker; however, he provides Eustace with a home and some resources, and would do his best for his family if they were in trouble, so he is treated here as an Ally. Still, he would not be much help in really dangerous situations. Mr. Cholmondley is a lot more powerful, but a much less reliable source of aid. Also, whatever magical powers Mr. Cholmondley (and his employees) may possess, he is unlikely to use them to aid Eustace; for practical purposes here, he is merely extremely powerful. (If he chose to exert himself to the full, he could easily qualify as Ultra-Powerful, possibly with Special Abilities.)

Out of all Eustace's family, only Marjorie is treated as a Dependent, partly because his parents probably have higher personal point values than him, and partly because they are unlikely to become involved in problems of their own with which Eustace could help, or to need rescuing. (Marjorie might just insist on involving herself in his concerns.) Still, Eustace feels a proper Sense of Duty towards them all.

D6 System Introductory Try- Out



The Pyramid of Ptah

*This is a **Pyramid** exclusive edition of the introductory **D6 System** demo game, with additional items and a pyramid-themed board. For the original version, with a different board, please visit <http://www.westendgames.com/fliers/d6mini.pdf>.*

Also, this document is available as a [ready-to-print PDF](#).

When you read a comic or a novel, you've probably thought, "If I was that person, I'd have done things differently" or "I'd like to be that person and do that kind of stuff!" In that way, a roleplaying game shares much with such forms of entertainment as improvisational acting or interactive storytelling. All have a loose plot or idea that they explore, and all encourage involvement by their participants. You get that chance to "do things differently" and to "do that kind of stuff." They likewise offer the opportunity to do things that you'd probably never be able to experience in real life (like fly without a machine or be an agent of a covert government agency).

The key difference between improvisational acting or interactive storytelling and roleplaying games is that a roleplaying game has rules. Instead of having to guess as to whether you managed to do what you wanted to do, the game provides guidelines on how to figure that out. Sure, many video games and online interactive worlds provide a similar cooperative experience, but a book-based roleplaying game doesn't need any expensive equipment, special software or cartridges, or a connection to the Internet. Instead, you only need the rulebook, some dice, a lot of imagination, and a few friends. Moreover, you'll get to know your friends better (or make new ones) in a way that's exciting, fun, and different every time.

There are many roleplaying game rule systems, but one of the most compelling reasons to chose the *D6 System* over other systems is its simplicity. Focusing on cinematic action, you can learn all of the important rules in 15 minutes or less and make a character in about five minutes(when using a template). You'll spend more time creating scenarios than figuring out the rules to make your ideas work!

This pamphlet offers a simplified version of the game mechanics you'll find in the *D6 Adventure*, *D6 Fantasy*, and *D6 Space* rulebooks. Each rulebook gives more details on how to apply the basic rules, including many character options and sample equipment, two damage systems (only one is used here), and dozens of combat and skill options and example difficulties. Previews are available online.

Game Rules Overview: Any game using the *D6 System* follows the same basic principle: *Roll a number of six-sided dice equal to the character's skill or attribute score. If the total generated equals or exceeds the difficulty number, then the character succeeds at the action.* However, in each application of the system, attributes, skills, and other character details are tailored to the genre of the game. (For example, *Perception* and *Acumen*, both used in this mini-game, serve the same purpose; their names have been chosen to represent their genres more faithfully.)

Learning More: This pamphlet gives only a brief overview of how the system works. You can download previews of each *D6 System* genre rulebook from the Catalog on the West End Games Web site, www.westendgames.com/html/catalog.html. Each preview includes an introduction to the system, with details on how to use a complete character template and a short adventure to play.

Getting Started: You'll need some six-sided dice, paper, pencil, this booklet, and between one and five friends. **One of**

the dice must be a different color or size, or otherwise recognizable; this is the Wild Die (see the "Rules of the Trial Game" for its use). Print out this game and cut out the character cards and tokens. Each player chooses one character to play; in a two-player game, the chosen characters must be from different factions. Finally, lay the triangular gameboard inside flat and read the "Rules of the Trial Game" for instructions on placing the pieces.

Each character has several scores showing how good he or she is at certain tasks; these numbers look akin to "2D" or "3D+1." Body Points has no "D" after its number; it represents the total amount of damage the character can take. Full *D6 System* characters have more attributes (basic physical and mental abilities that are common to every living creature), more skills (areas of expertise and specific applications of attributes), and other characteristics, like equipment and advantages.)

Rules of the Trial Game

Story Background: A number of agents, gathered across time and space and each serving a different faction (Chaos, Order, or Neutrality), have all converged in an ancient pyramid devoted to the Egyptian god Ptah. Unfortunately, their entry triggered a curse, causing the pyramid to crumble about them! This is the big climactic scene: Who will win, and who will become trapped?

Rolling Dice: Whenever the rules call for you to roll a score or roll dice, roll six-sided dice equal to the number before the "D"; one of the dice is always a Wild Die, which represents the vagaries of fate. (If you only roll one die, that die is the Wild Die.)

Add together the numbers on the dice (including the Wild Die). Then add the modifier after the "+" (if the characteristic has one) to the total. This is your total for the roll. If a 6 is rolled on the Wild Die, add the 6 to the total and roll the Wild Die again; as long as the Wild Die rolls a 6, it adds its 6 and can be rolled again. If a 1 is rolled on the first roll of the Wild Die, it adds its 1 but something interesting -- and bad -- happens; see the "Negative Critical Event" box for details. **Example:** The thief has *search* of 3D+2. When making a *search* roll, her player rolls three dice (one of which is the Wild Die), adds them together, and adds 2 to the total.

Setting up the Gameboard: The gameboard represents the crumbling antechamber. The six triangles with doors represent the chamber entrances and exits. Four triangles contain mysterious giant carved columns, which can be hidden behind. There are also elixirs and four treasure items, which must be placed at random (see the "Negative Critical Event" box for the method).

Players roll initiative (see that section on the next page); the person with the highest initiative places his character on one of the six door triangles. The next highest initiative places his character, and so on until all are on the board.

Treasure: These items are placed randomly (face down if desired) at the beginning of the game, using the "Negative Critical Event" rules (see box).

- *Brass Knuckles:* Add +1D to the character's *Strength Damage*.
- *Cursed Jewel:* This jewel is so compellingly beautiful that anyone who successfully attacks a character holding it takes it instead of harming the character.

Negative Critical Event

In this mini-game, a negative critical event on the Wild Die represents the collapsing temple. Each time a 1 comes up on the initial roll of the Wild Die, immediately roll two dice, deciding which one is the first number and which one is the second. Place a "Fire" token on the triangle represented by the roll. (Use coins if you need more tokens.)

Example: The investigator's player rolled a 1 on the Wild Die of a dodge roll, so he immediately rolls two dice. He got a 6 and a 2, so a "Fire" token is placed to the right of the upper giant column, in the triangle marked "6, 2."

This system of placing "Fire" tokens is also used to place other random objects in the game.

Effects of Fire: At the beginning of any turn where a character is in the same triangle as a fire token, he takes 1D of damage for each fire token in the triangle.

- *Helm of Fast Thought*: Adds +1D to the user's initiative roll.
- *Leather Vest*: The character wearing it reduces his or her attacker's *Strength Damage* total by 2.
- *NeuroDex Band*: Adds +1D to the wearer's *dodge* roll.
- *Powerful Magnifying Glass*: Adds +1D to the holder's search or investigation roll.
- *Elixir*: Randomly place one elixir for each character on the board. (Thus if there are three characters, place three elixirs.) Each elixir, when consumed, heals a character for 2D Body Points, up to a maximum of his or her starting Body Points. Each elixir can only be drunk once.

Turn Steps: Each turn has at least three steps, depending on the number of players:

1. Determine initiative.
2. The person with the highest initiative total goes first.
3. The person with the next highest goes next. Repeat until all players have gone.

Determine Initiative: To decide who goes first, each player rolls the number of dice listed as his or her character's *Perception* or *Acumen* score. Whoever has the higher total takes his or her action first, followed by the second highest roll, and so on, until the person with the lowest total goes last. If there's a tie, the character with the higher *Acumen* or *Perception* goes sooner.

Take Actions: Each turn, a player states and then carries out the actions of the character he or she is playing. When the character has taken the action, that player's turn is done. When all players have taken their actions, begin a new turn by rolling initiative again. Each character can make one dodge, attack, move, or other action in a turn, unless the character takes two tasks (see "Two Actions," below).

Dodge: When your character dodges, she's evading attacks from an enemy. Roll your character's *dodge* score and find the total. If a character is in the same triangle as a giant column, add 2D to this roll because your character is using it for cover. Your total becomes the new base difficulty any opponent needs to beat to hit your character. This new difficulty applies until the next time the dodging character has a new turn. **Example:** The gladiator has 3D+2 in *dodge*, which means that the player rolls two six-sided dice and one Wild Die, totals them, and adds 2 to the result. If the player gets 17 for the total on his dice, he adds 2 to this for a final total of 19. His opponent uses this as the base attack difficulty.

Attack: When your character attacks, he punches, kicks, or uses a weapon against an opponent in an adjacent triangle (excluding diagonally). Roll the number of *brawling* or *fighting* dice for the character and find the total. The difficulty number equals 5 or the target's current *dodge* total minus

5. If the total on your *brawling* or *fighting* roll is equal to or higher than the difficulty number, your character hits.

When your character hits, roll your character's *Strength Damage* score and total the dice to find out how much harm you caused the other character. **Example:** The investigator has 4D+1 in *brawling*. The player rolls three normal dice and one Wild Die, getting 10 on the dice. To this, she adds 1, for a total of 11. Since the gladiator decided to *dodge* earlier in the turn, the investigator must beat a 14 (19 for the gladiator's *dodge* total minus 5). Since 11 is less than 14, she missed the gladiator. If the gladiator hadn't dodged, the investigator's player would have hit, since her total of 11 was equal to or greater than 5.

Damage: Subtract the *Strength Damage* total from the target's current *Body Points* total. Keep track of this on a separate piece of paper. When a character gets to 0 or fewer Body Points, he or she falls to the floor, unconscious. Turn the character's piece upside down. Any carried items are dropped. **Example:** On the gladiator's turn, his player rolls well enough to hit the investigator. He rolls his *Strength Damage* of 2D and gets a total of 15 (rolling 4 on the normal die, 6 on the Wild Die, and 5 on the Wild Die reroll). The investigator's player subtracts 15 from her character's current *Body Points* total.

Move: Each triangle represents about 2.5 meters. If a character wants to move, he or she may move up to four triangles on the board (excluding diagonally). This requires no roll. Characters who move onto a door triangle do not have to exit. More than one character cannot occupy a triangle at a time, although an unlimited number of items, fire

tokens, or unconscious bodies can be there. Characters can move through the same space as another character. *Partial Moves*: As an option, a character may move up to two triangles and perform one other action in a turn at no penalty. If a character moves one or two triangles and does two other actions, both actions have the two-action penalty (see the "Two Actions" section for details).

Other Actions: Characters may try to do other things that take an action. These include picking up one item in the character's triangle (which does not require a roll) or doing a special goal action described on the character sheet (which requires a roll). Using an elixir or other treasure needs no effort and takes no action.

Two Actions: If you want your character to do two tasks in one turn, then subtract 1 from the number in front of the "D" of **both** characteristic scores before rolling the dice. Actions that do not require a roll do not get this penalty. Players may take no more than two actions for their character in a turn, and only one of each type of action may be performed each turn. Actions may be performed in any order, but you must decide before doing any actions how many your character will take. **Example:** The investigator wants to investigate a giant column and dodge in the same round. She would roll 3D+2 for her *investigation* and 2D+2 for her *dodge*. If she wanted to pick something up and dodge, she would roll 2D+2 for her *dodge*. And if she wanted to pick something up and move, no penalty would be assessed.

Affecting the Die Roll: Each character starts with three Character Points and one Fate Point. Fate Points and Character Points may not be spent on the same roll. You may use each point only once.

A character may spend a Character Point **after** a roll; each point spent allows the character to roll one additional Wild Die and add its total to the current roll (add and reroll 6s but don't consult the "Negative Critical Event" box on a roll of 1). Each Character Point may be used once, but a player may spend as many Character Points as he or she likes on a roll. **Example:** The investigator rolls 11 on her *dodge*. She spends a Character Point and rolls a 4, making her final total 15.

A Fate Point doubles the number of dice rolled, as well as the bonus, for one roll only. It must be spent **before** the roll. Only one Wild Die is rolled. **Example:** The hard warrior spends his Fate Point before a *brawling* roll, giving him 8D+4 (rolling seven normal dice and a Wild Die).

Ending the Game: In most roleplaying games, characters have goals they want to achieve together, and a gamemaster controls the obstacles; "winning" doesn't have much meaning, so long as everyone has fun. In this game, instead of a gamemaster, the goals of the characters provide their own challenges.

Board

Losing: Characters who exit the gameboard before completing their goals may not return. Unconscious characters may not win. Since the effects of the Wild Die can always cause damage even if there's only one player, it's possible for everyone to lose. That's what makes the game more exciting.



Winning: To win, a character must accomplish his or her goal and escape out of any exit. From any door triangle, it takes one additional triangle's worth of movement to leave the board and the temple.

Game Options: Character options are one advanced rule that you can add to this game. You can find others online in the Systems section of our Web site, www.westendgames.com.

Character Options: In the full *D6 System*, there are many options for improving and specializing your character. As an optional rule to give you a taste of these possibilities, players may choose or randomly pick one of the following at the start of the game:

- *Fast Reactions*: You get +1D to *Acumen* or *Perception* for determining initiative.
- *Good Luck*: Once a game, you may do one of the following for one turn: add +2 to all rolls, take two actions without penalty, or reroll one failed roll.
- *Hypermovement*: You can move one extra triangle per turn.
- *Natural Armor*: You subtract 1D from all *Strength Damage* rolls against your character.
- *Natural Hand-to-Hand Weapon*: Increase your character's *Strength Damage* by +1D.
- *Skill Bonus*: Choose one skill at the beginning of the game to get a +6 bonus to it every time your character uses it: *brawling*, *dodge*, *con*, *investigation*, or *search*.

The Characters

D6 Adventure Bodyguard

Faction: Order

Bodyguard

Perception	3D
brawling	4D
dodge	4D
Strength Damage	2D
Body Points	35



D6 Adventure Bodyguard Goal: You've been hired to help another (Order or Neutrality) character complete his goal; the character you're helping is announced at the beginning of the game. In a two-player game, your goal is to reduce the other character to 0 or fewer Body Points.

D6 Fantasy Gladiator

Faction: Chaos

Gladiator

Acumen	2D
fighting	4D+1
dodge	3D+2
Strength Damage	2D
Body Points	37



D6 Fantasy Gladiator Goal: Your master has sent you to destroy all members of the other two factions (Order and Neutrality). You must reduce all the members of those factions to 0 or fewer Body Points. In a two-player game with the hard warrior, you must defeat him before exiting the temple.

D6 Space Con Artist

Faction: Neutrality

Con Artist

Perception	3D+2
brawling	2D+2
dodge	3D+2
con	4D+2
Strength Damage	1D
Body Points	36



D6 Space Con Artist Goal: You have an irrational need to trick others; to win, you must con all currently conscious characters before you exit the board. To trick someone, make a *con* roll while the other player makes an *Acumen* or *Perception* roll. If your total is higher, the target is tricked and remains so for the rest of the game. (This has no other effect.) The *con* roll counts as an action; the target's roll does not. You must be next to a character to con her.

D6 Adventure Investigator

Faction: Order

Investigator

Perception	3D+1
brawling	3D+1
dodge	4D+2
investigation	3D+2
Strength Damage	1D
Body Points	34



D6 Adventure Investigator Goal: This temple contains vital information. You must investigate all four columns and get out alive. Investigating a column requires you to be in the same triangle as it. Then, as an action, you need to make an *investigation* roll against a difficulty of 10.

D6 Fantasy Thief

Faction: Neutrality

Thief

Acumen	2D+2
fighting	2D+2
dodge	5D
search	3D+2
Strength Damage	2D
Body Points	34



D6 Fantasy Thief Goal: This temple means nothing to you, but you have been paid a princely sum to search for a secret code inscribed over each doorway. To accomplish this, you must visit four of the six door locations and make a *search* roll (as an action) when on the door triangle against a difficulty of 10.

D6 Space Hard Warrior

Faction: Chaos

Hard Warrior

Perception	2D+1
brawling	4D+2
dodge	3D
Strength Damage	2D
Body Points	37



D6 Space Hard Warrior Goal: You learned about some fraggin' fighting stuff in an ancient temple. You must gather the brass knuckles, the leather vest, the helm, and the NeuroDex band and escape with them to win!

Available Now for the D6 System!

The new *D6 System* roleplaying game series offers fans of one of the most popular cinematic systems a new way to get their favorite game. Combining the best of over 15 years of *D6 System* design -- including systems appearing in *Men in Black*, *DC Universe*, *Hercules & Xena*, and the awarding-winning *Star Wars* roleplaying game -- each *D6 System* rulebook provides an attribute and skill set tailored specifically to the genre while using a game engine that's cross-genre compatible. The books feature character templates, three compatible character design systems, two damage systems, many system options, and over 80 Advantages, Disadvantages, and Special Abilities. Each book is 144 pages with a full-color hard cover and a one-color interior. The covers, when placed together with *D6 Adventure* in the middle, form a stunning panoramic image.

- ***D6 Adventure Rulebook:*** Focused on the modern era, but suitable for any setting from the Wild West to the near future. Product Number WEG 51011, ISBN 1-932867-00-7, \$29.95.
- ***D6 Space Rulebook:*** Suitable for any far future setting, including cybernetics and space travel. Product Number

WEG 51012, ISBN 1-932867-01-5, \$29.95.

- ***D6 Fantasy Rulebook***: Suitable for any non-modern fantasy setting, including high, low, semi-historical, and swashbuckling. Product Number WEG 51013, ISBN 1-932867-02-3, \$29.95.
- ***D6 Core Set***: Includes the three genre rulebooks (*D6 Fantasy*, *D6 Adventure*, and *D6 Space*), a three-fold screen, and a gamemaster's booklet in an attractive display box. A perfect collector's item. Product Number WEG 51014, ISBN 1-932867-04-X, \$89.95.

Other upcoming and available products include ***D6 Fantasy Creatures***, ***D6 Adventure Locations***, ***Bloodshadows***, ***D6 Space Ships***, ***D6 Fantasy Locations***, ***D6 Space Aliens***, and ***D6 Magic***, with many more on the way.

For previews, free templates, mini supplements, discussion boards, and more information about the *D6 System* and other West End Games products, visit our Web site at www.westendgames.com.

* * *

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Pyramid Review

Zombie Smackdown! (for *All Flesh Must Be Eaten*)

Published by [Eden Studios, Inc.](#)

Written by Mark "Obi-Wan Jabroni" Barnabo, Bryant Durrell, Derek "Gudeberg" Guder, Fred "Big 100D" Jandt, Justin "The Animal" Mohareb & Steven "The Snake" Walmsley

Cover by Gregory Price

Interior Illustrations by Travis Ingram, Matt Morrow, Cary Polkavitz, & George Vasilakos

144-page 7½ by 9½-inch saddle stitched softback; \$23

"You have been to the exotic East with [Enter the Zombie](#) . . . You have been taken on high adventure to dark places [Pulp Zombies](#) . . . You have gone waaaay out West with [Fistful o' Zombies](#). But tonight, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, we have before us an epic struggle, a fight between good and evil, one in which the very honor of this great sport is at stake. So take your place around the squared circle and prepare to watch the fight of your lives . . . "

"Ladies and Gennl'emmen . . . get ready to **zombie!**"

In the very latest supplement for [All Flesh Must Be Eaten](#), players enter the world of professional wrestling and ritualized combat of sports entertainment, to become the televisual age's greatest warriors, battling for the sport's honor and future, both in the ring and outside it. The "Face," or good guy, keeps true to the spirit of wrestling, fighting the perennial bad guy, or "Heel," who together with an unscrupulous manager is happy to take wrestling in a direction away from all that is good and honorable about the sport. Along the way, both types of wrestler, plus the Jobbers (who always lose), and the Tweeners (who are neither Face nor Heel), will play out Angles. These storylines, acted out inside and out of the ring, plot out the feuds and relationships between the wrestlers. Essentially each Angle adds a set of motivating elements to a fight.

Of course this is just for the ordinary wrestling you can see on the television nightly. *Zombie Smackdown!* adds another element into this heroic mix. A wrestler no longer faces any old rival, but a far deadlier competitor. One that is evil, feels no pain, and whiffs not of testosterone, but of the graveyard! Members of the corpse cortege are back to fight in the Squared-Circle and they are the toughest opponents a wrestler is likely to face.

As *Enter the Zombie's* Occidental counterpart, *Zombie Smackdown!* gives an overview of sports entertainment, including its history and a glossary of its own language, "Kayfabe." It introduces a new character type, the Professional Wrestler, roughly on a par with the Martial Artist and Shootist types from *Enter the Zombie* and with the Champion from the *Angel RPG*. The core book's Norms, Survivors, and Inspired types take supporting roles around the ring. Most of the new qualities and drawbacks are tied to the Professional Wrestler type. Some mark his role in the ring, Face, Heel or Jobber. Others his physicality, Giant or High Flier; or his expertise, for example, the Cheap Shot Artist knows where to land dirty blows, while Intelligent Feet marks a fighter skilled with strike moves using his feet. The others indicate his toughness, such as Intestinal or Testicular Fortitude. Of course, wrestlers are still free to select qualities or drawbacks from the core rulebook.

There is only one new skill, Promo, which is the ability to work a crowd to a wrestler's advantage. But three skills are central to performing in the ring. Acrobatics covers flips, rolls, and aerial maneuvers; Brawling covers driver, suplex, slam, and cheap shot moves; and Martial Arts covers strikes and holds. When buying these skills, a wrestler also chooses the signature moves he is famed for. Over 40 are described with players encouraged to personalize each maneuver with a colorful description tied to their wrestling identities. Weapons are also included for the dirtier fighter, from the humble 2×4 to the popular folding chair.

While Wrestlers with the Gifted quality can use miracles, they are better able to perform new superhuman maneuvers by channeling Heat. Heat is the crowd's thrill and exultation which wrestlers both work and feed off to fuel special moves. Represented by Essence, it can be regained over time, or more quickly by successfully *working the mic*, performing signature moves, defeating opponents, or winning title bouts. A wrestler needs the Heat Channeling quality and be at least a Face or Heel to use Heat. The book also suggests that he should have the gifted quality, but this is contradicted earlier and the Heat Channeling rules make sense without it.

The new aspects for zombie wrestlers are all suitably gruesome. For example, "Breakable Bones" enables an undead fighter to escape a hold by snapping a limb, while "Crimson Mask" lets him do the same by sloughing off his skin! Zombie Heels or Mega Heels with a taste for flesh can also steal a victim's Heat as they chow down. Yet while *Zombie Smackdown!* suggests the possibility of player character zombie wrestlers, it is not addressed in any depth. *Enter The Zombie* is necessary to give it full justice.

An ordinary wrestling game is possible with *Zombie Smackdown!* (probably doing a better job than other RPGs on the subject), covering all the moves, the layout of the ring and the arena, its rules, handling the world of sports entertainment in the Unisystem (*Zombie Smackdown!* simply uses the system's cinematic rules), winning and losing, the ref, and the various types of match. But that is not what *Zombie Smackdown!* is about. It includes three fully developed Dead Worlds and four mini ones that each adds zombies to the square-circle. The first is "Babes and Barbed Wire," set in the American arena of constant crowd-pleasing action and soap-like angles. The player characters work for Hardcore Extreme Wrestling, a small independent outfit touring smaller cities, booking airtime on regional late-night television. The manager's obsession with his wrestlers' size and bulk leads to extreme methods to get the physique he wants on camera. This includes steroids, which might be behind the rage-induced attacks among the wrestlers. Before long, both wrestlers and the authorities are facing a wider outbreak that puts the players at the zombie outbreak's heart, giving them the opportunity to end it. Overall, this Dead World is not quite so world ending as the others.

It is followed by "Legendary Masked Men," set in the world of "Lucha Libre," the fighting face of Mexican masked wrestling. Lighter and more agile than their American counterparts, Mexican wrestlers, or luchadores possess two identities.

Once is a luchador's public face or mask, which hides his identity, the other his real identity kept hidden except at home. A player is expected to play this to the hilt, creating a personality for his luchadore and mask, and one for his unmasked self. Thus a luchador might be a "Rudo" or bad in the ring, but a stand up and honorable guy in reality. The setting's masked aspect makes the Lucha Libre ideal for infiltration and in "Legendary Masked Men" this has been done by an ancient Aztec cult that also hides behind masks. So the player character wrestlers must face masked Aztec-cultist-wrestler-priests in a fight to save the sport's spirit, and Mexico itself. This Dead World is well done and interesting to read just for the background on Mexican wrestling itself. It also has potential for crossover with Eden's *Angel RPG* or *Pulp Zombies*, as well as a Zorro-like game.

The third, "Land Of The Undead Rising Sun," takes the wrestlers East into Japanese hardcore wrestling wherein anything goes, focusing less on Angles, and more on inflicting pain and suffering via damage inflicting moves and foreign objects. The down-at-heel Universal Combat Group, a minor league affair is dominated by the sudden rise of the Heel Necrohammer. Backed by powerful supernatural aid, he plans to inflict as much suffering on the world of wrestling as possible which includes the creation of an army of Necro Zombies! This is a tough Dead World, one with high potential for crossover with *Enter the Zombie*.

So is the first mini-Dead World, "Immortal Combat." Players are participants in a secret tournament to win a

\$1,000,000 purse, but must face The Mortician, an undead American wrestler and his zombie horde. The supplement will also be useful in "Extreme Zombie Entertainment," where the undead resume their normal pre-dead lives, including fighting in the ring. Alien invaders want the Earth in "Battle Zombies Victory," sending a champion to win the planet. Here the player martial artists and wrestlers are part of the program to select the hero to face the alien's champion. Finally, in "The Fallen and the Risen," angels and demons bored with the post apocalyptic eternal war give zombies the spark of life to fight again. The section also includes notes on zombie mini-wrestlers.

For whatever reason (all right, I find it incredibly crass and superficial) nothing sends me diving for the television remote faster than wrestling. While not even this book will change my mind, it does not mean that I would avoid a game using *Zombie Smackdown!* It does a fine job of making the world of sports entertainment accessible and gameable in a surprisingly small amount of space, but then it goes one further by adding a cadaverous component to the combat. Its failure to develop the playable zombie aspect as the supplement suggests is a shame, perhaps needing and more information on combining it with *Enter the Zombie* would have been appreciated. Yet its Dead Worlds show how the undead can throw down in the Squared-Circle. All are perfectly playable, but the best of these is Legendary Masked Men, which is a clever combination of corpse, cult and combat under the mask.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Review

Mad Scientist University

Published by Raiding Party Games

Created by Zachary William Anderson

250 color cards, rules sheet, \$9.95; expansions \$2.95 each

It's strange that a game called *Mad Scientist University* should borrow so much of its innovation, but perhaps it's in keeping with the company's Raiding Party Games moniker.

The player group comprises student members of the secretive, eponymous university, and everyone is being tested on the skills they learn in their classes. The object of the game is to have the most goal cards at the end of the third round.

Players take turns being the teacher's assistant, which is a fancy way of saying you're the dealer. There are two decks, the goal deck and the element deck. The TA deals an element card to each other player, and then turns over a goal card for everyone to see. Players now have 15 seconds to come up with a methodology for achieving the goal using their element.

For example, if your element is sushi and the goal is to infiltrate a secret society, you must explain to the rest of the class how you plan to secret yourself into the ranks of the society using sushi as the basic component of your plan. You're encouraged to be as creative as you like, and to expound on the process with all the verve you can muster.

The TA, on the other hand, is the final judge of how things will be arbitrated. He can choose in what order the presentations are made, give players more or less time in which to finish, or just be nicer to certain players while deciding a winner. Of course, what goes around comes around . . . when he's done, he returns to his lowly student status and the player to his left becomes the TA. The winner takes his goal card and adds it to his stack. After the action has passed around the table three times, whoever has the most goals wins.

It's a simple game, but it's hard to avoid the obvious comparisons to Out of the Box Publishing's *Apples to Apples* card game (and if comparing a game with something called *Apples to Apples* isn't irony enough . . .). The missing piece of that amusement's puzzle, however, is the anonymity. In *Apples to Apples*, the most successful player in any round is unknown to the judge. In *Mad Scientist University*, you cannot help but know whose narrative is whose. At the end of the third round, the TA knows where the scores stand, and can easily choose to ignore a good player's description if he knows another goal card will give that player the win.

The game pieces are about as basic as they can get. The set comes in a folder like those in which you would get your collegiate literature, and the cards are printed on the same perforated stock used to create business cards on a home computer (and yes, you do the perforating). They don't tap down evenly, but they're stiff enough for play and you won't beat yourself up over the price. Save for the company banner and the stylized logo, there isn't much in the way of visuals, and the color ink-jet printing job seems sound.

Although the game's fatal flaw may be a deal breaker, the supplements -- called Course Packets -- may do what they can to ameliorate the problem. Some of them offer alternatives to the normal methods of play, like outside arbitration (which seems to assume you have spectators), a group vote, or a coin toss, and suggest having the person about to win explain *all* his previous goals using his current element. It just replaces one layer of work with another, of course, but one half-hearted and arbitrary solution may find more acceptance from your group than another. Each Course Packet runs along a theme -- one is all about computers and provides goals like "translate everything into binary" or "archive all the world's text," and elements like floppy disks, HTML, and canned air. You can also buy Home Economics,

Zoology, and the relaxation of Spring Break, among others.

None of this means it can't be a lot of fun . . . it can. The cards offer some amusing possibilities, there's plenty of inspiration to get players into the right frame of mind, and who hasn't had some crazy scheme like this they wanted to share? It's advertised as a party game, and if one looks at *Mad Scientist University* as more of a social experiment than a game in the traditional sense, it's a much more palatable buy. The *Apples to Apples* comparisons are inevitable, but the novelty it does present may presage even better things to come from Raiding Party Games' secret lair.

--*Andy Vetromile*

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



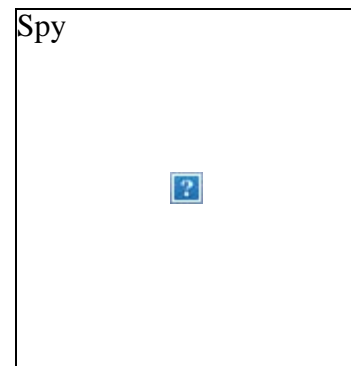
Pyramid Review

Spy Card Game

Published by Kosmos/Uberplay

Designed by Reiner W. Knizia

For 2-4 players; \$17



Spy is a game of espionage. Players take the role of a spymasters, dispatching their spies on secret but rather abstract missions. The winner is the first player to send off all their spies.

The play area is a row of continents and a row of hiding places. There are six continents: North America, South America, Africa, Australia, Antarctica, and Eurasia. The "hiding places" are bits of iconic spy gear: a camera, a timepiece, a hat, dark glasses, a lighter, and a pen. Each continent and bit of gear starts with one spy counter on it, and the remaining spies are divided evenly among the players. Every player starts with three cards and draws one additional card each turn.

Spy Layout



The game deck consists of cards depicting one of the continents and one of the pieces of spy gear. So each card represents two possible missions, and you send spies on a mission by playing cards that depict it. For instance: You send spies on the African mission by playing several cards that have Africa on them. You send a number of spies equal to the number of matching cards you play minus the number of spies already on that mission. So if you play four Africa cards when there are already three spies on Africa, your play only lets you send one additional spy.

If you have three cards in your hand at the beginning of your turn, you have to put one of them face up in front you. You can play face up cards in the same way you can play cards from your hand. In fact, you can send spies on a mission using a combination of cards.

The trick is that your opponents can see what you have on the table. If you've accumulated several hats in front of you, for instance, they have an incentive to play their hats early; this would put more spies on the hat, making it more difficult for you to put spies there.

These relatively simple game mechanics make for some interesting choices. Although each card has two missions, you can't use both. The Eurasia/pen card is either a Eurasia mission or a pen mission, so you have to decide where to concentrate your resources. If you play a set as soon as you can, you only send a single spy and you're squandering cards. If you wait to accumulate more cards and make a larger set, then your opponent may send spies on that mission and reduce the value of your set.

Game play is pretty quick, but the rules suggest you play a series of games. At the end of a game, each player receives one penalty point for each spy they have left. The player with the lowest score after several games is the winner.

The game comes with 12 cards for setting up the play area, the 108-card game deck, and a sheet of 48 spy chits. The small game box has a plastic insert for storing the components. All of this is well made, even if it is disappointing to buy a German game that doesn't come with little wooden pieces. Given prices for games these days, it's a good deal.

The most striking thing about the game is its abstractness. The trappings of international spycraft provide a thin veneer for a solid rummy-inspired mechanic. The spy gear icons are called "hiding places" and the game cards are called "secret documents," but it's odd to think of several spies with a sheaf of secret documents being sent on a mission to hide them in a hat. In terms of game play, moreover, that peculiar hat mission is no different than a mission to South

America. And just how is it that there are as many missions to Antarctica as there are to Europe and Asia combined? This is not exactly a James Bond movie.

Nevertheless, the game has an element of secrecy and competition about it that's reminiscent of espionage. If you want to make a set of more than three cards, it will need to make use of some of the face up cards. Yet if you just put the cards you are most interested in on the table, your opponents can try to thwart you. So you need to bluff and misdirect, hiding the important cards in the midst of others.

There is not so much luck involved that it completely washes out strategy, but sometimes you just don't get the cards you need. There are several of each card in the deck, so you can't deny your opponent the card they need by keeping it in your own hand. We've had games end with a quick succession of card draws, with victory going to the player who drew what they needed first. This does create a certain drama; in an abstract way, perhaps it's suggestive of the car chase at the denouement of an action film.

Some games, although playable with two players, really only shine with a larger group. Just as cold war espionage was a game primarily played between two super powers, *Spy* is at its most strategic as a two player game. You need only second-guess and out-bluff a single adversary, and hoarding cards is a real temptation when only one other player gets to act before it's your turn again.

In brief: If you want the sort of thinking-optional game that rewards but does not strictly require cunning strategy, then *Spy* offers a good balance. If you hanker after richer theme or purer strategy, then the abstract, card-based mechanics won't suit your needs. Just remember: If any of your spy chits are caught or captured while on a mission to the sunglasses, the Secretary will disavow any knowledge of your actions.

--*P.D. Magnus*

Odds 'n' Ends (with Cranberry Sauce)

It's after Thanksgiving, which means it's time for leftovers. As such, rather than have a real column, I'm going for the grab bag of ideas, and making columnloaf. Yum.

* * *

I upgraded my Internet browser last week to [Firefox](#).

To illustrate what a big deal this is, I've been using one browser – [Opera](#) – for years. (Okay; technically I've used other browsers when Opera failed to load a page.) But I'd heard good things about Firefox, and I tried it out.

And I made the switch in less than an hour.

Amazingly, Firefox is pretty much everything I like about Opera, only more so. Fast, sleek, customizable. And I especially like the idea of “[extensions](#)” -- small plug-ins that do handy little tasks. (I'm planning on experimenting with the one that will turn my browser into a Z-Machine interpreter, capable of playing my old Infocom games.)

Although I miss a few of my Opera features – most notably the ability to quit and save open pages, restarting a session later with all previous windows – I don't miss 'em enough.

* * *

I was thoroughly impressed by Firefox that I decided I wanted to “be a part of this” as much as possible. If the open source community could make Firefox and [OpenOffice.org](#) (which I've been happily using for a couple months now), then I wanted to see what else they had to offer.

So I switched to the Mozilla e-mail client: [Thunderbird](#). Since I live and die by my e-mail (having over seven years of continuous e-mail records), this needed to be a robust environment.

Despite spending six hours in a rocky start at importing my e-mail (“rocky” meaning “trying to track down the half-dozen e-mail messages that cause the entire import process to crash”), I finally got everything imported, and it was pretty neat. It didn't have the immediate “Wow!” factor of Firefox, but once I tamed it in a couple of crucial ways I was beginning to look forward to our new relationship.

And then, during a sprightly search, I noted that it didn't find a message I was fairly certain I had. So I popped open the folder directly, and noted that it had 26 messages.

This was a far cry from the 15,230 messages (really!) I was expecting to find.

In searching through other folders, I noted that they, too, had been mysteriously pruned of about 99% of all messages. And combing through all options and documentation gave no indication as to why this happened. (Fortunately I had a really recent backup, so there wasn't too much harm done.)

So, since I'm not about to devote another afternoon to importing my mail again, I have no choice but to conclude that Thunderbird is not suited for my needs currently. Which is sad . . . I know many people who swear by Thunderbird, and I want to like it. But I also need an e-mail client that'll allow me to import the previous decade of my life, and *not* devour everything.

Oh, and if you sent me an e-mail on Saturday or Sunday (November 26th or 27th) and think I might not have received it, please feel free to resend it. I'm pretty sure I recovered all mail that's important, but duplicates in my inbox are easy to deal with.

* * *

[Banana Phone](#) burns.

* * *

So does [this](#).

* * *

World of Warcraft, a new MMORPG from Blizzard, has been getting phenomenal reviews. As a fan of pencil-and-paper RPGs, I find myself wondering what the implications of the seemingly continuous computer gaming worlds are.

Computer RPGs were previously a finite experience. Once you killed the big baddie at the final level of the Stygian Abyss, you won; you could play again, but it would be with the understanding that you were just reliving the previous experience, only with slight changes.

MMORPGs, however, offer the promise of continuous gaming; you could, theoretically, play the same character for months or even a couple of years.

But – and here's the interesting thing – this still doesn't compare with pencil-and-paper gaming. It's not uncommon to hear about groups who've been gaming together for a decade or more, often in the same universe and even with the same characters. So I find myself wondering: How many people are going to be playing, say, *Everquest* a decade from now, with the same characters? Given the turnover of computer game technology, I would find it surprising, but not impossible; I know of MUDs, MOOs, and MUSHs that have been around for decades, so it's feasible that these modern MMORPGs could go for that long.

However, my gut tells me that the limitation is, strangely, graphic cards. The thing that decade-long pencil-and-paper games and text-based online games have in common is that their core “technology” is constant; on-screen text reads the same today as it did in 1984, and gamers' imaginations are just as vivid as their Reagan-era counterparts (worries about kids and mortgages notwithstanding). But graphical computer games have been pushed most insistently by their peers; a game that looked great in 2000 would be met with derision today.

The loophole, though, is that it might be possible to someday develop a technology that *is* functionally equivalent from one decade to the next. I believe we're getting close to that point with audio technology; there's not much “better” that music and aural components can sound before the human ear can't tell the difference. Could graphics ever hit this real lifelike holodeck-type quality? I honestly don't know . . . but if I were a betting person, I'd guess that the odds are more likely that the answer is either “never” or “some time in the next 10 years.” That seems to be the way it works with computer stuff.

In the meantime, I'm sure that, if this technology does come around within the next 10 years, there'll be a pencil-and-paper game that's been doing its thing for the past three decades.

--*Steven Marsh*

The Nostradamus Cipher

by Adam Wells

"You will not find me alive at sunrise, Jean."

Jean Aymes de Chavigny smiled ruefully. "How can you be so sure, master?"

Both men chuckled, before the man in the bed gave in to coughs and wheezes. Jean gently propped him up with another pillow. "Oh, master, I am sorry. I did not mean . . ."

The old man waved his apology off. "It is nothing. I had rather leave in mirth than grief." He paused, breathing with difficulty. "But the arrangements I asked you to make? You are sure they are completed?"

"I do not pretend to understand, master, but it is done. It will be placed as you have commanded, and interred with you."

His teacher patted Chavigny's hand feebly. "I wonder if I had a choice . . . But you have done as I asked. Take your leave, my pupil. Remember what I have taught you. I . . . will sleep for a while."

Jean waited until the breathing sounds gained a measure of regularity, then rose to leave. At the door, he turned back for his last look at the prophet alive.

"Sleep well, Nostradamus."

* * *

The problem with the famous prophecies of Nostradamus is that they are vague. Those few that might be linked to particular events are never understood until after the event itself provides context. Until then, the allusions, obscure symbolism, mangled poetic grammar, and difficult metaphor of the predictions lend themselves to any number of interpretations.

The Prophecies are so difficult to interpret because they are literally encoded. Nostradamus admitted, in the preface to his first volume of prophecy, that he had pursued a deliberate agenda of obfuscating his meaning. That's a code. So interpreting Nostradamus correctly requires breaking it -- and it's very complicated, involving more than simple letter or word transposition. In fact, so much of the code is predicated on occult knowledge and linguistic idiosyncrasies that it seems unbreakable. But every code has a key . . .

In closing the preface to his first book, Nostradamus wrote:

"And thousands of other events will come to pass . . . as I have set forth more fully in writing my other Prophecies, which are drawn out in length, in prose, setting forth the places and times so that men coming after may see them, knowing the events to have occurred infallibly. This we have noted in connection with the others, speaking more clearly. For although they are written under a cloud, the meanings will be understood. When the time comes for the removal of ignorance, the event will be cleared up still more." (Leoni, 131)

The implications are incredible. First, Nostradamus is claiming that he wrote some predictions in "more fully" detailed (code-free) prose, citing recognizable places and precise dates. Any such work remains unpublished and, as far as the world is aware, unseen. Second, he is explicitly stating that his code will be broken, the "meanings will be understood." He personally made provisions to ensure that particular prediction would prove correct.

In 1566, less than a week before he died, Nostradamus added a codicil to his will. In it, he bequeathed his astrolabe (a device for measuring the position of stars) and a large gold ring to his eldest son, Cesar, and two walnut coffers, with

everything in them, to his eldest daughter, Madeleine. Interestingly, the coffers were bequeathed "without anyone being permitted to see or look at that which will be therein." (Leoni, 783) Within them, Madeleine found all those things a doting father might be expected to give his favorite daughter: clothes, jewelry, various knickknacks . . . and the Nostradamus Cipher.

The Cipher itself is a bundle of vellum sheets on which Nostradamus detailed, in Latin, his method of obscuring the Prophecies. The first section of the Cipher gives Nostradamus' prose prognostications, by which he seems to have intended to convince the bearer of his accuracy. It may also, if the GM chooses, include the missing end to the seventh Century. (The Prophecies were written in groups of 100 poetic quatrains, called Centuries. The seventh Century, for some unknown reason, has only 42 quatrains.) The second section lays out a series of rules by which ambiguities and anagrams in the quatrains can be recognized and resolved. The third, and most important, section of the Cipher consists of a long series of numbers. The numbers give the number of words from the previous word that the interpreter must travel to find the word that should actually come next. The Prophecies make entirely different claims if they are rearranged according to the pattern in this third section and the misleading words are corrected with the information from the second. However, as Nostradamus helpfully notes, the Cipher does not reveal the location of the starting word, which is essential for breaking the code. To find it, he advises in closing, "As he is the only one who knows the number of the starting word, one must speak with the seer in person, and mind his language."

In 1791, someone with access to that injunction deduced that Nostradamus meant he had arranged for the crucial information to be interred with him. In the chaos of Revolutionary France that year, some "National Guardsmen" broke into his tomb in the wall of the Church of the Coredeliers in Salon through his epitaph stone (which read, in part, "Let not posterity disturb his rest"). Acting the part of drunken louts, they looted it, and scattered his bones. One is said to have drunk wine from his skull. They did not find the starting word. What they did find, lodged in the skull's mouth (the Latin word *lingua*, the last word of the Cipher, means tongue, as well as language), was a small golden disc, with the Latin inscription, "That which I sought, I have rendered unto God. That which you seek, I have rendered unto Cesar."

Although it would be easy to assume that it did, this does not constitute one of Nostradamus' common allusions to a biblical verse. In fact, he meant it quite literally. The required information is to be found on the astrolabe that the codicil conferred upon his son, Cesar. Engraved in an arc on the face are the astrological symbols for the planets known in Nostradamus' time: Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. Under the sigils are the first Latin letters of their names: M, V, M, D (for *Diupater*, an ancient form of the name), and S. Between the first four letters are plus signs, the expected one between D and S prominent by its absence. In Roman numerals, M + V + M + D, or 1000 + 5 + 1000 + 500. The starting word is the 2,505th word of the quatrains.

Searching for the Cipher, disc, and astrolabe is ample fodder for a series of adventures, or even a campaign. What happened to the cipher after its inheritance? Did Madeline understand its implications? Could she even read it? Have parts of the work been separated, forged, or even destroyed? Cesar was never much for astrology, to his father's disappointment. What did he do with the astrolabe? Tracking these bequests to a private collector or descendant of Nostradamus may require both archeological research and detective work. Was the gold disc reburied with Nostradamus' bones, in the other church in Salon? Furthermore, who were the "National Guardsmen" who broke into the seer's tomb, and did they understand the inscriptions on the disc? (If the campaign is set during the late 18th century, they might even be the PCs, of course.) Who else is after the Cipher? To what ends might they stoop to make sure they get hold of it first? And, finally, did Nostradamus have foreknowledge of who would find it? What did he do about it, if he did?

Obtaining the artifacts and deciphering the code doesn't have to end the story. Nostradamus' real message is still a matter of conjecture. Some options are:

True Prophecies

Nostradamus really had precognitive ability. He encoded his insights into the future to preserve people's faith in free will, to prevent people's attempts to avoid the events, and to avoid prosecution by the Inquisition as a black magician. Once deciphered, the Prophecies are a startlingly accurate portrayal of history since the seer and the future yet to

come. Some ambiguities may still exist because of Nostradamus' difficulty in understanding changes in technology and culture. Still, there's not much wiggle room. If this is what the Prophecies contain, it might be best for a campaign if the CIPHER is incomplete for one reason or another, or found only in parts.

True prophecies fit best into a campaign where paranormal or psychic abilities play a major role; otherwise, they require a dramatic reinterpretation of the game world. This variety of Nostradamus' predictions may "freeze" a reality, negating free will, once they are deciphered, or even once they are written, making it impossible to vary from them, and possibly endangering their reality when people try. This kind of danger would almost certainly require attention from any organization committed to "protecting the timestream" or preserving free will. Regardless of the existence or attention of those kinds of groups, powerful entities that want to control or destroy the knowledge are certain to exist.

Finally, in this scenario, where Nostradamus actually was a precognitive, he should be a significant NPC, both during the search and after the discovery. Aware of the searchers, and presumably aware of what they will do with the CIPHER once they find it, he might leave clues to help those he favors, or plant false trails to deceive those he disapproves of. It could be either or both for the PCs, but things are likely to get a little weird. ("Excuse me, sir? Ahem. 'The disc is in the church.' I don't know what that means, how this old letter knew you would be here today, or why it asked me to tell you that, but there you have it.")

Visions with Cloudy Sight

Nostradamus did have some ability to predict, but it succeeded only intermittently. Some of the prophecies are correct, but others are slightly off, or even notably off, what actually happened and will happen. This might be because of poor prophesizing, free will, or visions that included different timelines. He still coded his work for the same reasons, either because he thought he was completely accurate, or because he recognized that enough would be correct to raise suspicions. There may be a way to anticipate the success of a given prediction, or there may not. PCs may find themselves frustrated by encountering, in the deciphered prophecies, many of the same problems that they would have encountered in the originals.

This can be a basis for a campaign in itself. Once the Prophecies are deciphered, the PCs might feel obliged to try to counter or ameliorate some of them, since it seems not all are automatically fated to happen. Forewarned of disasters, assassinations, and other history-changing events, the temptation to get involved in them would be quite strong. An organization with access to the CIPHER and an interest in doing this kind of work could make an excellent patron. A slightly different, but intriguing, possibility would be an organization devoted to ensuring that as many of the prophecies as possible DO come true, perhaps because of concern for the timeline, or some arcane understanding of the implications of "misses."

In this kind of campaign, Nostradamus can play a role similar to the one in "True Prophecies," just maybe less competently. ("Excuse me, sir? I'm supposed to give this message to the first 'noble knight' who comes along, but I'm getting sick of waiting, so: 'The disc is in the church.' There. I've told somebody. I'm done with this.")

The Joke's on You

Nostradamus was a fool or a charlatan. Either he completely imagined his "abilities," or he was deliberately milking plausible-sounding gibberish to win fame and power. In either case, the deciphered predictions are a disappointment. If Nostradamus truly believed in his own abilities, the CIPHER and search stand as outlined. If, on the other hand, he knew he was full of it, the CIPHER may consist of sarcastic, if accurate, "prophecies" about how many gullible people would believe them, followed by musings that anticipate Barnum's "there's one born every minute." To avoid making the discovery of the CIPHER a complete bust, it could also contain valuable historical information -- perhaps insights into the French royal court of his time -- or even guide the finders to a mundane treasure, a cynical reward to those who solved the puzzle.

This version of the CIPHER works well in a campaign devoted to realism. There's enough mystique to Nostradamus that many players will anticipate value to his work even in a world that otherwise sticks strictly to plausibility. Furthermore, the PCs are unlikely to be the only ones lured by the promise. There are still likely to be powerful forces

interested in obtaining the artifacts, and obtaining them first. Just the possibility of its value makes the Cipher an excellent "McGuffin," an ultimately meaningless item that provides the basis for an adventure.

Nostradamus doesn't have to have been a precog to have set up future clues, just a patient prankster. Arrangements could have been made through institutions that were likely to last, or he or his pupil Chavigny could even have started a secret society devoted to perpetuating the joke. ("You wish to disinter the body? The third secret prophecy is fulfilled! You are the 'tall man from the land of Columbus who will come seeking the disc,' just as he foretold!" "My god, you've seen additional prophecies!?! Let me see them!" "Um, somebody . . . stole them. Just last week. Yeah, that's it. Probably somebody else on the trail.") This kind of seemingly impossible clue encourages the PCs to believe that there may be something to the legends, an important spur to their search. In fact, when they find the Cipher, players may think that its inaccuracy proves that they still have not found the real thing. Make sure Nostradamus explains the joke in the Cipher, if you want to end the search there. (Giving the PCs themselves a chance to perpetuate the joke afterwards might help them regain some dignity.)

In the Guise of a Prophet

Nostradamus may not have been writing predictions at all. Some secret society researchers have speculated that his writings were instead "cryptic messages, ciphers, schedules, timetables, instructions, blueprints for action." (Baigent, *Holy Blood*, 143) In one version, Nostradamus was an agent of the Guise family, which was seeking to gain the kingship of France; the Prophecies set forth a plan of action for their followers, providing for such plots as the "accidental" jousting death of Henri II, which vastly benefited the Guise cause. When the efforts of other Guise agents, possibly including the mysterious Priory of Sion, made his foresight "come true," he not only gained influence at court, but became an invaluable propaganda asset. Although Nostradamus as a Guise agent would be of historical interest, it may be a little obscure for the players. If the Guises themselves were just a pawn in a larger conspiracy, or the quatrains were instead intended for an organization or secret society that endured through to the PCs' day, the ability to decipher their secret messages would remain relevant. Note that the intended use of the Prophecies as a plan does not automatically negate their ability to predict -- in fact, it may enhance it! The Nostradamus Cipher could have been intended for use within the organization, or, double-agent style, Nostradamus might have intended it to be used to break his controllers' power.

This version fits nicely into an Illuminati-oriented campaign. The PCs might initially believe the accepted version of the Prophecies as predictions by a precognitive, only to find out, as they are drawn more deeply into the search, that the truth is something different, though no less incredible. The organization whose codes are at stake will obviously be very interested in keeping the Cipher out of the hands of the PCs; enemies of that organization will be just as interested in obtaining it. Either or both sides might seek to recruit the PCs in between attempts to neutralize them.

Either explanation of extra clues from Nostradamus, precognition or preplanning, would be appropriate for this type of Cipher. The boundary between the two should be further blurred by the intercession of agents from various interested parties. Nothing is certain! All is permissible!

("What'd that guy say to you?" "He said he was told to tell me the disc is in the church." "Weird. The woman who was just here knew what we're after. She told me not to trust that guy. She also gave me this note." "Weird. What's it say?" "Let's see . . . the disc is in the church. Um . . .")

Secrets Man Was Not Meant to Know

Nostradamus knew something. The Prophecies, accurate or not, are simply intended to be the medium by which he could pass on a secret or secrets. Here, the prophet is neither part nor pawn of any larger group; instead, he has learned something startling, the knowledge of which he decided to preserve without revealing it to the larger uninitiated public. The possibilities are legion. As a doctor, he may have discovered a formula for resurrecting the dead. As an astrologer, he may have learned how to cast a truly accurate horoscope. As an alchemist, he may have discovered the secret to the Philosopher's Stone. As an occultist, he may have discerned certain magical formulas, or the reality of things thought mythological. (In a Lovecraftian game world, the deciphered Prophecies may resemble the *Necronomicon*.) If the Cipher is to be of any real value to the PCs, Nostradamus found something that remains unknown to the present game

world.

The nature of the campaign must influence the nature of the revelations. Although this is a good way to introduce hitherto unknown possibilities into a game, care should be taken to maintain plausibility. Generally, the greater the paranormal presence in a game, the less significant, but more plausible, Nostradamus' discoveries become. Of course, although Nostradamus would have understood any discoveries he made from an unscientific perspective, it's possible that they were not paranormal. He may have stumbled across an herb that makes a powerful antibiotic and only thought it was a magical cure, for example. Medical advances like this work well as his discoveries, since they are supported by Nostradamus' personal history, which included several successful stints fighting the plague. Almost any scientific discovery could work, however, from a cure to the common cold to cold fusion. Outside organizations could still prove obstacles to the PCs quest for the Cipher, either because they anticipate the secret's value, or because they are operating under the standard assumption that the Cipher provides accurate predictions. (The PCs, too, could be operating under that misconception.) Certain organizations could be threatened by the nature of the secret; imagine the reaction of drug companies to a plentiful substitute for their bestseller, or the problems for religious authorities confronted with evidence that their founder was actually a woman.

Nostradamus, in this paradigm, likely would have little role in a future search for the Cipher. Neither precognitive nor prankster fits particularly well, although either could still be used to mislead the PCs at your option. The seer may instead appear primarily as a figure in historical research. His actual history can be reconfigured or elaborated upon to stress his possession of whatever secret(s) you decide upon. Increasing his success rate at curing patients suggests a miracle cure, unexplained reserves of gold implies alchemical success, reports of night terrors and gibbering fits indicates congress with blasphemous Things Man Was Not Meant to Know, etcetera.

The Nostradamus Cipher by no means exhausts all the possibilities for using Nostradamus in your campaign. A little research will suggest many others.

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- The reference to "rendering unto Caesar" is from the New Testament of the Bible, Matthew 21:22.

Romae Arcanae Alternae

"Times of troubles are unpleasant to live through, but make exciting settings for adventure stories. Citizens and soldiers will find work to do holding back the shadows; explorers from other timelines can try to uncover the secrets of an empire where pagan gods and magical spells have real power."

-- William Stoddard, *GURPS Fantasy*

Once more inspired by a recent release, we take up the vexilla raised by Bill Stoddard in the "Roma Arcana" setting for the new *GURPS Fantasy*. Although this column has [occasionally](#) dabbled in [fantastic](#) or [scientifically fictional Romes before](#) as [part](#) of a [broader menu](#), this time it's omnia Roma, omnia tempora! (Latin not guaranteed accurate; consult your local pedant for details.) Herewith, four fantastic premises, all seen through the purple and gold lens of Imperial Rome, the eternal game setting.

"The hostilities between Caepio and Drusus also began from a Ring . . . whence arose the origin of the wars and the destruction of the Republic."

-- Pliny, *Natural History*, XXIII:6

The Ring was stolen during the confusion of the wars, and vanished in fire and blood with the Republic. The divine Julius searched for it, and was on the verge of mastering it when he was killed, just as was Livius Drusus, its last known owner. The divine Augustus may have found it, late in his life, for his heirs were debauched, and insane, and half-witted, and finally murderously fearful. A great fire and another civil war followed, and the Ring was lost, as the lords of the August Empire quarreled among themselves. Now a new Emperor sits on the throne, of obscure birth, risen to power through war and *maleficium*. In the East, Titus Flavius Vespasianus destroyed a holy city and took from its treasuries a chest containing the very breath of God. With this ancient power of Creation at his beck, he overthrew the weak Aulus Vitellian and took the Purple for himself. His legions have returned to the northern marches, pressing across the Rhine River into the Northlands. His general Agricola desolates Britain and calls it peace, and his legions press south across Gaetulia to the black rivers. As the great volcano Vesuvius smolders, Vespasian stretches out the August Empire's hand across the once-free lands of the North, searching the world over for the Ring that will seal his power forever. He has even suborned Apollonius the White, wisest magus of the era, to his service and to his search. Apollonius is said to be creating new warriors in the oceans of the East for the Emperor, the *orcus* -- the devourers.

This is an epic high fantasy setting, taking its moral tone from Tacitus and Tolkien alike. PCs may be *Albi* from the forests of Britain, Pygmies thrust out of placid idyll in Aethiopia, Druids or magi alarmed at the building evil in the South, or heroes of the Free Men of the North who seek to keep the Shadow of Rome from falling across the entire Earth. Of course, if they could but find the Ring and hurl it into Vesuvius, the power of the Empire would no doubt be broken forever . . .

"We glance hastily at these things . . . in the hope of putting the reader into that state of feeling which is experienced oftenest at Rome. It is a vague sense of ponderous remembrances; a perception of such weight and density in a by-gone life, of which this spot was the centre, that the present moment is pressed down or crowded out, and our individual affairs and interests are but half as real here as elsewhere. . . . Side by side with the massiveness of the Roman Past, all matters that we handle or dream of nowadays look evanescent and visionary alike. . . . When we find ourselves fading into shadows and unrealities, it seems hardly worth while to be sad, but rather to laugh as gaily as we may, and ask little reason wherefore."

-- Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*

Rome, the Eternal City, flourishes under the noble emperor Marcus Aurelius. Accompanied by faithful servants, he travels through his city incognito, feeling its pulse and its power; righting wrongs and humbling the wicked. Genii guard the gateposts, priests tell fortunes to supplicants, and merchants sail to Sind and to the islands of the Erythraean Sea, braving rocs and ape-men to find gems and spices for the tables of the rich. The Emperor's wise rule has brought travelers and traders from all ends of the earth, from Cathay to the Red Isles of the Uttermost West, to the forums and marketplaces of the greatest city the world will ever see. Indeed, some travelers and traders seem to have stepped in from lands of miracle; glowing magical lamps, slim impossibly strong swords, and flying shields appear in tinkers'

wagons and tiny market stalls alike, always bringing story and adventure in their wake.

This "Mille Noctes Et Unum" setting treats Rome as "Baghdad-on-the-Tiber," or perhaps "Lankhmar-on-the-Tiber," depending, with a wink and a nod to anachronisms like rapiers, brandy, telescopes, and the rest of the fantastic rogues' kit. Its default tone is perhaps light fantasy, perhaps urban fantasy, varying with GM emphasis. "The Adventure of the Forty Vestal Virgins" will have one tone; "Ill Met In Subura" another. PCs can be almost anything or anyone from anywhere in the pre-industrial world -- or even modern tourists who took a wrong turn in the dark looking for the Trevi Fountains! Dark mystery cults, innocently scholarly aristocrats' daughters, honeyed wine, gladiatorial celebrities, orgies, and a good bath all await the bold. Carpe diem!

"When I reached fifteen I was a disciple of all the spirits and gods, and I knew about the seven levels of priests and the deeds of the lawless demons. For my parents strove that I might learn whatever there was to know about the earth, air, and sea, not only how the corruption of men increases, but also what makes a plant good, sturdy, and nourishing."
-- St. Cyprian, *Confessions*

So you're the new kid here at Sustuberis Magian Academy, eh? I hope you can carry the load; most of the kids here are patricians, and they really hate us plebes. I'm in Domus Mars, which is probably where you'll wind up, too; most of the patricians are in Domus Quirinus. The girls are in Domus Vesta, of course, and the barbarians are in Domus Bacchus. Great parties, but you don't want the prefects finding you in Vesta, or you'll get turned into a pig faster than you can construe Virgil. How are you at Aerial Harpastum? That's going to come in handy, then -- the Quirinians can't say anything if you can beat them in the sky above the palaestrum. So, what's your name, kid? Figulus? Wasn't there a magus named Figulus who, er, died, and . . . bloody Hades, you're his son! I'd know that mark of Jove anywhere . . .

British public school founders based their institutions on the ideals of Roman culture, so it's only fair that we turn around and base this setting on the most popular British public school fantasy in the world. It can be played relatively light and straight, like the source material has it, or darker and weirder. Perhaps the magi who graduate from Sustuberis and its fellow academies go into the front lines with the legions -- the game takes on a kind of "officer cadet" feel at that point. On the other hand, even the source material has plenty of dark hints and unpleasant elements that fit right in with the hellish cults of Cybele, or the plots of dark magi from hated Persia. PCs will be students, of course, which means the GM doesn't even have to decide where the game is going at all for the first little while -- just teaching the basics will be enough to keep young minds busy and productive.

*"Come, let me lead thee o'er this 'second Rome!'
Where tribunes rule, where dusky Davi bow,
And what was Goose-Creek once is Tiber now:
This embryo capital, where Fancy sees
Squares in morasses, obelisks in trees;
Which second-sighted seers, even now, adorn
With shrines unbuilt and heroes yet unborn . . ."*
-- Thomas Moore, "To Thomas Hume, From The City of Washington"

The Empire Never Ended. Behind the scrim of the world we know, Rome lives on, a cruel city of dreams and shadows occasionally leaking into our world in a rush of blood and fire. Crusading brothers take on the patricians, and are assassinated. The rich buy and sell the throne. Fond emperors foolishly appoint their sons to rule. License and impiety saps public moral fiber, and bread and circuses enervate the masses. Rome is the Dreamtime of the West, the eternal story mapped to locations around the world. Nowhere is that map more firmly fixed than Washington, D.C., with its white marble buildings, obelisks raised to Cincinnatus-like founders, and Pantheons of civic gods. Those who know the true viae, the roads that lead behind the world, can travel into Rome and see the levers of existence. They can petition the powers of Rome, the secret Senate of mighty lares, familial spirits of immense age and power such as the Flavians, Julians, and Severans. Here, too, are all the gods of the ancient world, kidnapped in chains and hauled to the Forum -- including the God of the Jews, trapped in His Ark by Titus. In Rome they sleep, watched over by Minerva and Mars. Their dreams drive the world forward, in a design laid out by the architects of the Eternal City.

This setting treats Rome as the Otherworld, eternally present, eternally powerful. The campaign can be secret history

or urban fantasy depending on whether the emphasis is on the Superficies or the City; it will most likely be dark fantasy, whichever direction the GM goes. PCs can be magicians who understand the truth of the world, and seek to use that knowledge for their own ends (a la the Shadow War from *GURPS Voodoo*), or mundane investigators (FBI agents, architects) who stumble into the Umbra Roma. Do they try to dissociate Rome from the world? Wake up the sleeping gods? What if Rome -- bloody, bold, and resolute -- is all that's keeping anything together? What if outside its walls lies ultimate barbarism, and unearthly gods who know not mankind?

The Hills Are Alive With the Sound of Panic

An adventure for *GURPS IOU*

by Karl Gallagher

"Gladiola Hopkins!"

Gladdie took a deep breath and walked onto the stage for her turn. She was a little nervous -- flubbing the final could mean a flunk even with her average. Not nervous enough, maybe.

A trapdoor opened releasing an adorable gopher snake. It swung its head about in obvious confusion. Gladdie stared at it and took a deep breath --

An icy hand grabbed the back of her neck and her body shivered. The scream burst out, shaped by trained reflexes, and filled the auditorium. Three of the calibrated wineglasses on the judges' table shattered. The snake tried to get back into the trap door. Everyone's ears rang for a few more seconds after the scream ended.

"You've been practicing, Miss Hopkins" said the Hysteria Department Chairthing. "That's the best we've had all day."

Gladdie smiled weakly and staggered off the stage. Down the main hall to the maintenance stairs, down to the basement service corridor, and back to the door marked DANGER: HAZARDOUS MATERIAL STORAGE. "If the photon capacitors didn't burn out we're ready to -- " Pete turned away from the other students as she burst in.

"It worked! I was perfect! They loved me!" Gladdie noticed their eyes moving up and down to her breathing and calmed herself.

"So you're registering for the summer project then?" asked Peter, putting down the oscilloscope.

"Well, sure -- a deal's a deal" she replied. "But, gosh, it works so well, why do you need our help?"

"That's a long story," said Peter, smiling widely enough to reveal everything caught in his teeth. "Maybe I can tell you over dinner?"

"Um, that's okay, we'll have plenty of time in New Hampshire." She fled.

* * *

This is a *GURPS IOU* adventure for any number of players. It's centered on WUSE or COUP upperclass or graduate students, with opportunities for one-shot or new characters.

The Set-Up

The Army has realized that tanks and bombs frighten away more enemy soldiers than they kill, so it's decided to skip to the end and avoid all those expensive, wasteful explosions. Now they've hired Prof. Marty Phobos of the Dept. of Military Science and Cost Overruns to build a "Fear Projector" (FP). Being brilliant at procurement, not physics, he said "No problem. Cash in advance" and dumped the details on his students. To make sure they focused on the problem, he arranged for it to count as credit for MSCO 414: Cost-Plus Prototypes, DT 501: Winning Through Intimidation, Ph 330: Focused Waves, and MSCO 550: Energy Weaponry. That leaves all the cash for him and a colleague from COUP (the College of Obscure and Unhealthy Professions considers scaring people to be under the Department of Dirty Tricks, so a compromise was in order).

The students used a combination of strobe lights and ultrasonic vibration to make a working cannon-sized beamer that causes a Will+2 Fright Check for everyone in the target area. Impressive, but not as good as Phobos' reports to the Army described. Now the Army wants a field test. On July 25th Army observers will be watching the town of Hardcheese, New Hampshire (pop. 1,000). If the whole town flees screaming, Phobos gets a bonus and a contract for a mass production version of the FP. If not, he has to pay the money back. All of it. With interest.

Not that Phobos doesn't know where the money is. He does -- it's in Vegas.

So Phobos has called the team together to explain the new grading policy. If the Hardcheese test succeeds everyone gets A's and a share of the bonus. If it fails, they flunk all four classes and get expelled for poor academic performance. The good news is he got his chairthing at the College of Weird and Unnatural Science and Engineering to provide additional funding for a summer field class, so there's money available to support test preparation.

A little research will show why Hardcheese was chosen for the test. Over 10% of the town has the Imperturbable advantage. They're famous for 12 years ago calmly fighting a forest fire even as it reached the edge of town. Any research will find the fire story. Asking THE Computer, Genetic Engineering faculty, or a library search will turn up the concentration of Imperturbable from an old GE study.

Brainstorming

Anyone suggesting they make the FP work better will be reminded that they'd tried that already. Using real bullets or explosives would be cheating so badly that the Army would notice. If the players don't think of this, have an NPC suggest planting ringers among the townsfolk to start the stampede. At that point they notice a sign across the street: "Dept. of Hysteria Summer Job Fair Tomorrow."

Hysterical Ringers

The Department of Hysteria specializes in all forms of emotional overreaction -- not just screaming in fear and gibbering in terror but also shrieking at rock stars, fervent denunciations, and passionate pleas. Its classrooms are heavily soundproofed but the best students still make passers -- by flinch at their screams. Graduates go on to careers as movie starlets, rock groupies, political activists, or evangelical preachers.

Hysteria majors are in hot demand even as undergraduates. The job fair is crowded, with bidding wars breaking out over the top students. The FP team is competing with:

- **B+ Actresses:** "Screams as loud as your CGI's colors."
- **Groupies Galore:** Stocking rock concerts, political rallies, entourages, and game shows.
- **Protest Professionals:** High pitched chants and fervent denunciations.
- **We Warn:** Explaining why everything you eat, use, or see is bad for you.
- **Mourners, Inc.:** Wailing at funerals, weeping at weddings.
- **Lovely Assistant Temps:** Suppliers to the finest mad scientists since 1804.

Phobos has a budget for the tests but WUSE can't throw around that kind of money. The team can only afford one to three hysterics at the going rate, probably not enough to pull the whole town along. (This is the perfect moment to introduce a non-WUSE character, as non-Hysteria majors will be looking for summer jobs, too.) The hiring process should check what kind of hysteric they're getting -- sulkers and fainters won't meet the Army's specs.

Note: Roleplaying WUSE nerds trying to chat up the Hysteria sorority girls could be good for hours of fun -- or it could bring up enough bad memories to provoke a GM lynching. Know Your Players.

If cash won't get them hysterics, they can offer credit, letting Hysteria majors enroll in their summer class (MSCO 599: Special Projects-Applied Fear Demonstration). For it to count toward their major a Hysteria professor has to be one of the faculty for the class. The logical choice is Abby Meeks, the Mass Hysteria professor. Prof. Meeks is willing, if

there's something in it for her. Any Lothario PCs can try direct persuasion of the shy and lonely spinster, or a study of her career can find a better lever. Meeks is so shy that she can only release her inhibitions for full screams in a crowd. This inability to do solo work has trapped her in the MH niche without tenure. The extra boost of the FP might enable her to overcome that.

The same trick can be used to help recruit Hysteria majors worried about their grades. How to sneak the FP into the room for finals without driving up the class average is left as an exercise for the PCs. Note that Hysteria grades on a pitch -- like a curve, but shriller.

Into the Hills

Once a suitable group of hysterics has signed up and finals are over, the infiltration into Hardcheese can begin. There's some tourism for the lakeside resort and forest hiking paths so all the usual seasonal jobs are available. The GM can place a children's summer camp by the lake to create more job openings and tap into horror movie cliches if desired.

Phobos has rented an old farmhouse on a hill overlooking the town to hide the FP in. It also provides housing for the team. Phobos will usually be in the town bar except on bingo nights, when he has his own table.

Once everything is in place, the GM can skip straight to the day of the test, or allow the PCs to start a campaign of tricks to get everyone in town on edge (see any *Scooby-Doo* episode for suggestions). Depending on how successful they are the GM may give the townsfolk -1 to -3 on Fright Checks. Getting the summer campers into town for the day is left to the team's ingenuity. Convincing the town's most stubborn residents to be on vacation that day could also make the test more likely to succeed.

General Mayhem and his aides will arrive at the farmhouse at noon. The PCs have until midnight to empty the town. Good luck!

The Fear Projector

The FP weights 2000 lbs and draws 10kW of power. When fired it affects a 30° cone up to four miles away. Anyone in line of sight or able to see and hear reflections of the beam must immediately make a Fright Check at Will+2 with any other modifiers applicable. If they fail the fright check they will flee the area by the easiest route, follow anyone else panicking, or hide if no escape route is available. Continuous exposure has no additional effect and targets can't be affected again until at least 30 minutes have passed.

Every time the FP is used roll for malfunction on 2d:

- 12 major malfunction, no effect, 2d hours to repair.
- 10-11 malfunction, no effect, 1-3 hours to repair
- 8-9 malfunction, has normal effects but then breaks down, 1-3 hours to repair
- 2-7 normal operation

Completing repairs requires a skill roll in Electronics or other appropriate skills and availability of spare parts. A critical success halves the repair time. If parts aren't available an Electronics-4 roll may be made to make a workaround, but if this fails the FP can't be repaired without the necessary part.

If the GM wants to allow improvements to the FP's performance, options are:

- putting two FP's in a crossfire (creates a Fright Check -2)
- tuning the strobe and/or ultrasonic frequencies to affect specific personality types (this would make it -4 to the targeted type and +4 to all others). This requires tests on the target type and skill rolls in Psychology and Electronics Operation.
- adding more emitters to the FP to allow frequency harmonics. This would be developed as a new Invention, GM

should allow an improved Fright Check roll by how much the Invention rolls were made by.

Simple Mass Panic Rules

Once everything is in place the GM can roll to see the outcome. Modifiers to this roll are:

1 hysteric in town:	+1
2-12 hysteric in town:	+2
13-40 hysteric in town:	+3
41+ hysteric in town:	+4
each 100 outsiders in town:	+1
each 10 Imperturbables out of town:	+1
climate of fear (from pranks):	+1 to +3
tricksters unmasked:	-3
improvements in FP:	+1 for each -1 to Fright Check

Roll 3d and check table:

3-10	Complete failure. Phobos arrested, students expelled.
11-14	Failure. Phobos indicted, students get hearing before ArchDean
15-17	Partial failure. Army cancels follow-on project but takes no other action. C-'s all around.
18-20	Inconclusive. Army schedules retest in one month.
21-23	Partial success. Army gives contract for improved prototype. B's.
24-26	Success. Production contract awarded. A's for all.
27+	Complete success. Huge 10-year contract awarded. All students receive A+ grades.

The GM should provide a vivid description of the hysterics leading the whole town out into the hills . . . or of them running off while everyone watches them with a puzzled look and then goes about their business.

Detailed Mass Panic Rules.

If you want a more detailed breakdown of how the town would panic, and particularly if players want to apply assorted subtle tricks for increasing panic, the actual Fright Checks can be done for the townsfolk. This involves a lot of dice rolling, but the townsfolk and other NPCs can have their rolls done for groups of 10 or 20 to reduce that.

The population breaks down as 200 Will 9, 300 Will 10, 300, Will 11, 100 Will 12, 50 Will 11 + Imperturbable, 50 Will 12 + Imperturbable. If summer campers are present they'll be 40% Will 8, 40% Will 9, 20% Will 10.

The Hysterics will have to pass a Fright Check to do any special maneuvers. They can make Acting rolls to fake panic -- for each 3 points they make the roll by they count as an extra panicking person for Fright Check modifiers. (i.e., a hysteric rolling 9 below her skill would count as four people).

Table of modifiers

Being surrounded by people who've panicked makes it harder to pass your own Fright Check. Conversely, people who've kept their nerve have a steadying influence. Anyone who's not taken the Fright Check yet has no effect. When a character has to make a Fright Check, add the modifiers from the table below to his Will.

Number of People	Panicked People	Unpanicked People
1-5	-1	0
6-15	-2	+1
16-30	-3	+2
31-50	-4	+3
51-75	-5	+4

76-105	-6	+5
106-140	-7	+6
141-180	-8	+7
181-230	-9	+8
231-290	-10	+9
291-360	-11	+10
361-440	-12	+11
441-530	-13	+12
531-630	-14	+13
631-750	-15	+14
751-1000	-16	+15
1000+	-17	+16

Mechanics of Mass Panic

When a group of people is forced to take a Fright Check at once, sort them in order of effective Will and test those with the lowest Will first. Anyone intending to panic is treated as having a Will of zero. If more than one Fright Check occurs at the same time, combine them as one Fright Check with a Will modifier of (total modifiers)-3. If the total Will modifiers reach a point where anyone has an adjusted Will of 2 or below they automatically fail (no chance for a critical success).

If someone not forced to take a Fright Check sees a crowd panicked enough to give a modifier of -5 or below, he must take a Fright Check at +5 to the crowd modifier.

Optional Subplots

- The "climate of fear" option can expand to a whole adventure with costumes, holograms, and a major apparition on test day.
- A COUP student could profit from the reward the Army gives whistleblowers by revealing the plan to rig the test. But he'd need proof and a way to still pass the class.
- A suitably elaborate scheme could lure the Imperturbable NPCs out of Hardcheese.
- Lots of people would want the Fear Projector for themselves. Hijacking the truck taking it to Hardcheese would be the easiest way to steal it. The team would have to race the clock to recover it or build a replacement.
- Other custom applications of the FP could be a distraction. For example, the School of Law wants a miniature one voice-activated by the phrase "Now, you could just trust the jury to do the right thing . . ."

Deus Ex Machinas

If the dice betray your players after all their hard work, you can still give them a happy ending.

- The fluffiest of the hysterics can come up with an idea to improve the FP 10-fold, and the modifications can be completed by midnight.
- Phobos could bribe Gen. Mayhem for a good report.
- When Phobos is arrested the MSCO Chairthing will have to do the grade reports in his absence. He can judge the students on their effort objectively, or rely on Phobos' progress reports to the Army.
- The ArchDean will forgive them if they're willing to earn some "extra credit" by handling this tiny chore for her . . .

Or, heck, just expel them. There's a whole world of adventure and opportunity out there. Bill Gates is a college dropout, too.

Alternate Scenarios

If your current campaign doesn't center on WUSE students (or isn't even at IOU) you can still use some or all of this scenario.

Hysteria-Centered: The Fear Projector plot can be removed entirely, leaving a group of Hysteria-major PCs trying to start a panic for extra credit. This should be set in a different town with less stubborn residents.

Mystery: The current IOU characters can pick up clues about the FP test and work to avert the test, or at least get a cut of the pie for not ruining it. A member of the party could infiltrate the FP team and work both sides.

Inverted: In a non-IOU campaign the FP test could be aimed at their home town. They'd have to see through the various tricks to figure out the connection between all these new summer workers and the mysterious professor renting a house for the summer. This could be either an IOU project or just the workings of your current campaign's villain or mad scientist.

Aftermath: The PCs can come in after or during the panic and have to figure out what happened by tracking down the hysterics and using them to find the FP team and their employer.

Other Genres: Prof. Phobos can work as-is for a modern-day or *Cliffhangers* campaign. For Supers he should have more personal prowess and a gadgeteering ability to customize the FP to work on the PCs. In a Black Ops campaign Phobos is the cover for a Grey experiment to measure human mental resistance. In a *Cyberpunk* campaign the FP can target implants or even work in cyberspace.

Variations

Silly: Make the Hysteria Majors as ditzzy as possible and Phobos incompetent at any technical issue. Encourage cartoon-based fear tactics. Panic has no lasting effect, don't use the Fright Check Table. There are no injuries or damage even if the whole town stampedes.

Weird: Eliminate the more humorous aspects and look puzzled when the PCs laugh at anything. Anyone failing their Fright Checks must roll on the FC Table to see if they have any severe impacts.

Darkly Illuminated: Instead of the Army, the FP is being procured by an "unnamed government agency" which may be a front for someone else. Mafia? Mad scientist? THEM? The companies at the Hysteria Job Fair are all fronts. Mass panics will have sprained ankles, tramlings, car accidents, and houses burned down by abandoned stoves. If the test fails Phobos will simply disappear, with a replacement explaining what they really did this summer.

Notes on Hysteria Majors

Majors will have high HT, average ST and IQ, and average or low DX (they're exceedingly likely to trip when running). The main skills taught are Acting, Performance, Bard, Singing, and Sex Appeal, with appropriate maneuvers. Many have an Attractive or better appearance. Phobias are common. Unfzable and Imperturbable students get washed out quickly. Danger Sense is useful for getting in three deep breaths before your cue. Known majors have the Reputation "noisy and useless in emergencies" among IOU members (-3, large group, 10-, 4 pts) but may buy it off by demonstrating that they only panic deliberately.

New Maneuvers

Scream (Average) Defaults to Acting, Bard, or Singing, no prereq

This maneuver allows the character to utter a convincing scream.

Piercing Scream (Hard) Defaults to Bard or Singing, no prereq

This produces a clear, very loud scream that can be heard at twice the distance of a normal shout.

Terrified Scream (Hard) Defaults to Acting or Singing, no prereq

This maneuver tries to convince witnesses that the screamer is truly terrified of something. A critical success will force everyone in earshot to make a Fright Check. This must be taken with a specialization in Fleeing, Cowering, or Fainting (which default to each other at -2).

Delighted Scream (Hard) Defaults to Acting, Singing, or Sex Appeal, no prereq

Gives an impression of pure ecstasy at the arrival of the target. A successful roll gives +2 to any Sex Appeal rolls made against the target by the screamer during the next 24 hours.

Synchronized Screaming (Hard) No default

This must have a specialization in a specific scream maneuver. A group of screamers with this maneuver may do a synchronized scream whose effect is multiplied by the square of the number of screamers. Roll against the lowest maneuver level of the group.

Angry Rant (Average) Defaults to Intimidation, Acting, or Bard, no prereq

Emotional outburst intended to force target to yield on conflict or acknowledge guilt. Can be used in Contest of Skill against target's Will, or bonus to reaction roll (+1 for each 2 pts. roll is made by).

Angry Sermon (Hard) Prereq: Angry Rant (must use same base skill)

As Angry Rant, but targeted at a group.

Pleading (Average) Defaults to Acting or Bard, no prereq.

Persuading target to provide concessions through pity or sympathy. Can be used in Contest of Skill against target's Will, or bonus to reaction roll (+1 for each 2 pts. roll is made by).

GM Notes: Use of any of these maneuvers to influence someone is dependent on the relationship between the characters and the emotional content of the speech. Inappropriate usage should have negative effects. Roleplay all attempts.

New Skill

Weird Engineering (M/VH) No default.

Allows the creation, repair, or use of strange devices without necessarily understanding the principles of how they work. Game effects are as Weird Science, except that critical successes will fix a bug in the design or add a new feature. Weird Engineering can also be used as a substitute for any other Engineering, Mechanic, or Armory skill at -3 (Unlike a Weird Scientist, a Weird Engineer can fix a flat tire. Your car may have legs, but it will work). A successful Weird Engineering roll will reveal if and how a device is about to fail (Aragorn knowing how the collapsing brick bridge would tilt? Weird Engineering roll.). Weird Science and Weird Engineering default to each other at -3.

Characters

Martin Phobos, Professor, Dept. of Military Science and Cost Overruns (WUSE)

Prof. Phobos has found his niche in the military-industrial complex -- supplying complicated prototypes for state-of-the-art military systems. He doesn't like doing engineering but he doesn't have to. Schmoozing with generals and deputy assistant undersecretaries of defense brings the money in while his students actually deliver on his promises. That leaves him plenty of time for card games.

ST: 11 DX: 11 IQ: 14 HT: 12

Advantages: Academic Status +3 (tenured professor), Ally Group (Unwilling) (students and advisees), Tenure.

Disadvantages: Compulsive Gambling, Greed, Overconfidence, Duty (to IOU, -10).

Quirks: Avoids doing engineering work if he can. If it's not a class day he's at a casino or military base. Will always promise the government what it wants, even if it violates the laws of physics.

Skills: Area Knowledge (IOU)-21, Survival (IOU)-22, Administration-20, Research-18, Savoir-Faire (academic)-17, Savoir-Faire (military)-21, Cryptology/TL7-18, Science!-18, Weird Engineering-18, Intelligence Analysis-19, Gambling-17, Electronics/TL7-22, Engineer (Guns)/TL7-20, Engineer (Vehicles)/TL7-21, Engineer (Artillery)/TL7-19.

Typical Dialogue: "You do realize, General, that pushing the state of the art like that will drive up the development costs considerably." "All right, class, take a copy of the XLR-35 performance specs on your way out. Have a full design for it by the 17th. This will be 25% of your grade."

John Smith, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Dirty Tricks (COUP)

Of all the strange and bizarre personalities in COUP, the least so is John Smith. His looks are as boring as his name, and that's his real name. In fact he's continually annoyed with people assuming it must be an alias. His blandness has brought him the most boring teaching duties in the department. Smith will leap at a chance to have some excitement.

ST: 9 DX: 13 IQ: 13 HT: 11

Advantages: Academic Status +2, Danger Sense

Disadvantages: Duty (to IOU, -10), Compulsive Spending (bribes too much), Lives On Campus (dorm master in Murphy Hall), Secret (fnord).

Quirks: Gets angry when people won't believe that's his real name. Sits on tables and desks to compensate for his shortness. Carries a very tiny switchblade.

Skills: Area Knowledge (IOU) - 19, Survival (IOU) - 20, Administration - 19, Research - 16, Intimidation - 17, Computer Hacking -15, Electronics/TL-7 - 15 (specialty sabotage), Mechanic/TL-7 - 15 (specialty sabotage), Bard - 16, Writing - 22, Performance - 20, Disguise - 20, Psychology - 22, Detect Lies - 21, Electronics Operations (communications) - 22, Photography - 21, Knife - 18, Diplomacy - 18, Fast-Talk - 19.

Typical Dialogue: "John Smith. And no quotation marks." "Itching powder is a highly effective method for distracting the target."

Abby Meeks, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Hysteria

Prof. Meeks is happiest as "one of the crowd." She can scream and holler with the best of them if she's not the center of attention, but freezes up if people are staring at her. This has made her a good teacher-her students take turns practicing new techniques and coaching each other while Meeks guides them from the rear of the room. Good teaching isn't enough to advance at IOU, however, and Meeks seems doomed to remain untenured forever.

ST: 9 DX: 13 IQ: 12 HT: 13

Advantages: Ally Group (students, -15), Academic Status +1, Attractive (+1), Voice.

Disadvantages: Duty (to IOU), Shyness (-2 on any skill roll under observation), Low Self Image (-3 on rolls under stress)

Quirks: Totally silent when scared or nervous. Autophobia (wants to be with people, even strangers).

Skills: Area Knowledge (IOU) - 18, Survival (IOU) - 17, Administration - 14, Savoir-Faire (academic) - 16, Bard - 21, Singing - 22, Acting - 22, Fast-Talk - 18, Leadership - 15, Performance - 22, Teaching - 20, Detect Lies - 19, Stealth - 17, Streetwise - 15, Directing - 20.

Maneuvers: Scream - 25, Piercing Scream - 22, Terrified Scream (Fleeing) - 24, Delighted Scream - 23, Synchronized Screaming (Terrified Scream/Fleeing) - 24, Angry Rant - 22, Angry Sermon - 20, Pleading - 24. **Typical Dialogue:** "Um . . . Gladiola, why don't you start off with today's reading?"

Gladiola Hopkins, Junior, Dept. of Hysteria

Gladdie majored in Hysteria on a whim--nothing else appealed to her and she liked horror movies. Her grades are good but that's due to hard work rather than aptitude. She'll probably stick with it unless something else grabs her attention.

ST: 9 DX: 10 IQ: 13 HT: 13

Advantages: Academic Status (-1), Honor Student, Empathy, Rapier Wit.

Disadvantages: Duty (Prof. Meeks), Lives On Campus, Impulsiveness, Workaholic.

Quirks: Nosy. Doesn't know what she wants to be when she grows up. Fond of snakes.

Skills: Area Knowledge (IOU) - 13, Survival (IOU) - 11, Bard - 12, Singing - 14, Physiology - 10, Psychology - 13 (16 if Empathy can be applied), Acting - 14, Carousing - 11, Detect Lies - 12, Ventriloquism - 11, Driving (car) - 10.

Maneuvers: Scream - 16, Piercing Scream - 15, Terrified Scream (Fleeing) - 14, Delighted Scream - 15, Synchronized Screaming (Terrified Scream/Fleeing) - 14.

Typical Dialogue: "What's that? Oh, cool-can I try?"

Peter Kurbisfressen, 1st year grad student, Dept. of Military Science and Cost Overruns

Peter loves building fancy gadgets, the more complicated the better. Getting him to pay attention to anything other than the latest toy can be tough, especially personal maintenance. This is also bad for his grades, but Prof. Phobos has covered for him as long as the new machines get built.

ST: 11 DX: 12 IQ: 15 HT: 9

Advantages: Academic Status (-1), Intuitive (limitation-repair or debugging only), Patron (Prof. Phobos), Machine Empathy (from *GURPS Steampunk*)

Disadvantages: Nerd, Odious Personal Habit (poor hygiene, -1), Compulsive Tinkerer (must make a Will roll to go a day without trying to modify/improve completed devices), Duty (Prof. Phobos).

Quirks: Talking Shop (but not at OPH level). Hates letting the customers take his devices away.

Skills: Area Knowledge (IOU) - 14, Driving (car) - 10, Mathematics - 16, Research - 14, Strategy - 12, Tactics - 12, Writing - 14, Weird Engineering - 12.

The following skills are all TL7:

Armory (artillery) - 14, Engineer (vehicles) - 15, Engineer (machinery) - 16, Engineer (weapons) - 13, Electronics - 15, Nuclear Physics - 12, Physics - 13, Photonics - 15, Computer Programming - 16

Phil Richards and the Stock J Tape

by Brian Rogers & Matthew Pook

"Doc" Richards

Phil Richard cuts an unassuming figure. Standing slightly under six feet, with a gaunt frame and a weak chin, he carries himself with grace enough to be lithe rather than gangly. He smokes a little, drinks a little, exercises very little, and engages in the occasional recreational drug, so he is not in the best of health. Phil wants to be "smart," but hangs around with people less intelligent and less well read than he is rather than study. When around intellectual equals he is a reserved, quiet underachiever.

He has always had two fascinations: recording and the human mind. These led him to study biological psychology, with its recording of brainwaves. While in college, Phil had plans of becoming a PhD, but alas his funds fell short, and he was forced to abandon his education halfway to his Masters degree. More truthfully, the lack of funds is a convenient excuse for leaving school before he failed out, having spent too much of his time with the school's radio station.

Fortunately, that same radio work gave him connection with local rock bands in need of a sound and recording technician, and he quickly fell in with their crowd. His expertise and education was enough to earn him the moniker "Doc," and to this day Phil remains perfectly happy to let new acquaintances think that he did earn that PhD. Phil made enough to scrape by, and he did come to care about his new -- often equally under-motivated -- socially inept friends, but he wanted something more permanent.

The local want ads revealed the perfect position: The Cassandra Institute, a private mental institution, was looking for psychology technicians. Phil landed a steady job monitoring EEGs, recording interviews and other tasks he'd already mastered as a Graduate Student. The pay was good, they didn't look too closely at his slightly doctored resume and the hours fit around his growing recording work. The only drawback was the creepy patients, but Phil's contact with them was either after sessions of the Cassandra Institute's innovative psychometric calming treatments or in the company of several beefy security guards. Gossip identified the patients as either criminals or stress disorder victims, but Phil never asked questions.

With everything going so well, Phil took the plunge and signed a lease on a small house closer to downtown, with an attached office that he could convert into an actual studio. The next day, the Institute exploded. Literally. The flames were seen across town as the building did a creditable imitation of the Hindenburg. The death toll was enormous, and was assumed to include the Institute's owners. Firemen found that the building had been a firetrap, almost as if someone had designed it to explode.

Distraught, Phil wandered around the Cassandra campus, staring at the ashes of his former place of employment and wondering how he was going to pay his rent when he found a locked, fireproof metal box, thrown clear by the explosion. Claiming it as a souvenir, he went back to the studio and snapped the lock. Inside was a reel-to-reel tape, which played an audible cyclical susurrus. Phil spent the next day analyzing the tape. When one of his friends turned up in a chemically agitated state, Phil gambled that the tape was one of Cassandra's psychometric treatments and played a section repeatedly as a calming influence. While his friend quickly fell asleep, the secondary results were not what Phil expected.

Phil's first "patient" woke feeling not just refreshed, but reborn. Over the next few days he quit smoking, cut back on his drinking, and dedicated himself to both his music and his band. He went from being a classic slacker to practicing for hours a day, pushing his band, landing them three new gigs and pulling together the cash for a recording session in the Doc's new studio to get a record together. Phil was fascinated.

Too much of a scientist to expose himself to the tape, Phil started inviting other members of the scene to listen to parts

of it in order to see what happened. The results were all positive. Phil believed that he was helping people, and because the results faded in a short time, there could be no harm done. Once he isolated the parts of the tape dealing with social interaction, Phil made extensive use of them on himself, becoming the composed, charming man he had always wanted to be. He realized then that he could make money on this, and that there really was no reason to tell people the specifics. Sure, it seems callous, but as Phil reasoned, "It *is* for their own good."

With a confidence boarding on the cocksure, Phil painted a sign on his window that did not advertise a recording studio, but instead "Phil Richards - The 'I' Doctor: Psychological Therapy for a Superior Life." Now patients come in, go through a quick questionnaire to reveal what areas of their life they want improved, get talked into the procedure by the charming Doc, and then cut a check for a few hours in the chair listening to that relaxing hum. "Is that all?" they wonder, but head back into their day with a stronger sense of self, a greater gift of conversation or even better reflexes. The improvements are so positive that they don't notice their lack of control around the opposite sex, their lack of concern about their fellow man or the overabundance of self-confidence getting them into just a little bit of trouble.

Philip Paul Richards

85 points

Age 27, 5'8", 104 lbs. (SM 0).

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 13 [60]; **HT** 9 [-10].

Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs. HP 10 [0]; Will 13 [0]; Per 13 [0]; FP 9 [0].

Basic Speed 5 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0] Dodge 8.

Social Background

TL 8 [0]

CF American [0]

Languages: English (Native) [0]

Advantages

Contacts (Local Music Scene) (Instrument or Streetwise Skill 15, 12 or less, Somewhat Reliable) [4]

Talent (Musical Ability) 1 [5]

Disadvantages

Curious [-5]

Secret (Is not a real Doctor) [-5]

Skinny [-5]

Wealth (Struggling) [-10]

Unfit [-5]

Quirks

Attentive

Convinced that the effects of the tape are beneficial

Dreamer

Likes to be called "Doc"

Prefers the company of the less well-read

Skills

Accounting-11 [1]
Bartender-12 [1]
Carousing-9 [1]
Computer Operation/TL8-13 [1]
Driving/TL8 (Automobile)-10 [1]
Electrician/TL8-12 [1]
Electronics Operation/TL8 (Communications)-14 [4]
Electronics Operation/TL8 (Medical)-14 [4]
Electronics Repair/TL8 (Communications)-13 [2]
Electronics Repair/TL8 (Computers)-12 [1]
Electronics Repair/TL8 (Medical)-13 [2]
Engineer/TL8 (Electrical)-11 [1]
Engineer/TL8 (Electronics)-11 [1]
Fast-Talk-12 [1]
First Aid/TL8-13 [1]
Hypnotism-11 [1]
Literature-11 [1]
Mathematics/TL8 (Applied)-12 [2]
Merchant-12 [1]
Musical Composition-12* [1]
Musical Instrument (Electronic)-12* [1]
Musical Instrument (Keyboard)-12* [1]
Pharmacy/TL8 (Synthetic)-11 [1]
Physiology/TL8-11 [1]
Psychology/TL8-13 [4]
Research/TL8-12 [1]
Sociology-11 [1]
Streetwise-12 [1]
Writing-12 [1]

*Cost modifiers: Musical Ability.

Attributes [70]; Advantages [9]; Disadvantages [-30]; Skills [+41] Quirks [-5]

"Trade Off" Stock J Tape Exposure adds

Charisma 2 [10]

Callous [-5]

Overconfidence [-5]

The Stock J Tape

A classic reel to reel recording tape, the fireproof case was labeled "Stock J." Rather than a psychometric treatment, the tape contains an audio translation of a human personality -- the recording causes subtle alterations in the listener's psyche when heard. The tape has several discrete phases, each tying to a certain facet of the recorded personality, and each lasting between 15 minutes and an hour. The tape as a whole runs three hours. Hearing any part once has no discernable impact, but four continuous exposures initiates a noticeable shift that takes several days to fade. Greater exposure produces longer lasting changes.

Despite Phil's assumption that exposure to the tape is purely positive, what patients receive are flip sides of the recordee's personality. In game terms, they are being given certain advantages, paid for with unintended disadvantages. Memories are limited to high intensity moments and visual images from the recordee's past. What patients will make of these is not yet known.

J Stock Tape Modification [0 pt]

CF English [1], West Asia [1]

Advantages: Charisma 2 [10]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Fearlessness 2 [4]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Will +1 [5]

Disadvantages: Callous [-5]; Code of Honor (Gentleman's) [-10]; Lecherousness [-15]; Overconfidence [-5]; Sense of Duty (Unnamed Intelligence Agency) [-10]

Quirk: Has memories of previous missions [-1]

Memory Exposure

Some campaigns might be more amenable to the tape providing skills as well as advantages and disadvantages. In this case, continued exposure to the tape after gaining all of the standard benefits starts overwriting parts of the patient's memories, giving the Split Personality disadvantage and 1 point each in the following skills:

- Boating/TL8 (Motorboat)
- Body Language
- Carousing
- Dancing
- Driving/TL8 (Automobile)
- Gambling
- Guns/TL8 (Pistol)
- Holdout
- Intelligence Analysis/TL8
- Karate
- Lockpicking/TL8
- Piloting/TL8 (Light airplane)
- Professional Skill: Espionage
- Savoir-faire
- Sex Appeal
- Stealth

Unbalanced/Cinematic Exposure

The Stock J tape can work equally well for games less concerned with point balance. For this option simply select the most appropriate skills and advantages based on the desired exposure, along with two thirds as many points in the most appropriate disadvantages, from the list below. While in a perfect world Phil could give his patients all of the good traits with none of the bad, doing so would change the theme of the character.

Full exposure to this version is a 35-point increase.

CF English [1], West Asia [1]

Languages

English (Native) [0]; French (Accented) [4]; German (Accented) [4]; Russian (Accented) [4]

Advantages

Charisma 2 [10] Combat Reflexes [15]; Fearlessness 2 [4]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Will +1 [5]

Disadvantages

Callous [-5]; Code of Honor (Gentleman's) [-10]; Lecherousness [-15]; Overconfidence [-5]; Sense of Duty (Unnamed Intelligence Agency) [-10]; Split Personality [-15]

Skills

Boating/TL8 (Motorboat) (DX) [2]
Body Language (Per) [2]
Brawling (DX) [1]
Carousing (HT+1) [2]
Dancing (DX) [2]
Driving/TL8 (Automobile) (DX) [2]
Gambling (IQ) [2]
Guns/TL8 (Pistol) (DX) [1]
Holdout (IQ) [2]
Intelligence Analysis/TL8 (IQ) [4]
Karate (DX) [4]
Lockpicking/TL8 (IQ) [2]
Piloting/TL8 (Light airplane) (DX) [2]
(Professional Skill: Espionage (IQ) [2]
Savoir-faire (IQ) [1]
Sex Appeal (HT) [2]
Skiing (HT) [4]
Stealth (DX) [2]

Quirks

Always delivers a suitable quip upon killing an opponent
has memories of previous missions

For over-the-top games, replace Boating, Driving & Piloting with Drive! (DX) [24] and replace Guns with Guns! (DX) [24]. This is a 76-point increase.

Adventure Threads

Nobody Believes Us: What was the Cassandra Institute, and what were its goals? The technology used to create the Stock J tape is far ahead of any tech level that might house Phil Richards (whose presence is best set in the *Atomic Horror* or Contemporary periods), which raises the question of where it came from. The suspicious nature of the Cassandra Institute conflagration raises yet more questions: Are they a criminal conspiracy? Time travelers? An alien front? Will they be coming back for their tape? This makes a great "enemy within" *Atomic Horror* setting, with the PCs being ordinary people facing off against MIB-like Cassandra agents and discovering the real breadth of their new mental abilities.

The Name is "Stock"? Who was the original recordee, and what happened to him? Whoever he was, he possessed a [sharp mind](#), great charm, iron nerves, and a callous view of humanity -- as well as a strong bond of loyalty to something. (This assumes that he is dead. The Cassandra Institute conflagration has all the earmarks of an agent destroying the enemy base during his escape.) Regardless, there are now people adopting his mannerisms, his loyalty, and eventually his memories. Depending on how much of the loyalty vibe a patient receives, he might find himself heading on impulse towards international adventure -- along with the rest of Phil's patients.

"It's not hurting anyone." When the Doc tells himself that, he is ignoring both the breadth and depth of his business' impact. What are the ramifications on a small community when several of its citizens become charming, callous, and lecherous potential killers? This is makes a good investigative scenario, where the PCs are outsiders looking into a

town that's becoming increasingly callous and combat-worthy? And what if Phil gets it into his head to broadcast the tape over the airwaves?

Pyramid Review

Fright Night: Polar Terror (for the d20 System)

Published by [Hogshead Publishing](#)

Written by Steven Marsh

Illustrated by Amandine Labarre

64-page b&w softcover; \$15.95

Editor's Note: This book was written by Pyramid editor Steven Marsh.

The second incarnation of Hogshead Publishing is best known for its *Crime Scene* series of supplements for the *d20 System* that explore both sides of the law in the USA. So far these have included [Crime Scene: Police Investigation](#) and [Crime Scene: Forensics](#), but Hogshead has also branched out with a new line called "Fright Night." Each title explores all things that go bump in the night in the contemporary here and now, presenting a location and building a scenario around the setting. The first title in the series, *Fright Night: Haunted House*, looked at a very traditional setting, but the second is far more contemporary, for *Fright Night: Polar Terror* is set in the Antarctic.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The situation is very simple: As the isolating Antarctic winter approaches the United Kingdom's newest base, New Shackleton puts out a call for help. One of its tasks is to investigate radio and magnetic anomalies, but nothing has been heard from the latest exploratory team for the last five days. The PCs, serving at the US Amundsen-Scott base, are assigned to take a helicopter out to the British encampment, check on the survivors, and transport them or their remains back to New Shackleton.

Unfortunately, the party discovers the small encampment in disarray and the only survivor of the three-man team lost in coma. With the weather intensifying, the helicopter struggles to fly on to New Shackleton; as it lands, the engine splutters and gives out. Readily welcomed by the base staff, they are allowed to wait as the helicopter is repaired and the deaths of the exploratory team investigated. As they wait, they face a deadline: the last day on which airplanes can fly into or out of the Antarctic before winter sets in. After that, the player characters are trapped, although in pleasant company of the mostly British base staff. Yet there remains the question of what happened to the exploratory team -- a question that can only be answered following a series of strange events at the base itself, starting with a pair of deaths.

Of course, this being a horror scenario, there is an outré threat behind such events. And in creating such a threat the author faces a problem. How can he write a scenario set in the Antarctic and not draw comparison to the films *The Thing From Another World* or its remake, *John Carpenter's The Thing*? And the reality is that he cannot. So instead he must play with the expectations of the average gamer -- do something new with old and familiar tropes. And in creating the alien threat of *Polar Terror*, he has opted for a threat that is more mechanical than organic in nature. It is an enevore, able to take advantage of our technology to not only direct it against us, but also use it as a means of misdirection. These tools are employed by the author to build and instil fear and paranoia in both the players and the staff of New Shackleton base. To return to the problem of making comparisons with certain films, *Polar Terror* is like *John Carpenter's The Thing*, but it is also like the film *Virus*, based on the Dark Horse Comic. The monster is well designed, with clear motivations and abilities. Fortunately it is not infallible; players can outwit it, and will have to if

they want to survive. New Shackleton base does not possess an arsenal, and what weapons are available are tools first and weapons second.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

The adventure is supported by details of New Shackleton and its staff, some of them feeling a little sketchy. So is the base map, which needs both more detail of its buildings and the immediate area. There is a short history of Antarctica and the nature and dangers of life and work in the polar winter. These include not just hypothermia and frostbite, but also sunburn and the perils of touching metal objects.

For players, there are six new character classes: the Engineer, the Geologist, the Researcher (or Scientist), the Muscle, the Psychologist, and the Medic. These are designed to represent civilian professionals, not trained combatants, and they do a good job. Of the six, the Muscle is the least obvious in intent. He undertakes a range of physical duties at the base: sample characters at the base using this class include the cook, the janitor, the electrician, the pilot, and the vehicle operator. It is suggested that at least one of the player characters take the role of pilot in playing *Polar Terror*. Character creation is aided by a list of the skills and feats necessary to the process.

Of course, all horror games or scenarios need a means of handling fear and scared characters. The idea in *Fright Night* is to turn player characters into victims, and the new rules suggest how they react and act as victims. The GM simply makes two rolls, one to see the highest Hit Dice creature or character it can scare and another to see how many Hit Dice worth of creatures or characters the scare effects. The scare works as a ranged fear attack which the player makes a Will Check against. Suggested bonuses to this roll are in keeping with the genre. While the rules are sound, they are not as comprehensive as in some games, which may disappoint some. This leaves plenty of room for GM input, though.

Physically, *Polar Terror* is a solidly put together book, decently edited and containing some nice artwork, though the heavy repeated use of the artwork looks cheap. It contains everything a GM needs to run the adventure and even notes on continuing the story with further *Fright Night* titles. Overall, this book feels far more comprehensive and complete than what can be found in some of the publisher's *Crime Scene* series.

One thing that is lacking is a suggestion as to the necessary character level needed to play *Polar Terror*. It is a tough prospect for 1st-level characters, so is better suited to 2nd- and 3rd-level ones. It is also designed for the *d20 System* using just the *Dungeons & Dragons Player's Handbook* as opposed to the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game*, and this is intentional. The aim with the series is present a scenario that uses the less complex rules of *Dungeons & Dragons* familiar to most players. While the adventure is part of the *Fright Night* Series, it will probably last longer than just a single night or session, with the "Night" of the title referring to the long winter of the Antarctic.

It is fair to say that *Fright Night: Polar Terror* is far from an original scenario, but that is the point. Just as the familiarity with the rules system is an aid to play, so is our familiarity with the subject matter. Both contribute to the "pick up 'n' play" aspect of the *Fright Night* series. None of this familiarity should breed contempt, for with *Fright Night: Polar Terror* the author does a fine job of tweaking our expectations and builds a solid adventure from there.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Pick

Das Buch Zum Spielen (for Settlers of Catan)

Published by [Mayfair Games](#) (English translation) & [Kosmos](#) (German original)

Designed by Klaus Teuber, et. al.

Edited by William Niebling & Guido Teuber

192-page German full-color hardcover; 32-page English translation, b&w; 460 counters; \$25

If there's one consistent complaint about games that cross the Pond from Europe, Germany in particular, it's their fabulous cost. Not that these games aren't worth their price tag, but one must usually spend a pretty penny to get these bright and colorful offerings. *Settlers of Catan* has been singled out as one of the most egregious examples, with it, *Seafarers of Catan*, and all its kin ratcheting up some big numbers. But then you're confronted by *Das Buch Zum Spielen*, which may be one of the best deals on the game market.

Like any good game, *Settlers of Catan* has spawned a lot of house rules, alternate methods of play, and tweaks to change the game or keep it fresh. Klaus Teuber and company have collected some of the best examples by way of a contest and compiled a book -- literally "The Book" -- full of the crunchy results.

The first thing potential buyers need to know is *The Book* proper is entirely in German. If you can't read the language, much of it will be lost on you. So does that make it useless for non-speakers? No, but one thing at a time. Some of the book is just fun bits. There are pictures of Teuber's prototypes for the board hexes and other pieces, photos of museums and tournaments, and Teuber and friends are interviewed about their personal history with games in general and about Catan in particular.

The bulk of the volume is on gaming all things Catan, and this is what most people will probably buy the set for. The set? Yes, several components are sold together here. Even if you don't speak German, this comes with a booklet that provides translations of all the new scenarios. You still need the main book, because it has all the visual information you'll need, most notably the setup for each scenario (the booklet is cross-referenced by page numbers). Once you have the lay of the land, you won't have to keep referring back to the book; it pretty much runs on automatic from there.

There are 15 new ways to play, including The Atoll, which has players building seaplanes on a seascape; The Great Race, which requires you to be the first to expand to the other side of the board and establish a city; and The Storm Flood, wherein your builds determine how secure you are against floods at the end of the game . . . if the wrong buildings and roads are flooded, your victory points sink with them. Most of these have multiple entries, giving different setups depending on the number of players you want to use.

Some scenarios are playable with a copy of the original *Settlers of Catan* while others require *Seafarers of Catan* and/or *Cities & Knights of Catan* and the five- and six-player supplements for each. If you need anything else, it's in the component set. They've included a box full of extra pieces tailored for use with the new rules, and those pieces number in the *hundreds*. There are volcanoes, factories, balloons, and even a spinner, among others. To store it, you're given a dozen pliable but heavy-duty ziplock baggies *and* a sheet of labels to put on those packets.

The rest of the book includes variants (like Atlantis) and advice on strategy, tactics, and even some notes on playing the *Settlers of Catan* card game, but alas, only the scenarios are translated in any detail. The card game gets only two

pages at the back of the booklet.

And the quality is through the roof. Granted, the stapled booklet with the scenario translations looks almost like photocopies by way of its construction, but it's a lot easier to flip through than *The Book* itself, and it has the bulk of the information at your fingertips. *The Book* is a lovely, hardbound item, in full color, with colored tags at the edges to indicate where the scenarios end and the tactics section begins. The pieces have as high a production quality as the stuff that comes in the original game, and they have a home in the sturdy box provided. The box and the hardbound volume then pop neatly into the slipcase (the translation only fits with some grunting).

Although a game review strives to be as impartial as possible, it's hard to discuss a supplement like *Das Buch* without sounding like a marketing brochure for Mayfair. Not only does it manage to do everything it offers to, it exceeds all expectations. This is one of the finest values in gaming, and anyone concerned that they've blown their budget on the parent game will find this item extends the life of the game and adds new options that will keep things fresh for years to come, cementing *Settlers of Catan's* well-earned position as one of the most popular of modern games.

--Andy Vetromile

Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Setting or No?

This week over in SJ Games' sister publication, the *Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society*, **Traveller** Guru Loren Wiseman writes in [his editorial](#). "Over the years, I have come to believe that setting and background are vital components to a successful RPG."

I've been chewing on this idea for a few days, trying to decide whether I agree or disagree with it.

Here, then, are some random thoughts tied to this basic notion.

We Don't Need No Stinkin' Settings . . .

My immediate thought was to disagree with the idea. After all, the most successful RPG in the universe -- *Mazes & Monsters* -- was specifically retooled for its third edition to shy itself away from existing settings. Oh, sure, the Greyhawk setting was integrated more closely into the core books, but these ties are so subtle as to make Asimov's character details look voluminous by comparison. ("What's this world like?" "Welllll . . . people can cast spells that look like fists . . .")

And the *d20 System* -- which stems directly from *Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition* and is arguably one of the most earth-shaking developments in the RPG biz in recent years -- is devoid of setting (and if you accidentally include setting-tied material, your mind will be flayed and your monsters rusted).

Furthermore, other popular RPGs have rule sets that aren't tied to a default setting, such as the *Hero System*, *Toon*, and *GURPS* (at least editions First through Third Revised). And in the smaller-press world, people might be familiar with *Fudge* or *Masterbook* without necessarily knowing of any game worlds they are tied to. And some systems, such as the Storyteller system, have been used to reasonable effect in a myriad of settings, making it difficult to tell where the successful RPG ends and where the successful setting begins (as well as making it trivial to run a *Vampire/Trinity/Street Fighter II* crossover game).

. . . But They Sure Are Nice

On the other hand, settings *are* pretty darn popular, for companies, fans, and retailers. There are dozens of game lines who are associated with a setting, sometimes inexorably. Sure, *Deadlands* could be used to play a generic Western game, or even a bunch of other genres (pulp, Cthulhu, swashbuckling), but what would be the point? Many fans of *Deadlands* enjoy the game for the setting -- in fact, creating a market for playing *Deadlands* in an alternate system (a.k.a. *GURPS*). And other game systems -- such as *Call of Cthulhu*, *Torg*, and *Shadowrun* -- while having systems that suit their settings well, would have a difficult time existing away from their settings.

Perhaps more importantly, having a setting can be useful *even if it's not widely used*. This might be the secret behind the inclusion of Greyhawk in *Dungeons & Dragons* or the Infinite Worlds campaign in *GURPS Fourth Edition*. Because the existence of these settings gives readers and players a point of reference, both for how the game might be played, and how the developers' minds conceptualized the rules.

For example, the inclusion of Greyhawkian named spells in *Dungeons & Dragons* can give players the idea that they, too, could eventually have spells named after them some day; the somewhat "over the top" Greyhawk gods conveys a sense of über-epic high fantasy that is the hallmark of dungeon crawlers everywhere. The inclusion of a dimension-hopping setting in *GURPS* can give people the sense that its creators believe this system can do *anything*. ("A superhero picking up an in-system spaceship to transport elves? See the chart on p. 267.") And the default *Champions* setting -- a fixture of the *Hero System* all the way up through the Fourth Edition -- instills a sense of modern four-color slugfest action. Sure, the settings are fine if you want to use them, but perhaps equally importantly they give you a frame of reference for what you can do with the presented material, serving the same function as a picture of the Mona

Lisa on a tube of oil paint or a shaky-handed rainbow on a box of crayons.

How Many Zeros are on that Check?!

And, as a final point to consider – and not to sound Clintonian here – one's outlook on all this could hinge on the word “success.” After all, a successful RPG from anyone but the Top Two or Three Companies will have an initial print run of between 10,000 and 20,000 copies. But if 10,000 to 20,000 people went to see a movie on opening day, it would be considered a bomb beyond *Battlefield Earth*. In fact, as a point to consider: Your average mid-tier company print run on a game is less than the number of *screens* an expected blockbuster will open on. Yes, if you wanted to give your average gaming supplement to every projectionist on the opening day of *Spider-Man 2*, you'd be disappointing over 25% of them (or not, depending on the supplement).

Many game companies, then, believe the real money in gaming comes from supplemental sources, such as computer games, movies, television, toys, and so on. If a company manages to release a mass-market PC or video game, it will have exposure eclipsing almost any pencil-and-paper RPG product. And it's obviously a lot easier to sell these story elements to company if there's actually a story involved (although it isn't a necessity, as anyone who was left scratching their heads over the *Dungeon Siege* movie deal can attest).

Regardless, I find it interesting to consider the case of two of the most recent successful generic systems. The *Hero System* took pains to remove and distance itself from its setting and background, while *GURPS* decided to add those elements. And I bet that both creative teams involved thought they were doing so to make their games more “successful.”

--Steven Marsh

More Questions Than Answers

Christmases Past and Presents

by Chris Aylott

My first Christmas memory is of embarrassment.

I was seven or eight years old, living in Midland, Michigan during the mid-1970s. My little sister and I woke up around 4 a.m. and crept downstairs to see what Santa had left for us. I don't think we had any consciousness that we were doing anything wrong. We were awake and there were presents to be opened, simple as that.

About a half an hour later, my parents woke up and came downstairs. I have no idea what my sister was doing, but I was happily playing with my new [U.S.S. Enterprise bridge playset](#) with wrapping paper strewn around me. 4:30 a.m. and we'd already *had* Christmas, without them.

Words were said, loudly. Small children were sent up to their room for several hours. And later that morning we had Christmas again, with re-wrapped presents and appropriate cries of surprise and joy.

In retrospect, I don't think they were as angry as I thought they were at the time. Eight-year-olds see angry parents as the Apocalypse; today I suspect their real mood was exasperated. But I've never dared ask about their memories of that Christmas -- not even for this column -- and my relationship with the holiday has always been just a little bit touchy.

I'm uncomfortable about getting gifts, and give bad presents with depressing regularity. I can bang out clean copy on a typewriter at almost 100 words a minute, but put me in front of wrapping paper and my fingers turn into marshmallow jelly. I'm not religious, so the spiritual aspects of the holiday are lost on me -- and guess which shy kid got picked to read the Bible verse at the Christmas pageant three years in a row?

And yet that *Star Trek* playset was one of my favorite toys; I loved sticking my action figures in the transporter, spinning the dial, and pushing the button to make them disappear. I feel vaguely undeserving when the presents are handed out, but I always look forward to unwrapping a present that my mom wraps in her favorite wrapping paper. We've salvaged as much of it as we can every year for nearly 20 years; what's left is about the size of my palm but it has fat little monks and reads "Deck thy halls."

Christmases Not Long Past

I have mixed feelings about Christmas, so of course I became a retailer. Here I am in a profession that depends on holiday shopping to make the difference between getting by and living well. What's a nice agnostic boy doing trying to get everyone to celebrate Christmas and Hanukkah by buying lots of presents from him?

One good way to resolve this kind of inner conflict is to project it on your customers. My wife and I decided -- more likely I decided, and my wife put up with the idea -- that our customers were different, that they didn't much like the overwhelming holiday-ish-ness of your typical retail store in December. We didn't decorate, we didn't run holiday promotions, and the Christmas music on the CD player always stayed turned down to low.

When the subject came up in conversation, most customers agreed with us that they liked our "low-key" approach to the holidays. We gave our usual good service, sold plenty of gifts and gift certificates, and our customers certainly liked that. But we always just got by instead of living well.

Today I look back and cringe. What arrogance! There we are standing at an undecorated counter, striking a secular pose but trading on everybody else's holiday spirits. At least Scrooge had the ill-humored honesty to keep Christmas in

his own way by leaving it entirely alone.

And yet we got by for nine years with our holiday half-measures. We get a little credit for that, because we really are good at helping people pick out gifts for their friends and loved ones. But I think most of the credit goes to the people who tolerated our lack of spirit and didn't let it spoil their holiday.

And when you think about it, isn't that a little strange? Not unusual, strange. Everyone has their holiday horror stories. We go out and crowd the malls, circle the parking lots cursing the people who take the good spaces. We spend money on each other that we could as easily and more efficiently spend on ourselves. Giving Christmas gifts isn't very practical, but we do it anyway.

Which gives you more pleasure, spending \$100 on games for yourself or the same amount on presents for your family? Why?

When we give gifts, we trade certain self-gratification for the risk of disappointment. We don't know that the gifts we give will be liked, we don't know that we will like the gifts that we receive. Every year, I watch a few customers compile their gift lists and my heart sinks. They hand me the lists and I carefully file them away, and they tell their relatives to come buy things from those lists . . . and nobody ever comes. I have Christmas and birthday gift lists for one customer that go back five years, and not one item is crossed off.

And yet twice every year he makes out his lists and hopes that this time it'll be different.

Christmas Present

We moved the store to a new location this year, and we knew that part of that change was that we would embrace the Christmas season. No, I wasn't visited by three ghosts. We didn't even discuss it much. The business has changed, and the kind of business we are now Does Christmas.

So the Monday
before
Thanksgiving, my
wife and I went out
and bought our
very first Christmas
tree together. Two
trees, even -- a big
one for our store's
front window, a
little one for the
checkout desk.
Nothing fancy, and
the lights on the big
tree came pre-
strung. But I
couldn't stop myself
from smiling as we
hung little red balls
and miniature
reindeer on the
desk tree
Wednesday
evening, and I even
forgave the cat
when he knocked it

Tree

over ten seconds
after we were done.

We haven't gone overboard with Christmas cheer. We play the music louder than before. Our walls are pine green, and already in tune with the season (that's not an accident). We've strung poinsettia-leaf garlands along the top of the bookcases and backed our most important displays with red felt. In the front window we have the tree, wrapped boxes, gift cards and some favorite books and games. When the cat is at work, he finishes the display by sleeping under the tree.

Simple touches, nothing overwhelming. And most of the scenes playing out in front of me this year are familiar:

- A young woman comes in to buy her uncle a gift certificate. He'll buy her a gift certificate to the Ground Round. They've been doing this for years and seem completely satisfied with the exchange.
- A young man picks up the audio book he special-ordered, along with a couple of other books he has scooped off the shelves. He knows exactly what he's looking for and goes right to it. "There," he says, "I'm done with my Christmas shopping!" As I start to ring up his purchases, he wanders away from the register and stares wistfully at the RPG shelves.
- I promise a husband that I will deny all knowledge of the existence of a book he just got for his wife, even if she brings that book up to the register to buy it for herself.
- Kids drag their parents to the shelves to pester and beg, and I make bets with myself as to whether "We'll see" really means "Yes" or "No."
- Two elderly aunts go through the Reaper miniature racks picking out the creepiest monsters they can find for a 13-year-old boy.

I've seen these moments over and over again for a decade, but something's different. The shoppers I'm watching are enjoying what they're doing, and I'm enjoying it along with them. Even when I'm just standing and watching them, I feel like I'm part of the moment and not digging my heels in against it. (And it's not just my feelings that have changed -- our holiday sales have nearly doubled. For the first time, we're doing well instead of just getting by.)

How much of the "Christmas spirit" comes from embracing its trappings? Can our enthusiasm for an activity have so much to do with our enjoyment of it? And if so, how much damage do we do to ourselves when we hang back being cynical or ambivalent?

Christmas Future

I haven't been reborn in the Christmas spirit just yet. I still dread shopping for presents and will be squirming a little on the couch when we open them Christmas morning. But I'm working on it.

I have a daughter now, six months old. She doesn't know one day from another, but she already understands the joy of getting. She waves her arms and laughs when we open boxes from Grandma and pull out new outfits for her. I'm trying to relearn her childish enthusiasm.

And then there's my sister, my partner in the Great Early Christmas Caper of 1977. She certainly doesn't share my ambivalence about gifts. Even today, she's the first one up on Christmas morning and the first one to ask, "So when are we opening the presents? How about now?" My father and I love to torment her by putting off present time as long as possible, eating second helpings of breakfast and having an extra cup of coffee, speculating whether there's football on yet. But I want to have as much fun looking forward to the presents as she does.

It's hard not to hold yourself back, hard to plunge into the enjoyment of a holiday (or a hobby) without fear of disappointment. But if holding back helps cause the disappointment, isn't plunging in the safest thing to do?

Happy holidays, everyone. See you in 2005.

Search for The Source

By Shane Cubis

The search for mythical and exotic locations can play a huge role in inspiring your party to adventure. "Because it is there" has been the catchcry of hundreds of explorers, out to make a name for themselves as pioneers and trailblazers. Finding the source of rivers has brought glory and acclaim to many real-world explorers, from Henry Hudson and Lewis & Clark in America to men like John Oxley and Charles Sturt in Australia. How much more could these discoveries bring in the magical worlds of roleplaying games? Beyond the simple prestige of having a river named after your character, there might be some kind of arcane or divine rewards in store. Here are some exotic river sources for use in your favorite fantasy roleplaying game.

The Frej River

The source of the long and winding Frej River is exceedingly difficult to find. One must traverse over some of the least welcoming terrain imaginable, all of it inhabited by wild animals and mad natives. These people all appear to simultaneously shun and revere the river that enables their livelihood. They will only drink from containers -- never directly from the flow. Similarly, they will not eat any fish from the Frej until they have performed some kind of cleansing rite upon it. Nonetheless, all of these tribal people possess some form of mental illness, from hallucinations to paranoia to psychopathia. They all blame the river.

The final stage of the journey towards the source involves scaling a huge mountain, from which the waters of the river first begin their journey with a beautiful and breathtaking cascade. The peak of the mountain stretches far into the clouds, and the water seems to come from the heavens themselves. This beauty becomes less enthralling when one is slowly climbing the mountain, fighting to retain a grip on the slick rocks with a constant spray in one's face. The reward for completing this unappetizing journey is an object lesson directly from the gods.

The first sight of the source often renders confusion in the explorer. It seems to be some kind of eternally renewing lake, chained to its bed with shining silver links. Sensing the presence of intruders, the lake will thrash wildly against its bonds, deluging the area. Guttural gurgles and moans erupt from its center. In fact, the source of the river is a Promethean water elemental of immense size, chained here by some vengeful deity for reasons long lost to history. Its very essence is continuously wrenched from its body to serve as the mighty river, flowing down a vast mountain. At the same time, by some mystical and unknown power, the creature's body is eternally renewed. Both practices cause the elemental inconceivable agony. The silvery bonds are crafted from some divine metal that has thus far resisted all attempts to shatter it, much less those of the creature to break free.

The elemental itself has long since had any remnant of sanity stripped away from it along with the water that feeds the river. The only things it is more than vaguely aware of are the never-ending agony and a constant mental replay of its crimes, over and over and over. All efforts to communicate with the creature have failed, including a few attempts at mental contact which resulted in the immediate breakage of the unfortunate telepaths' brains. It is not difficult, at this point, to see the cause of the aforementioned tribal madness.

Drinking from the source will drive the imbiber to immediate madness. He will see his companions as all manner of demonic monsters, and will react accordingly. Some unfortunates have thrown themselves from the peak of the mountain to escape these illusionary demons. Thus far this condition seems incurable, although some sage may have an answer. Perhaps doing some favor for the water elemental community or finding out the identity of the elemental's captor and begging him for assistance would help.

Artifact of Endless Water

The Marnish River ebbs and flows in sporadic and seemingly random bursts. Locals build their dwellings well back

from its banks, which can overflow without warning. It is always unusually warm, although not uncomfortably so. Those who drink from it find the water to be, on the whole, refreshing. Those who swim in it, especially on chillier days, find it to be wonderfully relaxing and invigorating. Generally, the people who draw their water from it tend to be a little bit more spontaneous, random and (in the most extreme cases) manic. Claims have been made about the river's unusual healing properties, but these tend to be nothing more than idle rumors.

The source of the Marnish River lies underground. The budding explorer can feel the heat of the cavern in which it lies long before they arrive. Once inside, they discover a series of eternally boiling springs, set in a naturally smooth room full of steam. A human or demihuman could not even enter the room without some form of magical protection, and even a mighty dragon once described it as "infernally hot." The steam moves into adjoining caves, where it cools down and filters into a joined passage. Still hot, the water runs together in a torrent, forming the starting place of the warm river.

The reason for the unnatural temperature of this area is hotly debated among sages who know of the Marnish River. Some have postulated that an immense fire elemental, a possible counterpart to the water elemental from the Frej River, is trapped beneath the springs. Obviously no one has come anywhere near close enough to check the veracity of this theory, but if it is true then the creature must be suffering a similar kind of torturous punishment as the water elemental. An explorer who discovers the truth of this mystery would have the ear of any sage in the region.

There is another, less-known mystery to this source. At the base of the springs, deep underwater, lies an ancient artifact. It was thrown into the bubbling waters centuries ago by some trickster god, and has since lain unclaimed. Ancient texts refer to it simply as The Decanter, and its powers are unknown. It may influence the flow, temperature, or alleged healing properties of the river in some way, but this is all conjecture. One thing is certain: There must be some reason why The Decanter has not yet been claimed by anyone, deity or mortal.

The Lake of Tears

The townsfolk who draw their water from the River of Duty are known to be far more serious and stoic than their neighbors and cousins. They live their lives day-to-day, quietly going about their business and rarely laughing out loud. Colorful festivals and fairs are all but unknown to them, and they do not tolerate insouciance or silliness. Even the children seem solemn and muted. There is a high rate of depression among the townsfolk, and if quizzed on their belief system, most will give the impression that they see life as basically dark and meaningless. They tend towards hard-working, but can often be seen sitting on a fallen log or on the bank of the Duty, staring silently into the middle distance with a blank expression.

The source of this river sits deep in the center of the City of the Gods, surrounded by the mansions they have built in tribute to their own divine glory. Although many have quested for it, the Lake of Tears is unreachable by mundane means. The source is a divine pool fed from the unending tears of the Goddess of Sorrow. She sits, hunched over the shore of the pool in a position that speaks of boundless misery, alone and unaware of her surroundings. A steady flow of tears well from her reddened eyes like a stream, blurring the reflected images of pain and torment reflected in the icy, disturbingly calm waters. All the sorrow of the multiverse is echoed here.

Anyone who stares into the lake will feel the pain and misery of its waters, and be overcome by a sense of hopelessness -- that there is nothing good or light in the world. Any mortal who dares to drink from the Lake of Tears will be immediately and permanently overwhelmed by this feeling. A deep, potentially suicidal depression will settle over the unfortunate drinker, who will be nothing short of inconsolable. If left alone, the drinker will kneel down next to the Goddess of Sorrow and join her in weeping. Over time they will merge into one being, and the soul of the mortal will be forever subsumed into her eternal sadness.

Generally, only a holy quest performed on behalf of the Goddess, requested through prayer and communion with her, will lift the curse. This quest will usually involve furthering her ethos by spreading misery to the world on a large scale, and may place the party into morally gray areas. If a victim can be somehow convinced of the essential goodness of the multiverse -- an extremely tall order which will require an overwhelming display of benevolence -- they may snap out of the magical depression. They will always retain a hint of a dark edge to their personality, but will no

longer feel suicidal or worthless.

Civitas Illumni

A huge, river runs through a well-populated area deep beneath the earth, picking up a lot of debris on the way -- from mundane garbage to mutilated corpses. This flotsam and jetsam is carried along and dumped on a distant shore, and anyone who stumbles across it has a fair idea where it came from. The burning question is this: From whence does this nameless river itself derive?

The answer lies deep in the bowels of the earth, even deeper than most under-earth denizens would comfortably travel. There, the intrepid explorer will find an ancient and ruined city, known only as the Civitas Illumni. The city sits on a small island, in the midst of a large sea. The sea itself does not feed the river, surprisingly. It is, however, full of huge and hungry eels and other creatures, so the explorer had best beware that they do not become lunch before their vessel alights on the shore. The Civitas Illumni is indeed a dead city, and one that has long been cleared of any obvious treasures. It is apparent that the beings who lived here were twice the size of humans, if doorways and building sizes are anything to go by. In the center of the island is the sole functioning machinery left by these inhabitants. A crystalline laboratory slowly turns on its own axis with an omnipresent whine. As the explorer stands in front of this dully glowing structure, a constant flow of fresh water runs in a stream, 50 feet below. Parts of the torrent are visible through rusting grates in the street, and once one is aware of its presence, the flow can be traced to the shore of the island. Seemingly, the sea around the island parts for this river, which remains uncontaminated by salt.

If entry to the laboratory is gained, the intruder feels an instant sense of nausea, which is not alleviated until they once again leave the structure. This seems to emanate from a clockwork machine in the center, which appears to create the water from thin air. In reality, the water is a by-product of the machine's original purpose, which was to create milky crystals called knostones for the original inhabitants of the Civitas Illumni. The ingredients required to manufacture these magical stones are long lost, and so the machine produces nothing more than the water which forms the river.

The river retains some traces of magic, and as such can influence creatures that drink from it in strange ways. These effects tend to be subtle, random, and permanent. One might become more intelligent, less aggressive, or even take on the attributes of another species. These effects are more likely the closer one is to the source when the drink is taken.

Elven Masters

Three New Prestige Classes For All d20 Fantasy Game Settings

by Richard Farrese

Companion of the White Owl

The Company of the White Owl is an elite group of elven warriors active in the wild northern reaches of the world. Responsible for the protection of elven ancestral lands, ancient sacred grooves, and various druidic circles, the companions of the White Owl are cunning survivalists and deadly warriors. When the Company was first created, eons ago, its members were charged with the safety of those who safeguarded the northern woodlands, mainly the druids of the wilderness, who often fell victim to the deadly wandering beasts that abounded in the region.

At first, the companions of the Owl -- as they are often called -- were little more than bodyguards responsible for the safekeeping of those who ensured the woodlands remained in the care of the elves. With the passing years, they developed techniques allowing them to defeat the most powerful of creatures and survive the deadly elements, making them the undisputed champions of the northernmost elven territories.

Hit Die: d12

Requirements

To become a companion of the White Owl, a character must fulfill all the following requirements:

Race: Elf or half-elf born among or raised by elves

Alignment: Any non-evil

Base Attack Bonus: +5

Knowledge (geography): 5 ranks

Knowledge (nature): 5 ranks

Survival: 5 ranks

Feats: Endurance, Martial Weapon Proficiency (any), Weapon Focus (any)

Special: The character must be invited to join the Company of the White Owl in order to take any levels in this prestige class. Most often, the character is approached by a companion and asked to perform a special task on behalf of the Company. Upon completion of this task, which usually includes the protection of elves or elven lands, the character is invited to join the ranks of the ancient fighting company.

Class Skills

The companion of the White Owl class skills (and the key ability for each) are Climb (Str), Diplomacy (Cha), Handle Animal (Cha), Heal (Wis), Intimidate (Cha), Jump (Str), Knowledge (geography) (Int), Knowledge (nature) (Int), Listen (Wis), Ride (Dex), Search (Int), Spot (Wis), Survival (Wis), and Swim (Str).

Skill Points at Each Level: 4 + Int modifier

Class Features

All the following are class features of the companion of the White Owl prestige class:

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: A companions of the White Owl is proficient with all simple and martial weapons as well as in the use of light armor, medium armor, and shields.

Vision of the Owl (Su): When he becomes a companion of the Owl, the character is initiated into the secrets of the order. At 1st level, he learns to increase the range of his vision (both normal and low-light), which is in effect doubled.

Weapon Training (Ex): Starting at 1st level, the companion receives extensive training in the use of a particular weapon. This weapon, chosen by the character, must be one with which he is proficient. At 1st level, he adds +1 to all damage rolls made with this weapon. This bonus augments by +1 at 4th level, and again at 7th and 10th level.

Endure Cold (Su): The 2nd level companion becomes so used to extreme conditions that he is protected by a permanent endure elements spell in cold environments (this ability is lost in extreme heat conditions).

Winterland Walk (Su): Also at 2nd level, more secrets of the order are revealed to the companion. He can now walk upon snow and ice as easily as he would upon an earth road.

Cold Resistance (Su): When he attains 3rd level, the companion gains cold resistance 5. This resistance raises to 10 at 6th level and to 15 at 9th level.

Cunning of the Owl (Ex): At 5th level, the companion becomes so used to survive in extreme conditions that he gains a +4 competence bonus to all Survival skill checks (including those made in combination with the Track feat).

Wisdom of the Owl (Ex): The 8th level companion adds a +2 enhancement bonus to his Wisdom score.

Ice Stride (Sp): When he reaches 10th level, the companion uncovers how to move from one patch of ice to another. This ability function as the tree stride spell with the exception that the companion must step into a patch of ice and then emerge from another (rather than use trees).

Companion of the White Owl Advancement Table

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort. Save	Ref. Save	Will Save	Special
1	+1	+2	+0	+0	Vision of the Owl, Weapon Training (+1)
2	+2	+3	+0	+0	Endure Cold, Winterland Walk
3	+3	+3	+1	+1	Cold Resistance 5
4	+4	+4	+1	+1	Weapon Training (+2)
5	+5	+4	+1	+1	Cunning of the Owl
6	+6	+5	+2	+2	Cold Resistance 10
7	+7	+5	+2	+2	Weapon Training (+3)
8	+8	+6	+2	+2	Wisdom of the Owl
9	+9	+6	+3	+3	Cold Resistance 15
10	+10	+7	+3	+3	Ice Stride, Weapon Training (+4)

Master Forester

The elven master forester specializes in the protection of forested lands and the wilderness in general. Found in woodlands where elven settlements are established, master foresters are treated with honor and respect by most elves. They dedicated their lives to ensure that the forests of the world remain untouched by the vile hand of civilization -- a

battle that most master foresters fear they will one day lose.

Master foresters are at ease with animals, dire animals, and magical beast. To a certain extent, they are able to control such creatures. Most master foresters are found in the company of animals or dire animals they consider friend.

Hit Die: d10

Requirements

To become a master forester, a character must fulfill all the following requirements:

Race: Elf or half-elf

Alignment: Any

Base Attack Bonus: +3

Knowledge (nature): 6 ranks

Survival: 6 ranks

Feats: Endurance, Iron Will, Track

Class Skills

The master forester's class skills (and the key ability for each) are Climb (Str), Handle Animal (Cha), Heal (Wis), Hide (Dex), Intimidate (Cha), Jump (Str), Knowledge (geography), Knowledge (nature), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Ride (Dex), Search (Int), Sense Motive (Wis), Spot (Wis), Survival (Wis), Swim (Str), and Use Rope (Dex).

Skill Points at Each Level: 4 + Int modifier

Class Features

All the following are class features of the master forester prestige class:

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: The master forester is proficient with all simple and martial weapons, with light and medium armor, and with shields.

Turn or Rebuke Animals (Su): A master forester is so in tuned with nature that he has the ability to turn or rebuke animals. This ability functions as the turn or rebuke undead ability of the cleric class, but functions only on normal animals. A master forester may attempt to turn or rebuke animals a number of times per day equal to 3 + his Charisma modifier. A master forester with 10 or more ranks in Knowledge (nature) gets a +2 insight bonus on turning checks against animals.

If the character is also a ranger or druid, he may add half his ranger and druid class levels to determine at which character level he can attempt to turn or rebuke animals.

Wild Empathy (Ex): Like a ranger, the master forester can use body language, vocalization, and demeanor to improve the attitude of an animal. If the character already has the wild empathy ability, he gains a +4 competence bonus to his Diplomacy checks when using this extraordinary ability.

Animal Companion (Ex): At 2nd level, the master forester gains a loyal animal companion that accompanies him on his adventure. He may choose any type animal typically found in forested areas, such as a badger, wild dog, eagle, hawk, owl, or wolf as his companion. This extraordinary ability functions as the druid ability of the same name and he

may choose from the alternative lists of animal companion as long as the chosen animal lives in wooded regions.

Woodland Stride (Ex): Also at 2nd level, a master forester may move through any sort of undergrowth (such as natural thorns, briars, overgrown areas, and similar terrain) at his normal speed and without taking damage or suffering any other impairment. However, thorns, briars, and overgrown areas that are enchanted or magically manipulated to impede motion still affect him.

If he already has the woodland stride extraordinary ability, the master forester adds an additional 10 feet to his base movement rate while traveling through wooded areas, as long as he wears no armor, light armor, or medium armor (he loses this benefit if he wears heavy armor).

Nature's Shield (Ex): When he attains 3rd level, the master forester learns how to use the natural surroundings of the forest to his advantages. When he is engaged in combat in a wooded environment (and whether he fights in melee or fires missiles from afar), the master forester can use the surrounding vegetation as cover. He gains a circumstance bonus to his AC equal to his Wisdom modifier (if positive) when fighting in the forest.

At 6th level, the master forester gains an additional +1 competence bonus to his AC when fighting in the woods as well as a +1 resistance bonus to all saving throws when in such environment. At 9th level, these bonuses increase to +2.

Turn or Rebuke Dire Animals (Su): At 4th level, the master forester becomes even more linked with nature. His ability to turn or rebuke animals is now extended to include dire animals as well.

Dire Animal Companion (Ex): When he reaches 5th level, the master forester gains another companion, this time a dire animal. The master forest may choose a dire animal from the following list: dire badger, dire bat, dire bear, dire boar, dire wolf, or dire wolverine.

Turn or Rebuke Magical Beasts (Su): From 7th level and onwards, the master forester may now rebuke or command magical beasts in addition to animals and dire animals.

Commune with Nature (Sp): When he attains 8th level, the master forester gains the spell-like ability to commune with nature once per day.

Nature's Revenge (Su): When the 10th level master forester witnesses a crime against nature, such as the unwarranted destruction of a tree or the slaughtering of an animal for the sheer thrill of it, he enters a sort of trance that allows him to focus his rage at the offender(s). When this happens, the master forester gains a +5 bonus to all attack and damage rolls made against those who violated the natural order before his eyes. He can use this ability a maximum of once per day plus his Wisdom modifier (if positive). When triggered, nature's revenge lasts for the duration of the encounter.

Master Forester Advancement Table

Base Attack Level	Fort. Bonus	Fort. Save	Ref. Save	Will Save	Special
1	+1	+2	+2	+0	Turn or Rebuke Animals, Wild Empathy
2	+2	+3	+3	+0	Animal Companion, Woodland Stride
3	+3	+3	+3	+1	Nature's Shield (AC bonus equal to Wisdom modifier)
4	+4	+4	+4	+1	Turn or Rebuke Dire Animals
5	+5	+4	+4	+1	Dire Animal Companion
6	+6	+5	+5	+2	Nature's Shield (+1 AC, +1 saves)
7	+7	+5	+5	+2	Turn or Rebuke Magical Beasts
8	+8	+6	+6	+2	Commune with Nature
9	+9	+6	+6	+3	Nature's Shield (+2 AC, +2 saves)
10	+10	+7	+7	+3	Nature's Revenge

Vindicator

Vindicators are part of an elite circle of elf warriors dedicated to the worship of the good elven god of holy vengeance and righteous retribution. Fanatically devoted to the protection of the elves and the eradication of tyranny, vindicators are crusaders who seek out and destroy totalitarian rulers and overthrow corrupt or oppressive governments. These holy warriors spend their lives in the pursuit of eradicating those who enforce their wills upon others. They especially despise slaveholders and anyone involved in the market of humanoid slavery -- some vindicators have been known to liberate orcs and gnolls who had been badly treated by their slaver masters.

Considered to be a blessing by most elves and good-aligned societies, vindicators are regarded with suspicion -- and occasionally outright hatred -- by most lawful governments. Although most vindicators rarely openly reveal that they are part of this select group of warriors of the god of holy vengeance, their stern demeanor and zealous devotion usually give them away.

Clerics of the god of holy vengeance are obvious choices for this prestige class, but chaotic good fighters, rangers, and rogues who follow the faith are especially good candidates to become part of the vindicators' select group. Other classes are not as attracted to this prestige class, but fallen paladins, wizards, and barbarians occasionally become vindicators.

Hit Die: d8

Requirements

To become a vindicator, a character must fulfill all the following requirements:

Race: Elf or Half-Elf raised in or accepted by an elven community

Alignment: Chaotic Good

Base Attack Bonus: +6

Knowledge (religion): 4 ranks

Feats: Combat Expertise, Iron Will, Weapon Focus (in the deity's favored weapon)

Special: The character must be an active follower of the elven god of holy vengeance and righteous retribution in order to take any levels in this prestige class (which does not necessarily imply that he must be a cleric of the faith). Furthermore, he must be accepted into the ranks of the Order of Holy Vindication and trained by a vindicator of at least 2nd level.

Class Skills

The vindicator's class skills (and the key ability for each) are Bluff (Cha), Climb (Str), Concentration (Con), Gather Information (Cha), Hide (Dex), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (religion) (Int), Jump (Str), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Ride (Dex), Search (Int), Sense Motive (Wis), Spot (Wis), and Survival (Wis).

Skill Points at Each Level: 4 + Int modifier

Class Features

All the following are class features of the vindicator prestige class:

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: The vindicator is proficient with all simple and martial weapons, as well as with all

armor and shields.

Spells per Day: A vindicator who was previously a divine spellcaster continues to gain access to more powerful divine magic as he obtains levels in this prestige class. For every even-numbered level the vindicator acquires, the character gains new spells per day as if he had also gained a level in the divine spellcasting class he belonged to before he added this prestige class. He does not, however, receive any other benefit a character of that class would have gained. This essentially means that he adds half his vindicator level to the level of whatever other divine spellcasting class he has, and then determines the spells per day accordingly.

If a character had more than one divine spellcasting class before he became a vindicator, the player must decide to which class to assign the additional levels for the purpose of determining divine spells per day.

If the vindicator did not previously belong to a divine spellcasting class, he gains the ability to cast divine spells exactly as a cleric of his patron deity. Spell progression is the same as that of a cleric of a level equal to half his vindicator prestige class level.

Important Note: The elven god of holy vengeance and righteous retribution is a minor power and may not be part of every campaign setting. The DM may assign another deity to take on this role. Alternately, he may create an entirely new minor deity. Typically, such a god would offer his clerics (and vindicators) access to the following domains: Good, Healing, Protection, and War. His favorite weapon would be the longsword.

Detect Evil (Sp): A vindicator can detect evil at will. This spell-like ability duplicates the effects of the spell of the same name.

Holy Aura (Su): Upon becoming a vindicator, the character receives the blessing of his god in the form of a holy aura, which grants him a +1 sacred bonus to AC. This bonus augments by +1 every three levels thereafter (+2 at 4th level, +3 at 7th level, and +4 at level 10).

Weapon Specialization: At 2nd level, the vindicator's intense training in the favored weapon of his deity (typically the longsword) grants him the Weapon Specialization feat. If he already has this feat, he gains the Greater Weapon Specialization feat instead.

Damage Reduction (Ex): When attaining 3rd level, the vindicator's rigorous combat training bestows him the extraordinary ability to shrug off some amount of injury he receives with each blow or attack. Subtract 1 from the damage the vindicator takes each time he is dealt damage. This bonus increases to 2 at 6th level and to 3 at 9th level.

Smite Evil (Su): A vindicator of 4th level or higher may attempt to smite evil with one normal melee attack when wielding his deity's favored weapon. He adds his Charisma modifier (if positive) to his attack roll and deals 1 extra point of damage per vindicator class level. If the vindicator accidentally smites a creature that is not evil, the smite has no effect but it is still wasted for the day. At 8th level, the vindicator may use this ability twice every day.

Divine Grace (Su): Also at 5th level, the vindicator is granted another favor from his deity. He may now apply his Charisma modifier (if positive) as a bonus on all his saving throws.

Slay Evil (Su): Once per day, the 10th level vindicator wielding his deity's favored weapon may attempt to slay an evil creature in melee combat. When this supernatural ability is triggered, the vindicator attacks as normal. If the attack is successful and the target creature is evil, it must attempt a Fortitude save (DC 20 + vindicator's Charisma modifier) or be instantly slain. If the attack is unsuccessful, or if the vindicator used this ability on a non-evil creature, the slay evil ability is used up for the day.

Code of Conduct: Vindicators must be of chaotic good alignment, so they have no elaborate code of conduct. However, they lose all special class abilities if they ever willingly commit an evil act.

The Vindicator Advancement Table

Base Attack Level	Fort. Bonus	Fort. Save	Ref. Save	Will Save	Special	Spells per Day
1	+1	+2	+0	+2	Detect Evil, Holy Aura +1	
2	+2	+3	+0	+3	Weapon Specialization	+1 level of existing class
3	+3	+3	+1	+3	Damage Reduction 1/-	
4	+4	+4	+1	+4	Holy Aura +2, Smite Evil 1/day	+1 level of existing class
5	+5	+4	+1	+4	Divine Grace	
6	+6	+5	+2	+5	Damage Reduction 2/-	+1 level of existing class
7	+7	+5	+2	+5	Holy Aura +3	
8	+8	+6	+2	+6	Smite Evil 2/day	+1 level of existing class
9	+9	+6	+3	+6	Damage Reduction 3/-	
10	+10	+7	+3	+7	Holy Aura +4, Slay Evil	+1 level of existing class

Regular Contests in an Instant

Optional Rules for *GURPS*

by Glen Barnett

Buff, the beefy, barely-clad barbarian, slammed his large mug of ale into the bench, splashing it across the table. "I could too win a tug-of-war while kneeling in mud against that lardy fellow over there! Lorm's Beard, I'll do it blindfolded!"

Regular Contests are most commonly over in a few turns. *GURPS Basic* has some suggested rules for speeding up regular contests when both sides have very low or very high effective skill "so that it doesn't bog down too long".

But even so, some contests can take a while. If Buff and that lardy NPC were *both* drunk, blindfolded and kneeling in mud, it might easily be a contest between effective skills of, say, 7 and 4. Such a contest would take around four turns on average, but it can sometimes take much longer. If the other players are starting to shuffle impatiently at the thought of yet another lengthy bout of muddy, muscle-bound flailing about, maybe you'd better fast-forward to the conclusion.

"In fact," said the barbarian a little too loudly, slamming down his huge tankard and wiping his mouth, "I'll do better!" The barbarian pushed himself to his feet, none too steadily. "I'll take on all comers. Any one of you here thinks he can beat me?" Eight people stood in response to the challenge.

There was an audible groan from around Buff's table.

Sixty die rolls later, Buff has beaten the other eight NPCs, and is about to start on Lardy. Meanwhile, the other players have gone to a movie.

The rule for speeding up Regular Contests (p. 349 in the *Basic Set*, under *Extreme Scores*) shifts one of the scores to 10 and moves the other by the same amount. In fact the book says to shift the *lower* one to 10, but it doesn't hurt if you shift the higher one instead -- shifting the lower one to 10 gives more "both succeed" standoffs, shifting the higher leads to more "both fail" standoffs. Which you actually use may be a matter of convenience, or you might choose whichever matches the appropriate "mood" -- other things being equal it seems sensible to use the one which shifts the values the least (if it started out as a contest of 6 vs. 4 incompetents, having a few "both fail" standoffs plainly fits the dramatic circumstances better than several "both succeed" ones).

The shift-to-10 rule gives results pretty close to the probabilities they're supposed to approximate, except for very small or very large effective skills -- unfortunately, the very circumstances it's suggested you use the rule for. If you nevertheless find the rule works well enough in practice for pairs of small or large scores, the good news is it works far better for the skill values in between, so there's no harm in using it more generally for a slightly faster contest. Only do this when both skills are the same side of 10 -- if one skill is above 10 and the other is below, it's already faster than shifting to 10!

Faster, faster

But Regular Contests can be done much faster still. It turns out that a Regular Contest can be emulated as a single straight skill roll with skill adjusted for the other guy's skill.

Take a Regular Contest between a PC and an NPC. Shift the NPC's effective skill to 10, and move the PC's skill by the same amount (the same calculation as the rulebook, except the NPC will always go to 10, even if they have the higher skill). Now the PC must make a straight 3d roll under their shifted skill.

Another way to look at it is to take the player's effective skill, minus an adjustment of 10 less than their rival's skill -- this way of looking at it may be faster to work with when you're having contests against several NPCs.

The probabilities of winning using this adjusted skill roll are exactly the same as winning with the shift-to-10 version of the regular contest.

For example, imagine (sans mud, ale, and blindfolds this time) Buff has a skill of 14 and Lardy has a skill of 13. Then Lardy's skill is moved down by 3 (13-10), so Buff's adjusted skill is then 11 (14-3) -- plainly 11 is also the shifted skill Buff would use under a shift-to-10-regular-contest. Buff's player rolls 3d and gets a 9, winning the regular contest.

With a standard regular contest of 14 vs. 13, Buff wins 65.51% of the time. With the adjusted skill roll of 11 (*and* with a shifted-to-10 Regular Contest), Buff wins 65.46% of the time.

Under this adjusted skill roll method a Regular Contest takes exactly one 3d roll, every time. Buff's drunken-blindfold-kneeling-muddy-tug-of-war against each of eight NPCs will take exactly 8 rolls to resolve, not 60 or more. It's all over in less than two minutes, even with some time added for colorful descriptions of just how muddy he gets.

If the Regular Contest is important to the plot, or if it's between two PCs, or if the players are enjoying the action anyway, it's better to play it out as a full Regular Contest (with the proviso that you can always use a "shift-to-10" regular contest if you want it a little faster).

Making Shifted Contests More Accurate

If the two scores are the same, a shifted-to-10 Regular Contest always leaves the probability of winning unchanged (at 50%). Also note that under the rules as written ("a roll of 3 or 4 is always a success," p. 343), a skill of 3 is exactly as good as a skill of 4 in a straight Regular Contest, but in a shifted-to-10 Regular Contest, the 4 wins about 63% of the time.

The table below gives the probability of the higher (H) score winning for various cases (where you'd use the shift-to-10 rule normally) using the original Regular Contest rules, the published shift-to-10 rule, and the best available shifted score when the lower score goes to 10.

Original Contest	Prob H wins	GURPS shift-to-10	Prob H wins	"Best" Adj.	Prob H Wins
5 vs. 4 or 16 vs. 15	72%	11 vs. 10	63%	12 vs. 10	74%
6 vs. 4 or 16 vs. 14	84%	12 vs. 10	74%	13 vs. 10	84%
6 vs. 5 or 15 vs. 14	68%	11 vs. 10	63%	11 vs. 10*	63%*

* There is no good single choice here. See discussion below.

For contests of 6 vs. 5 and 15 vs. 14, there is no good approximation to the "true" chance of winning available on a straight shift to 10. The higher skill should win 67.8% of the time. Against a lower skill of 10, making the higher skill 11 gives it a win probability of 62.5% (more than 5% too low); making the higher skill 12 gives it a win probability 74.1% (more than 6% too high). A reasonable compromise is to call it "11 and a half" - alternately take the higher score as 11 and 12 (11 the first round, then 12 the second round, and so on until somebody wins) -- this actually gives just under 67% chance.

As can be seen from the table, in the circumstances that the book encourages you to use the shift-to-10 rule, if the more extreme score is either 4 or 16, you should add an extra 1 to the adjusted score in the "vs. 10" regular contest. You might consider adding "one half" for contests where the more extreme effective skill is 5 or 15. These considerations apply whenever the two scores are the same side of 10, not just in the above table. If you shift the higher score to 10 instead, these extras are subtracted from the lower score rather than added to the higher score.

Because a 3 is as good as a 4 in a straight regular contest, but this is ignored in the shift-to-10 rule, it turns out that the 3 vs. 5 and 3 vs. 6 contests are already effectively shifted the "extra 1" identified by the table above. But if the contest

is 3 vs. 4, the "correct" contest is 10 vs. 10 (since if you rolled it out the 3 skill would win half the time), not 10 vs. 11 (winning 63% of the time). If this bothers you, *always* treat an adjusted skill of 3 as a 4, and then apply the "add an extra 1" rule above as required.

If you like the fact that the shift-to-10 regular contest gives 4 and advantage over 3 (even though the regular rules do not), then by all means stick with that and shift to 11 vs. 10.

Those "Best" Shifted Contests And Instant Regular Contests

All the discussion about improving the accuracy of shifted regular contests applies to the "instant" Regular Contests at the start of this article -- so if you want the win probabilities to better reflect an fully-played-out Regular Contest, treat a 3 as a 4, and where the more extreme (further score from 10) is a 4 or a 16, add an extra 1 to the higher adjusted score. So for example, a contest of 4 vs. 8 shifts to 10 vs. 14, but you should add 1 to make it 10 vs. 15, which in turn means the PC in an "instant"-regular-contest skill roll has a target of 15 on 3d. Further, you may want to make contests where the more extreme score is 5 or 15 more accurate by adding "one half" after shifting to 10 (as shorthand for alternating between the vanilla shifted score and adding an extra 1 each round).

When the skills lie either side of 10 (or when one of them is actually 10), there's little point in trying instant Regular Contests, since a straight regular contest will be over very quickly. It's still possible, of course, so here are some suggestions: If at least one of the scores is between 8 and 12, just do a straight shift-to-10 calculation. When the scores are not both above or both below 10, you should *not* use the "add 1 for a 4 or 16" rule mentioned above. If none of the scores are between 8 and 12 inclusive and the two scores lie either side of 10 (that is, one score is well above 10 and the other well below), just do a straight regular contest -- it will almost always be over on the first round anyway.

Pyramid Review

Foes of Freedom (for *Mutants & Masterminds*)

Published by [Green Ronin](#)

Written by Steve Kenson & Steven E. Schend

Art & graphics by Ramón Pérez, Hal Mangold, Jonathan Kirtz, Kevin Stokes, Storn Cook, James Ryman, & Christopher West

Edited by Jon Leitheusser

96-page full-color softcover; \$23.95

It's a simple, straightforward title, and it's just what it says: *Foes of Freedom* is a collection of enemies for use with the *Mutants & Masterminds* RPG from Green Ronin. There's a pile of these things on the market, and that's understandable -- if you put out a superhero game, you're almost expected to follow up with a book or two of characters for it. If you're going to do such a thing, you ought to be bringing something awfully cool to the table, and the goods just aren't here.

The volume deals with villainous groups, solo ne'er-do-wells, and the facility that holds them. The groups are the most interesting facet of the product. Among the more engaging: The Minotaur, stolen from his ancient prison, is now the unseen head of his own version of the Labyrinth. Operating from behind the scenes, "Taurus" uses ruthless business practices to continue waging his centuries-long feud against Daedalus, the superintelligent craftsman who imprisoned him on Crete. Cutting-edge scientists, thieves, and assassins (many created by Taurus' own team) round out his cohorts and his company's bottom line.

Talos (from [Freedom City](#) -- a book that is a big help in navigating this one) and his crew believe in the superiority of artificial life, and work to relegate man to a subservient position. To this end, he has created the Foundry, which offers androids for combat or infiltration to anyone who can meet the fabulous price tags. It's always on the lookout for new and interesting technology to steal, and guards its own secrets zealously by isolating factories with teleportation technology.

Other groups are less inspired, including some cultish cabals, a team of thieves, and a family of psionicists, as well as a sampling of monsters who don't really form a team.

The lone villains are even less impressive, and many are a deliberate homage to characters from mainstream comics. Blackstar is a rogue Star Knight, a thinly veiled version of Green Lantern's foe Sinestro, while scientist Connor Kirkstrom loses a limb to a shark attack and ends up turning into man-shark Megalodon using a serum made from shark DNA.

There are a few good ideas, some worthy of note simply because they're so odd (like Cthulhu-faced alien privateer Captain Kraken) or daringly non-powerful (the puzzle-loving Conundrum and the unnerving Fear-Master really have to work for their victories if they face anyone with more power than your average Batman). True props go to the more innovative X-Isle, an intelligent city that longs to *be* Freedom City, and the book's finest example, Silver Scream, a long-dead screen actress whose spirit hasn't left the limelight. But mostly it's a roundup of super-standards, with a shadow man, an intelligent meta-ape, a possessing spirit, some mythological figures-turned-villains, and a just plain strange computer hacker.

Every setting has to have its super prison. To keep these people off the streets, they've built Blackstone Special Federal Penitentiary ("the Stone," about two miles off the Coast of Freedom City) and loaded it up with the meta-dregs of society. The prison itself isn't all that noteworthy -- what looks like a chunk of rock on the water's surface is actually a monorail-serviced core descending into the seabed -- but the mysterious warden and the prison's history manage to score some points for enlivening the location.

A brief appendix adds some interesting new powers, flaws, and (super) feats -- setting up fall guys, developing a master plan, producing an immortal character's life story without a 10-page character sheet -- but those three pages hardly justify the buy (although at least this one isn't a hardcover). Unafraid as the book is to provide low-power NPCs and details on capers for everybody to get into, you'd think they could ditch a couple of mugs and delve deeper into ways to make these "normal" but clever foes a challenge for the heavy hitters.

Browse through any entry in the *Mutants & Masterminds* line and you'll have a pretty good idea of the book's ornamental qualities. The artists' work is worthy of the real comics, and they do a dandy job here with character portraits and Blackstone diagrams.

Although it shines through here and there, and the writing is every bit as smooth and readable as anything with the redoubtable Steve Kenson at the helm, the obvious title reflects the plainness of its contents. *Foes of Freedom* is an unremarkable selection that bulks up the *Mutants & Masterminds* background in fits and starts, but has little to recommend it as a rogues gallery.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

BESM Dungeon (for Big Eyes, Small Mouth)

Published by [Guardians of Order, Inc.](#)

Written by David L. Pulver & James Maliszewski

Cover by Julie Dillon

Illustrated by Svetlana Chmakova, Christina Crontiris, Julie Dillons, Pamela Ramali, Chris Steward, & Chris Watkins

96-Page Perfect Bound Six By Nine-Inch Book; \$15.95

What do you do if you fancy a dungeon bash but want to avoid the "dreaded" *d20 System*? There are, of course, plenty of choices when it comes to the fantasy RPG, but most go out of their way to avoid the tropes and clichés of the world's leading RPG. The choice is really quite limited, but Guardians of Order offers an option that is lighter and faster than most, *and* is one that has an anime spin which gives it a flavor of its very own. As the title suggests, *BESM Dungeon* is for [Big Eyes Small Mouth](#), the leading anime RPG. It is also the third title in the publisher's BESM Fantasy line, which includes the *BESM Fantasy Bestiary* and *Uresia: Grave of Heaven*.

That said, *BESM Dungeon*, designed for use with the d6 variant of the Tri-Stat system, can be run with nothing more than just the *BESM Core Rules*. It includes a setting, a guide to suitable characters and races, a host of new creatures (which can be used in conjunction with those found in the *Fantasy Bestiary*), a hoard of magical items to plunder, and of course, a ready-to-play dungeon. The latter works best with at least four players, though more are preferable, the guidelines suggesting that a party consisting of two warrior-types or two mage-types serve as a solid basis for an adventuring group.

The setting is Noah's Landing, a village that sits on the eastern coast of Jessenia. This untamed island is mountainous, heavily forested, and marked with murky swamps, and is home to a wide variety of dangerous beasts and creatures -- Goblins, Fish-Men, the feline Nekojin, and others. Until 60 years ago, Noah's Landing was a thriving port and home to the Temple of Lysandra. As well as a place of worship, it was also a giant lighthouse that helped guide ships safely past the rock and monster infested waters around the island of Petra. This time of prosperity and good fortune ended when an unholy alliance of Goblins, Trolls Ogres, Dragons and worse marched out of the swamps to assault the temple. No one alive today knows what happened, but the Temple of Lysandra vanished in a blaze of light. In the years since the Curse of Lysandra, it reappears each month at the time of the full moon. At first it was silent, but now terrible yowls can be heard from within, while adventurers are drawn to the tales of the riches still to be found in the labyrinth below the lighthouse.

In keeping with the "going down a dungeon, killing things, taking their pretty things, and going up a level" ethos of the dungeon bash game, characters in *BESM Dungeon* start out as first-level, 25-point characters. They are described as being competent at beating up rats, but despite their high mortality rates they should be able to advance in level quite quickly. With those 25 points, players need to buy stats, an occupational template, and finally attributes or a species template for their characters. The species templates given include the usual Elves, Dwarves, and Humans, but adds Pixies, Lizard Folk, Half-Dragons, and Shape Changers to the mix as well. The first of the real nods to anime is the inclusion of the Nekojin or cat people; the fact that Elven ears point not upwards, but horizontally; and that you can play an Inter-Dimensionally Exiled Schoolboy/Schoolgirl! Another nod in the otherwise fantasy standard dungeon

occupational templates, is the Mecha Knight, usually a young boy or girl who uses a clockwork magical suit of armor to fight evil. However, characters should not be designed as combat monsters, and a GM is advised to either deny their inclusion in a game or upgrade the dungeon to account for the increased martial prowess of the character.

Loot and stuff is dealt with in more detail than in most *Big Eyes, Small Mouth* campaigns. Several new European medieval weapons are added (war hammer, morning star, halberd, and so on), as well as two items of in-genre armor. Evil armor is heavily spiked and gives bonuses to intimidation checks, while cheesecake armor clearly comes from the Chainmail bikini school of manufacture. Even worse, the higher the appearance of the wearer, the better protection it gives! Money, whether in the form of coins or gems comes in large amounts, the former never less than a bag full and copper coins are never good for more than ale and a round or two of beef sandwiches.

A little background is given on Jessenia and Noah's Landing, such as the latter including both a sorcerer's school and a ninja clan (whose students, in true anime style, are all meant to be men although every student bar one is female), but much of the book is given over to the dungeon. This is spread over three levels, plus the few rooms of the lighthouse above, and rules are included for all the usual dungeon stuff -- light, doors and wandering monsters, etc. The latter are rolled for every 30 minutes or -- more alarmingly -- every minute that the party remains in a corridor or on some stairs! The problem for the player characters will be that for the denizens of the dungeon, only two years have passed since they assaulted the temple of Lysandra. Having not long settled in, they welcome a fresh supply of meat.

The dungeon is clearly meant to be atypical and within such design constraints this is well done. It should provide plenty of dungeon bashing hours, especially if the GM throws in some of the soap opera elements of particular to anime, and are suggested by the guidelines on creating an adventuring party. The book is rounded out with a pair of appendices, one containing several new dungeon monster templates, the other a list of magical items of power. Of the former, perhaps the most absurd are the Bread Pudding, a mobile mould that is descended from foodstuffs left behind by adventurers, and the Pokedrake, and the less said about *its* origins, the better.

There is a certain tongue-in-cheek quality to *BESM Dungeon*, giving it a much lighter feel than might be found in the average dungeon-set game. This is due in the main to the other inspiration for this supplement -- anime, which accounts for the soap opera style and relationships encouraged between party members. But the setting is not some high school or metropolis; rather, it is something more akin to the computer adventures published by Japanese software houses, best typified by the early *Final Fantasy* series. The setting is also ripe with crossover potential, not just with the inclusion of the Dimensionally Exiled Schoolboy/Schoolgirl racial template, but with a magical item found within the dungeon as well as whatever the GM cooks up -- for example, how about gaming the *Dungeons & Dragons* cartoon anime style?

Most obviously, *BESM Dungeon* can be played as is, as a one-off mini dungeon bash, or it can be used as the springboard for something bigger of the GM's design. Yet however the GM decides to use this supplement, *BESM Dungeon* offers plenty of entertainment in a new spin on old cliché.

--Matthew Pook

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Right Hooks

At my Day Job yesterday, we were arguing about whether successful RPGs were character-driving or plot-driven. After a few minutes of debate, I paused and said, "Their neither. They are premise-driven." When asked for clarification, I said (after stalling for thinking time by sprinting to the restroom), "All the most successful games have premises that are easily explained."

And so I rattled off a list:

- *Deadlands*: Horror Wild West.
- *Aberrant*: Near-future superheroes.
- *Shadowrun*: Fantasy cyberpunk.
- *Spycraft*: Spies.

In fact, this last example shows that the best games often have their premise summed up in the *name*; I suspect one reason *Dungeons & Dragons* is as successful as it is remains because it has one of the most evocative names in gaming. (Really, how hard is it to deliver on either prong of that two-tiered promise?) And I defy someone to provide an explanation of *Vampire: Dark Ages* that doesn't, in some way, contain the phrase, "You play vampires in the dark ages."

By this point in my rant (and, really, if standing on top of a desk gesturing wildly with a Diet Pepsi Twist can is a "rant," then there's something wrong with society), I was stopped and challenged: "What games *aren't* premise-driven?"

It is at this point that I am reminded of an old existential joke (which, I believe, I am stealing from Raymond Smullyan):

One philosopher says to another, "With all the problems in the world today, it is better not to even exist."

"Yes," the other philosopher replies. "But who can be so lucky? One in a thousand?"

Anyway, the joke shows my conundrum: It's a lot easier to imagine that something doesn't exist than to describe it. But I pressed on, gamely (hah!).

It was also difficult to find examples that everyone would have heard of, but that *weren't* commercial successes. And it was difficult to come up with successful properties with stories and characters that didn't have game-worthy premises.

"So, envision the *Fight Club* RPG. What would it be about?" And, after some stammering, we came up with, "Modern-day psychological conspiracy humor, something-or-other."

Feeling my oats, I pressed on. "Okay; without using the words 'Lovecraft' or 'Cthulhu,' describe *Call of Cthulhu*." The instantaneous answer was, "Pulp horror."

"Great," I replied. "Now, without using the words 'Tank' or 'Girl,' describe the *World of Tank Girl* RPG." The stammered premise was, "Post-apocalyptic humor." "So it's like *Paranoia*?" I replied. "Er, well, no . . ." and then it became obvious that there was no good way to describe it. No premise = failed game.

As I thought back to the bargain bins of my Former Friendly Local Game Shop, I was flooded with inspiration. "What about *Everway*? It was a beautiful game, but I couldn't understand what it was *about* . . . something about fantasy and pretty cards. *Earthdawn* is easy to explain, with 'horror/epic fantasy.' *Over the Edge* is 'conspiracy *Gilligan's Island*.' But what's the *Star*Drive* setting for *Alternity*?"

I don't know how well Wizard of the Coast's *Eberron* is doing, but I know that, as a former retailer, I'd have a hard

time selling it because, even having read a reasonable amount of it and looking at a bunch of the pretty pictures, I have a hard time *understanding* it. (I had a similar hard time with *Fading Suns*, until someone explained it as "*Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* in space." As soon as I envisioned those possibilities – with nobles, magic-users, priests, thieves' guilds, and the like – I was hooked . . . and I was able to sell a lot of copies after that, since I could give a six-word pitch.)

Now, there are a few games that don't have such easy classifications, but I can get close enough for government work:

- **GURPS:** A generic realistic system.
- **Rifts:** Dark future multi-dimensional.
- **Traveller:** Person-level space opera.

And, obviously, licensed games have the advantage of having an immediately evocative property tied to them; two hours of watching *Star Wars* or *Star Trek* creates a much more inspiring universe than reading most game books for two hours.

So what does this mean to you, the game player and game consumer? Well, the biggest thing it means is that you have a possibility to create campaigns that *don't* have these solid premise-hooks. If you want to make a campaign that begins as an ancient Victorian game, has the PCs die and come back in modern times as spirits in a farcical *Ghostbusters*-style RPG told from the other side, you can; there are dozens of systems that would facilitate this. If you wanted to do a game where the players play both drivers and vehicles in an anime-style world, you can. But both would surely be hard sells as RPGs. Likewise most of Ken Hite's columns for *This Very Magazine*, while being great campaigns, would be difficult to market as settings because they are often difficult to sum up easily. (Without speaking for him, I suspect one of the reasons Ken likes to write for us is the freedom to present ideas and possibilities that would be difficult to express in the "mainstream" RPG market. The gold throne carried around by teeming throngs of admirers is also a pretty nice perk.)

I've run games where I've had the players "trust me" and revealed very little about the setting or what would happen. But such freedom can't be afforded in the gaming industry, since retailers and distributors need to know what the game is about ahead of time. It's difficult to envision an RPG with the style and panache of the first *Matrix* movie without coming to the conclusion that everyone would know about such twists ahead of time.

Fortunately, these possibilities are open to you. Go ahead – run or play in games that *can't* be easily summed up. You'll have a blast, and industry professionals will be jealous.

--*Steven Marsh*

Jingle Bells

An Adventure for *Transhuman Space*

by Eric Funk

This one-shot adventure is designed for law-abiding or mercenary PCs in the *Transhuman Space* setting. Characters with a criminal reputation may instead be contacted by one of several groups to "discourage" the PI (Private Investigator) team from investigating further. This should not affect the plot, as they could also be approached in later.

Many of the elements presented here, except for the introduction, could be foreshadowed amongst numerous Red Herrings. Perhaps an NPC recently sold all their shares in SmarTech, and came looking for advice. If a PC is an AI or a hyperevolutionist, then they may be approached by the victim looking for advice.

Getting the Heroes Involved

A digital entity (ghost/AI) going by the name of Pieter Ressereccion contacts the group for help. The (legally) adult friend of the child of an important person has disappeared. The infomorph offers standard detective search wage such that their take will be as per Bounty Hunter p. TS138, plus 25% (divide by 30 to get daily wage). One day's pay will be transferred now, the rest upon the safe return of the youth. Both families are real, but unavailable for comment at this time. A Quick Contest of Fast-talk or Merchant against skill 15 could gain either an additional +25% wage or an extra day's pay in advance. If the characters accept, they will be asked to sign a simple find person contract. Note that if the missing person is hurt through their actions, pay will be halved, and the rescuers may be responsible for medical expenses incurred. In addition, this is a "low visibility" assignment, and any overt weapons or combat-orientated cybershells should be discouraged.

Questions & Answers

Who is the infomorph? Depending on local regulations, the personage could be a SAI or ghost, but either way they have a normal job history with the Pirrie family.

The missing person (by the name of Chris Pirrie) has been acting unusual lately, paranoid and reclusive. A few hours ago, their VII stopped responding to messages. It normally confirms them.

How long have they been missing? One hour. The subject did not attend a party they indicated they would.

When was the person last seen? They were last verified early in the morning, by communicating with a different friend. Police will not start a search until one day has passed without conclusive evidence pointing to foul play.

Assuming the offer is accepted, investigators will be provided with a valid ID file on the victim, and an access code to the domicile. Both are valid for 14 days, and the infomorph indicates it will notify the house AI of the validity of their intent and privilege.

On the House

The house AI lets them in without a fuss (assuming they use the code). If asked, it reveals that the victim was watching a loop of video constantly before they left; it still has a copy that it will freely give. There are a number of productions from small companies, and from three giants: SmarTech, CogniScape, and Deep Thoughts. (Several of the small companies are fronts for the terrorist group, although that information cannot be discerned here.) Mentioning the names to a search enabled AI will immediately flag SmarTech as being suspicious. It has a low reputation rating, and a large

number of recent news articles and testimonials that speak poorly of it. CogniScape is a red herring. If investigated, it is a neutral, faceless mire of red tape.

Organizations

What Everyone "Knows" About SmarTech

Founded in 2088, it trains AIs and computer skill ROMs. Although not its primary industry, SmarTech also produces a large share of snazzy, bright, and short-lived memes in the local area. For those connected, the corporation has a very low reputation rating.

Rumors About SmarTech

The corporation was recently exposed as having major ethical problems (false). They upload brainpeeled children to test ads on or to grow into SAIs (false). A number of AIs that were fitted with skill ROMs went crazy (true, but a coincidence; the AIs were actually following orders for the government, and SmarTech was unknowingly left to take the fall). They are replacing all "human" staff with AIs and bioroids. (This is mostly false. After profits plummeted, staff was downsized, and when business started to pick up, the first to return were those with the lowest "upkeep.") The GM is encouraged to add several wild rumors to this list.

What Everyone Doesn't Know About SmarTech

The corporation is actually recovering from an extreme memetic attack. This company is so honest it actually invites a federal memetic review board (such as the Memetics Defense Division of the [NTIB](#)) to inspect the memes and research techniques. Of course they will be suspicious and recalcitrant toward any civilian asking about their practices. If asked to analyze a meme that may have been involved in criminal activity, after a few background checks they may analyze it. Estimates indicate that it will take a week to get results at "low" processing priority. GMs should feel free to extend or shorten this timeframe if the team needs clues. If trouble comes knocking, most security guards here wield standard electrolaser pistols, and wear older-style light nanoweave (with ceramic inserts). (For a "typical" SmarTech security guard, see the "Ready-Made" section below.)

What Everyone Knows About Deep Thoughts

It was founded in 2097 to take advantages of AIs and public memetic documents.

It is so named because the SAIs seemed to take an unusual amount of time compiling memetic analyses. SAI-based memetic R&D firm publicly specializing in advertisements for children's toys. (If asked, their lawyers will calmly indicate that the name has nothing to do with the works of a twentieth century author. Really.)

The CEO of the company is listed as Johnathon Whitcomb -- a brilliant engineer with vision, and a knack for making friends. Should anyone personally ask, they will be told that he is hard working, very busy, often on the road, and that they should see his secretary if they want to make an appointment. His secretary will indicate that he has not asked to see them, and direct their questions to marketing or the legal department.

Before arriving at either the marketing or legal departments, Public Relations officer Naomi Turen will have been notified and she will intercept any nosey investigators. She has charisma and a soothing voice. Attempts to read her will have to contest with a net skill 18 in Acting, Diplomacy and Fast-Talk. If the GM wishes, she could even be a parahuman or bioroid with Pheromone Control (CI 63).

What Everyone Doesn't Know About Deep Thoughts

It actually makes military memes for the highest bidders through front organizations. Many beings have disappeared to

protect this secret. This will include the PIs and the PCs if they discover too much. Government agents are busy collecting data, but are hindered by counter-agents within the agency. Outsider intervention could break the stalemate, however. If trouble comes to this facility, most security forces here carry police armguns, and wear medium nanoweave armor (with clamshell cuirass). The building has a large variety of cyberswarms in all public areas (officially cleaners, painters, builders, but unofficially including surveillance swarms), as well as a grenade launcher turret near the front entrance that is loaded with tangler and tear gas canisters. All sections that encounter the public have at least one Greeter bioroid on duty at all times (see "Deep Thoughts" goon, below). If they are expecting trouble, riot shields and NBC kits are standard issue. Trouble is always expected around their dusty clearing warehouses in the industrial area, a modest way from the shining headquarters building. (For a "typical" Deep Thoughts security guard, see the "Ready-Made" section below.) All the maintenance and janitorial cybershells (a small number of which are actually RATS with the police pod option, see p. TS124) have electrolaser pistols and electrified surfaces.

What Everyone Knows About Serpent's Fang

The group was founded in the early 2090s, and has always had a small following. The leader appears to be a human male with a number of cybernetic implants who only goes by the name "Viper." The sect is notably pro-human, anti-biomod.

Rumors About Serpent's Fang

They have a nuclear device (false). They possess fragments of the Mind Crasher (see p. TM62) (also false). They are working with the TSA (as written, false).

What Everyone Doesn't Know About Serpent's Fang

It has a small cult following, many of which have infiltrated the memetic research divisions of several companies, including that of Deep Thoughts. They are using stolen memetic algorithms, and thus the memes share some similar logic strands. The leader, known only as "Viper," is always experimenting with uploading xoxs of different "successful" cult leaders into his extra implant. It is set up so it is not directly connected to his NAI implant, but the latter controls all the I/O connections to the former. The NAI is set to "awaken" Viper from his "communion" with the xox at timed intervals, or if someone enters the room. Unfortunately he has been hanging around the psychotic shadows too long, and his grip on reality has become so tenuous that and thus all he can do is marketing. In Viper's absence, his second-in-command, "Zap," has been filling the part, and acting as his mouthpiece.

Local government agencies have been keeping an eye on this group for a while, but since nothing solid has been proven yet, and infiltrations are difficult, there has not been a move against them yet. The agencies are currently watching and debunking the unfounded memes about the group's danger, while letting the group prepare to commit a provable crime. (For a typical member of the group, see the "Ready-Made" section below.)

Turtle

After being cyber-napped and locked away from live information feed, the memetic design SAI is becoming frantic, paranoid, and lonely. Living isolated for months, being only fed terrorist propaganda discs and copied marketing info from Deep Thoughts, Turtle is being forced to develop a high-power, violent anti-biomod meme. Turtle suspects (correctly) that as soon as it finishes its current project, it will be erased and restored from a stolen state. (Unbeknownst to it, it already has.) It has been hiding messages in the memes and propaganda it produces to lead anyone to the hideout. Anyone who approaches its isolated microframe and doesn't look or act like a terrorist will be asked for help. It already has a backup made this morning, and will merely update the backup file with an encrypted message to itself identifying its rescuers and updating the day's events. The resident program will then overload the CPUs and fragment the nonvolatile storage. It doesn't like being treated like this, and if someone honestly treats it well, providing it with Net access and a small list of funds to buy access to demographic reports, it will work happily.

Serving the Plot

The PCs should have decided to investigate either the hideout of the terrorists, or one of the clearing houses for the megacorp. Once the protagonists have ruffled feathers in both groups, the two factions will both anonymously contact any investigators on the case, and provide a few details to get them started on the other. In reality, both groups just want the adventurers to distract the other party while they prepare their coup. If the GM wishes to complicate matters, the infomorph Pieter could have grown impatient and hired another group of investigators.

Timeline

If the PCs do nothing, this is what will most likely happen:

- Deep Thoughts begins to act against the infiltrators, "programming" them with suggestions and memes into double agents. Several commit suicide from the stress.
- Serpents' Fang prepares to retaliate by exposing all the incriminating evidence it has on Deep Thoughts (including the bash campaign against SmarTech).
- Deep Thoughts' troops attack, and the efforts of Serpent's Fang are released prematurely (the memetic equivalent of a bomb, it will only affect a few people, perhaps causing a dozen to try to kill people with biomods, then commit suicide). Immediately after, a large explosion rocks the building and blows out the vehicle bay, and kills Turtle and Chris. Acting on a tip, the detectives were investigating the area and are also killed in the crossfire, bringing the incident into international news (optional plot device).
- Deep Thoughts is stormed by government troops the next morning and many arrests are made. Mr. Whitcomb is not found.

Achieving Success

- **Missing Person:** Should the PCs successfully get to the terrorists' lair, they should get the brief opportunity to sedate the missing person, and (later) collect their reward. The rescued will be thoroughly indoctrinated in the groups' philosophy, and will not go willingly. If statistics are needed, use the Fang Member template at the end, but raise IQ to 13, DX to 12, add Amnesia (partial), replace Brawling with Judo-12, and remove the weapons skills.
- **Turtle:** During the attack on the terrorist base, any adventurers will also have the chance to rescue Turtle. If in an area where SAIs are citizens, Turtle may become a Contact or Ally, otherwise Turtle's owners may become a Contact or Patron.

Story Options

- The infomorph was actually sent by one of Serpent's Fang or Deep Thoughts to distract the other while they prepare for the final coup.
- Perhaps Turtle has actually gone insane, and the hidden messages are dangerous, leading into a trap, or nowhere.
- Just as the team leaves the Deep Thoughts, a car bomb explodes, and luckily a passing car deflects most of the explosion. The party takes 2d points of damage, or avoids it with a Dodge roll. It doesn't really matter who set it. A news bulletin will air immediately afterward, indicating that the Serpent's Fang group will take responsibility.
- The government secretly contacts the adventurers and wants them to reveal/hand over what they know, and then asks them to help/keep off the case.
- What if the *Felicia*-series used by Deep Thoughts (see below) are "pre-ban"(see p. TS116)? What connections do they have? Why do they think the extra expense is necessary? To have discovered this, one would have had to witness them in action, which is a very dangerous thing, indeed.

Cooking Tips

- If need be, the subconscious memetics planted by Turtle could be used to prod players who are stuck for clues. Perhaps an NPC unconsciously acts on a subliminal clue?

- If the GM is looking for suggested media to begin the adventure, they could be short home movies containing infomercials and/or cyber-education (see p. FW 34).
- Recommended mixing order:
 1. The Disappearance
 2. Simple research reveals the suspicious media was produced with "in house" tools from three companies.
 3. If SmarTech cannot aid them immediately, then the only other that gets a reaction is Deep Thoughts.
 4. While traveling to the Deep Thoughts office, the GM should encourage rumors of Serpent's Fang activity in the area.
 5. After Deep Thoughts seems suspicious to the PCs, they will likely start poking around different sites owned by the corporation. They can either:
 - Encounter members of the Serpent's Fang group and interrogate them.
 - Or get an approximate area to search from SmarTech, who decoded it from the message with a (n unspoken?) warning that if they could find it, there will be others coming.
 - Or both, the Serpent's Fang member speaking something that the PCs send to SmarTech, as a clue, which allows them to break a code.

Aftermath

If the investigators managed to rescue the "hostage," they can get their reward. If they performed well, then they might find they have earned a Patron in the rich family, and perhaps an ally in Chris after the deprogramming.

Several governments have offered rewards for information leading to the capture of Viper, members of Serpent's Fang, and to the source of a number of strains of dangerous memes (which is Deep Thoughts).

Depending on the players' decisions with regards to the corrupt policies behind Deep Thoughts, the investigators may gain a Secret Patron (see p. CI 28), or Unknown Enemy (see p. CI 77). Deep Thoughts is a moderately powerful organization.

As a continuation of this adventure, the Deep Thoughts (or Serpent's Fang) members might seek revenge by unleashing (or blackmailing the heroes with) evidence that the Turtle (or another infomorph) they are fostering is not the "original," and is thus a xox.

Characters

Philip Van der Zweep, a.k.a. "Zap"; Terrorist; human male 5'8" [100 points]

As a Serpent's Fang member (below), but with the following changes:

Increase ST to 11 [20], DX to 13 [30], and IQ to 14 [45], HT to 11 [10].

Advantages: add Ally Group [20], Combat Reflexes [15]

Disadvantages: add Addiction (Wireheading) [-10]

Skills: add Computer Hacking-14 [12], Computer Operation-13 [1], Computer Programming-13 [4], Memetics-13 [2]

SmarTech goon [15 points]

ST 11 [10]; *DX* 11 [10]; *IQ* 10 [0]; *HT* 11 [10]

Advantages: Acute Vision +1 [2]; Patron (SmarTech) [15]

Disadvantages: Duty [-10]; Pacifism (One of Cannot Harm Innocents, Cannot Kill, or Self-Defense Only) [-15], -15 points in other disadvantages such as Bad Sight (Correctable) [-10], and Shyness [varies].

Skills: Area Knowledge (SmarTech facility)-10 [1]; Beam Weapons (Electrolaser)-11 [1]; Diplomacy-11 [6]; Electronics Operation (Security Systems)-12 [6]; Guns (Missile)-10 [1/2]; Judo-9 [1/2]; Law (Security)-8 [1]; Tonfa-10 [2]

Equipment: Electrolaser pistol; SmarTech uniform; handcuffs; tonfa. Elites carry police armguns with tangler and HEMP rounds, better Attributes and skill levels.

A SmarTech uniform is mostly light nanoweave armor (DR10, see p. TS159) with ceramic inserts, (PD4, full DR40, 6lbs at TL9, see pp. MF35-36 for use) a built-in communicator, camera, life sign monitoring, and radio uplink.

Not the best and brightest, they represent what the under-funded corporation could bring to bear.

Deep Thoughts Goon [81 points]

ST 12 [20]; **DX** 12 [20]; **IQ** 10 [0]; **HT** 12 [20]

Advantages: Alertness +1 [5]; Patron (Deep Thoughts) [25]

Disadvantages: Duty [-10]; Incurious [-5]; -25 in (Bully [-10]; Callous [-6]; Hidebound [-5]; Intolerance [varies]; Lecherousness [-10]; Pyromania [-5]; Sadism [-15])

Skills: Area Knowledge (one Deep Thoughts site)-11 [2]; Beam Weapons (Electrolaser)-14 [4]; Diplomacy-10 [4]; Electronics Operation (Security Systems)-12 [6]; Guns (Missile)-13 [2]; Interrogation-10 [2]; Intimidation-12 [6]; Judo-12 [4]; Law (Security)-9 [2]

Equipment: Police armgun with tangler and HEMP rounds; uniform; handcuffs; gas grenades (tear, sleep). Troubleshooting teams sport assault pods, near-miss indicators, and other equipment expected of mercenary units (see Fire Team Epsilon-4 p. PF36). Their uniform is mostly medium nanoweave (DR20), but includes a heavy clamshell Cuirass (DR55), see p. TS160, with built-in communicator, camera, life sign monitoring, with radio uplink. These are dangerous individuals who follow orders, and don't really care about what they're doing, as long as it's what they're told. Most Bioroids in this role are *Felicia*[114]-series (see p. TS116).

"Greeter" Variant: Remove Beam Weapons, Electronics Operation, and Guns. Add Attractive [5], Charsima +1 [5], and raise Diplomacy to skill 12. If using Martial Arts, then the ["Bantu Boxing \(Warriorstyle\)"](#) might be appropriate. Most Bioroids in this role are *Hamlin*[92]-series (see p. BD121).

Serpent's Fang member [-5 points]

ST 10; **DX** 11; **IQ** 10; **HT** 10

Advantages: Ally (VII, NAI-5,always present) [0]; Contacts (Various) [10]; Patron (Serpent's Fang) [5]; Strong Will +2 [8]

Disadvantages: Extreme Fanaticism [-15]; Intolerance (Persons with bio-mods; artificial life) [-10]; Secret [-20]; Sense of Duty (Serpent's Fang) [-5];

Skills: Area Knowledge-11 [2]; Brawling-10 [1/2]; Demolition/TL8-8 [1/2]; Computer Operation-9 [1/2]; Fast-Talk-12[6]; one of Guns (LAW)/TL8-10 [1]; Guns (Light automatic)/TL8-10 [1]; Guns (Rifle)/TL8-10 [1]; Philosophy (Serpent's Fang)-10 [4]; Scrounging-10 [1]; Streetwise-12 [6]

Equipment: Old weapons that still can use modern ammunition appropriate to one of the above skills, TL8 "heavy" Kevlar body armor (DR12, 4.5 lbs, p. B72). All have IFF interrogators and transponders in their equipment

Most have VIIs and, like many public organizations, keep in touch every minute with pictures, sounds, and information. The VII is also set to self-erase if the host dies (write random data to the non-volatile memory and shut down). Upper echelon members have cortex bombs installed to prevent interrogation of their shadows. As a group they have access to older explosives, and other hardware.

Pyramid Links

- "[Gaming and the Nature of Artificial Intelligence](#)" by Mark Gellis
- "[The National Technical Intelligence Bureau \(NTIB\)](#)" by Aaron Kavli
- "[Nonhuman Rights in the Transhuman United States](#)" by Steven E. Ehrbar
- "[Transhuman Martial Arts](#)" by Peter V. Dell'Orto & Werner H. Hartmann

Recommended Media

- *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency* by Douglas Adams
- *Arachnophobia* (1990)
- *Batman* the movie (1989)

Threatens all the World

by Brian Rogers

Life has a funny way of getting in the way. Things happen that we can't predict, and everything on our schedule gets booted off to deal with other events, be they [romantic](#) or have to do with [our friends](#). Sometimes, however, they are huge, and everyone has to [react to them](#).

In a serial fiction setting, these things are Crossovers. Yes, each hero or team has a personal story, but sometimes that story gets superceded by outside events. When unnatural earthquakes threaten to tip California into the sea, Omniman and his colleagues have to stop worrying about Lord Crustacean to stem the tide of destruction, occult investigators must forge allegiances with rival mystics to divine what happened, hard bitten cops have to abandon their legwork to keep order in a collapsing city, and even the quest for the one armed man has to be put on hold to give aid to the wounded. No one is immune.

Defining "Crossover"

"I'll tell you what's happening, as far as I know. Someone or something has obliterated the sun. An alien creature. one that might actually make us nostalgic for the Hunters."

--Aquaman, *Aquaman* v3 #26.

The absolute scale of the crossover crisis is questionable: it's not the impact it would have on the world so much as the number of heroes involved that makes a crossover. For example, the "Hunters" mentioned above are aliens that Aquaman and his allies prevented from conquering Earth just last issue. That event is not touched on by any other title in DC's line. In comic terms it's a nice private alien invasion that caused nary a ripple in the shared world. Then the sun goes out. That takes front and center in the next issue, even though Aquaman does nothing to resolve that crisis. While still part of the crossover, his story is just a spillover that keeps him from directly pursuing his own agenda. Events have overtaken him and he has to adjust his plans accordingly.

Taken at face value, this is ridiculous. Not that the hero will have to adjust his plans if the sun went away -- the sun going away is a pretty big thing. It's the fact that his alien invasion went unnoticed outside his comic. As the invasion involved a giant dragon sitting on the roof of the White House and worldwide awareness of skull-shaped space ships, people might notice. It might even make the news on the West Coast. But it didn't, because regardless of how many aquatic heroes he had as allies, the event never appeared in any other hero's books. It's not a crossover unless it actually crosses over.

This fluidity of perception is part and parcel of super hero comics, an artifact of having multiple creative teams with a limited editorial oversight. In a world with a single GM, this fluidity only exists if you want to maintain it as part of the supers feel. If you decide against it, all you have to do is make certain that nothing else has happened that would overshadow the enormity of the [current crisis](#) -- or if it did that the players knew about it.

Deciding on a Crossover

"But I should be used to crazy things. I've seen ancient gods and super heroes and teleportation . . . and the dead rising . . . heavens, Stanley was born during an alien invasion! Why do these kinds of things always surprise me? And not just me, but everybody?"

--Stanley's Mom, *Stanley and His Monster* #3

Why have crossovers? In short, they sell. Just as team-ups serve to boost the sales of an individual book, crossovers boost the sale of all of the books involved. Completists bought not just the core books of the crossover but every book even vaguely connected. Instant revenue! Once the comic publishers figured this one out there was no going back.

Crossovers -- and the crises connected to them -- became annual events. This still doesn't explain why you'd want them in your game, but even without profit potential there are significant advantages.

- **Verisimilitude:** Life doesn't follow a plot, and crossovers show this. Whether the heroes' lives are hectic or quiet, whether they're within inches of bagging the villain or filling out police reports, the earthquake is going to happen. Tossing in the occasional world shattering event keeps the player characters from thinking that the world is a scripted story that's all about them.
- **Distraction:** In an opposing mindset, crossovers are a great way to redirect the action. Maybe the players have been too savvy and are ready to bag a major villain whose 12 step master plan is only on step 3. Hit them with a crossover, give the villain time to get away and maybe even steal a march on the heroes while they deal with the aftershocks.
- **Excitement:** If things have been slow, a crossover makes a great change of pace. Rather than puttering around with tangled plot threads, the heroes have an immediate crisis. Once the rubble has cleared you can hopefully keep that momentum, weeding out the dead plot threads or revealing that this crossover is merely an echo of the greater [battle to come](#).
- **Assistance:** Crossovers don't always surprise everyone. Sometimes it starts in one book and expands into others. You can use crossovers to prevent a PC mistake from destroying the world ("Oops. He hit the Earthquake button."), use a cosmic story when you don't have cosmic heroes ("His machine is dragging down the moon?!? We're gonna need some help."), or introduce the PCs to the heroic community ("Well Detective Delaney, you know the most about this 'Dr. Quake.' The President wants your opinion.")

Designing the Crossover

"I recall having problems with the Deathstroke character. Why would this guy possibly be allowed into the club? It seemed to me that Superman would have nothing to do with him."

--Dan Jurgens, "Panic in the Sky" commentary.

Once you've decided to have a crossover, you have three questions to answer: what happens, who gets involved, and how do they react.

"What happens?" is fairly easy. Most crossovers stem from a single major incident: Alien Invasion, Planetary Disaster, Criminal Upheaval. Since one reason for the crossover is watching the heroes react to things outside their control, don't feel burdened by thematic appropriateness. Simply select the one that you most want to play with. Obviously you shouldn't break any of the fundamental rules of the game world -- if magic doesn't exist, having demons invade is a bad choice -- but otherwise just have fun. Likewise, the question of "who gets involved" doesn't need to be complicated. Remember, from a serial fiction perspective the thing that makes a crossover is the presence of other heroes. One obvious answer is "everybody," and if the crisis is large enough that's the correct answer. If it's a smaller crisis, you'll have to give some thought to who turns up. Keep in mind why you're having the crossover -- you'll pick different supporting NPCs if it's a distraction than if it's a broad scale introduction to the world.

In comics, Crossovers act as melting pots for the various isolated pockets of story in the shared world, as each team brings their own operating parameters. In most cases these are simply mindsets, where law-abiding heroes, violent vigilantes, scientific rationalists and mystic seekers have to all work together to save the world. They might not agree on methods, but they're all operating under the same rules (or [almost the same rules](#)).

Another possibility is having the crossover connect what would normally be discrete games. If your Mythos investigators fail to stop a Cthonic summoning, it would sure look like an earthquake to the man on the street. The superheroes holding up the city and rescuing people from collapsing bridges might not even be aware of the creatures moving under the ground, and the maverick cops will likely assume that they're just shooting up kidnapers and serial killers who are taking advantage of the chaos rather than inadvertently distracting the cultists to give the mythos investigators another chance.

If you're running two or three different campaigns at once, a crossover can bring all of them together, at least for a little while -- your players might not even realize it happened! If afterwards no one in your Cthulhu game ever

mentions the superheroes again . . . well, that happens in comics all the time. Spider-Man and Superman teamed up on several occasions without wondering why they never saw more of each other, and there was once an *X-Men/Star Trek* crossover (never mind Superman's appearance on *I Love Lucy*).

Finally, there's the question of how people react. Crossovers are a good time to make use of timetables -- what will happen if the player characters do nothing? Will other heroes pick up the ball? What strategies will they use? Who will die? The exact timetable will get thrown out the window once the players do get involved, but building one indicates how various NPCs react to events and each other. Take a good look at the NPCs' operating mindsets and plan their reactions accordingly.

If the PCs are of a [different power scale](#) than the other heroes (or operate under different story rules) consider a two-column timetable with the events involving the main cast in one column (for instance, the time taken for the cops to quell rioting and discover the serial killers) and the ones they can't effect (the super-team saving bridges, preventing an avalanche and holding the fault line together) in the other for reference purposes. In this example, the occult investigators would bounce between the two timetables, or perhaps require their own column. In the Aquaman plot mentioned above, the king of the sea does nothing to re-ignite the sun, being too busy trying to prevent the freezing ocean surface from killing all the cetaceans. While he is technically involved in the crossover, his timeline is his own.

Keeping the Players Engaged

"As there is a need for a brotherhood of heroes! Though J'onn J'onzz has indicated that the Justice League has been disbanded the purpose for which it was first joined is no less urgent in these dark days! What say you, my friends? Will you stand beside me in the name of justice?"

--Dr. Fate, *Legends* #6

One major problem with a crossover is the players feeling cheated for various reasons.

Sometimes players will be upset because they never did find out everything that's going on, but there are several ways to resolve this. First is just explaining it to them in the post game wind down, letting the players know while keeping the PCs in the dark. Alternately, you could have a news report detail the major elements that the players and their PCs missed, which gives the world a good lived-in feel as the heroes realize that they aren't the only ones saving the world. Finally, there's the in-character explanations, which can take many forms, from all the major participants having dinner and hashing things out to the cops grilling a captured occult investigator to find out what the hell happened. This last also makes a good springboard to later story arcs or PC contacts.

Other players get annoyed if their PCs aren't the ones doing the heavy lifting: They might be having a great time stopping looting and saving lives, but when it's revealed that the super-heroes are pushing the moon back into orbit they get upset because their actions become irrelevant. This is reasonable, as many players signed up to be the main heroes, not second stringers in a [cosmic story](#). This just means that you have to make the PCs' actions the most relevant ones: Omniman and his partners might be pushing the moon back into orbit, but if the PC cops don't shut down Dr. Quake's machine, the problem won't go away. Once again, success or failure rests squarely on the PCs.

Finally, there are players who want to be involved in everything: it's not enough that their heroes did the heavy lifting, they must do *all* the lifting. For such players, parallel plots with multiple PCs might be the best way to go. If you're merging existing campaigns, just use the current characters. If not, then hand out what would be the NPC crossover heroes. In either case, be prepared to do a lot of jump-cutting. While this is taxing, it can lead to a very rewarding session as you weave the individual story threads into parallel climaxes. Plus, with NPC heroes, you can increase the tension by killing the crossover characters, just as you might in a one-shot con game -- better still, a player who loses one of his three PCs for the session is hardly out of the action, so the death can literally come at any time without reducing player enjoyment.

Another option for players who want to do everything is using the crossover with [League-style play](#). The League heroes handle the major task, while the secondary characters split up to handle the minor ones. In supers universes, crossovers are the natural crucibles of Leagues, so they also make a natural kick-off point for a League campaign.

And, once the League is formed, the fates might force them to team up with another League for a storyline that is truly cosmic . . . and will boost a lot of sales!

Appendix Z: Bureaucratic Runaround

by Matt Riggsby

One of the most difficult challenges real people face is dealing with services allegedly provided by governments and large companies. Those services, unfortunately, may be provided by departments which are ill-equipped, poorly organized, and staffed by personnel of questionable competence, commitment, or both, and infinitely complicated by obsolete regulations which an overtaxed legislature hasn't seen fit to remove and by multiple layers of safeguards to keep the system from being exploited.

With the situations below, intended for modern and future bureaucracies but adaptable to historical and fantasy empires, your PCs can face some of the same difficulties. In a cyberpunk or steampunk campaign, a dysfunctional bureaucracy might be a symbol of a mechanized society gone mad. In *Unknown Armies*, there might be a hidden mystical significance. In *Paranoia*, it's just another day at the office. Entire adventures could be based on paper chases, with undercover spies trying to obtain a fake passport or interstellar privateers trying to file papers indicating that their stardrive has passed its annual safety inspection. Every time the PCs visit an office operated by a large organization (or, in fact, a small one) they may encounter one or more of these situations:

Unusual hours: Because of poor funding or simply tradition, the office the PCs need to visit isn't open regular business hours, making it harder to get to when it's open. For example, it might be open from 10 AM to 4:15 PM three days a week but until 5:30 on the first Thursday of the month.

Line: A frequent problem with government offices, demand for service may exceed capacity, so there's a long line of customers awaiting service. Offices that anticipate heavy demand may assign numbers and call customers in some kind of order (people renewing vehicle registrations get numbers starting with T or AQ, those applying for gun permits get numbers starting with AO or I . . .).

Payment problems: For payment of fees, the office may be unable to accept the form of payment the PCs offer. For example, they might accept checks and cash but no credit cards, a few credit cards but no checks, has no change for large bills, etc.

Computer down: The office's computer or communications system is temporarily unavailable. They can offer limited services, but can't do what the PCs need (or perhaps they can do part of what they need, but not everything).

Out to lunch: The clerk the PCs are dealing with isn't empowered to provide them with what they need. The only person in the office capable of doing that is out to lunch, gone for the day, not in yet, on vacation, or has recently left the job and hasn't been replaced yet.

Wrong form: The forms the PCs have filled out are the wrong ones or have been replaced by different forms. They must fill in new ones, which may need different information.

Incomplete documents: The PCs have brought along important documents (ID papers, affidavits, etc.), but not all the right ones. If they can't get appropriate waivers, they'll have to find the right documents.

Wrong office: After some discussion with the clerk, the PCs discover that the office they're visiting can't provide them with any or all of the services they need (for example, photo IDs can only be obtained at a particular branch, building permits must be stamped at the county clerk's office rather than the city planner's office). They'll have to visit a different one, which is probably far away.

Unavoidable delays: Once the PCs complete their business, they are assured that the proper permits or licenses will be issued, notices will be put on file, liens will be lifted, and so on. But, after several days, they aren't. Or if they have, notification hasn't reached the people who need to know. The PCs will have to start dealing with the bureaucrats again to figure out what has happened.

Conflicting requirements: If the PCs have already consulted one bureaucrat for requirements for their business, a different one will claim that there's an entirely different set of requirements. The bureaucrats are unlikely to communicate with one another, so the PCs will have to act as middlemen to resolve the situation.

Pyramid Review

Wyrd is Bond: a Role Playing Game of Urban Myth and Magic

Published by [Key20 Publishing](#)

Written by Jason L. Blair

Cover by Leanne Buckley

Illustrated by Carlos Barros & Leanne Buckley

96-page perfect bound black & white softback; \$20

Wyrd is Bond: a Role Playing Game of Urban Myth and Magic is the first title from Jason L. Blair since the release of the critically acclaimed, but controversial RPG of confronting the terrors of childhood, [Little Fears](#). Less controversial, but with a subject matter and language as equally strong, this RPG is about life in the gangs of America's socially and economically deprived inner cities. The players are not just gangstas, but slingers. Gangstas with both attitude and "Wyrd" or "Mojo," able to cast or "sling" magic.

Originating in Africa, the Wyrd spread across America through the music of the oppressed. First Blues, then Rock 'n' Roll, and more recently, through Rap and Hip-Hop, scaring Middle America along the way. The latest in gangsta sounds and chic is even scarier, lyrics loaded with occult references and gear festooned with arcane symbols like the Yellow Sign.

Players take the role of Slingers, able to bust a cap and sling a spell, too. Possibly associated with ordinary gangs like the Bloods or Crips (although game versions are discussed, *Wyrd is Bond* is *not* about real life gangs), slingers belong to one of seven occult-themed gangs. The empiricist and materialist Crows follow Aleister Crowley's writings; the Hermes Trimegistus following 3Xstars are risk takers and rule breakers; the D-Men work for the Devil, drawing power from humanity's suffering; the close-knit xenophobic Hispanic Los Reyes or The Kings; the Hungry Ghosts are various all-Asian gangs that like to keep things in balance; the Dread follow Baron Samedi and are connected to the spirit world; and the Blood Queens are a small all-female coterie of predators. Player slingers can come from any gang, though D-Men members are hardly team players.

Each gang's Wyrd is different (for example, death for the Dread and the Crows' physicality), as are its initiation rites, attitudes, typical names and threads, and musical tastes. Plus a pair of signature slings and a Trick, a sling cast without the need to roll and a method of recovering Juice, which powers each sling. Gang details aside, a slinger is lightly defined by his traits, skillz, and relationships. He has two positive traits (for example, Athletic or Street Smart), two negative (Addicted or Clumsy) plus relationships, allies, enemies, a rival and a lover. He starts with one skill, a complete proficiency defining his role in a gang, such as Break Specialist (DJ), Hook-Up (street trader in goods and information), and Wheelman. In addition, a slinger starts with a Wyrd score of 1, several points of Juice, and ten Beats or hit points.

The mechanics revolve around three factors: Order, Power, and Payback. Order is a measure of a character or action's speed, Power the strength, and Payback the Wyrd's gift to the slinger. To undertake an action, three six-sided dice are rolled and one die placed under each factor. Want to go first? Place the highest die under Order. Or Power to hit hard. Spaces are provided for this on the character sheet. Traits add an extra die to the basic roll. If a positive trait, the lowest die roll is discarded, but the highest if a negative trait. Skillz work the same, the player able to keep the roll he chooses. Objects, mundane or magical add bonuses to the roll, while relationships can add a bonus or impose a

penalty.

Payback is used for various effects, including healing, reducing damage, boosting a player's next sling, even adding a special effect to a mundane action. Want to turn that bullet you just fired into a spider? Roll high enough for Payback and you can. Slings use the same mechanics, making magic more spontaneous than a list of spells. Slings can take any form or effect, but works best when cast in keeping with the Aspect of a gang's Wyrd. For example, a Crow prefers to cast slings physical in nature, affecting body chemistry, composition or adornment, while the Ghosts' Wyrd calls for slings that keep the balance through polarized extremes. Should a gangsta sling against his Wyrd's nature, he acquires Disruption, which causes future slings to fail, prevent Payback from working, and even lose a character Beats if he tries to use Juice. Only by acting within his Aspect can a slinger gain Redemption and lose his Disruption.

Once his Juice runs out -- which it quickly can -- a gangsta cannot sling. It is recovered through actions particular to each gang. For example, D-Men members regain it by standing in fresh chalk outlines or turning a pregnant mother into a drug addict, while the 3Xstars earn it by getting into danger or renovating property. Personal methods of recovering Juice can be learned after a slinger increases his Wyrd, which is done by enhancing his reputation. This gains him a +1 bonus used to permanently improve his Order or Power, or to make an item magical, such as making a favorite Bulls jacket bulletproof. Alternatively, it can be used to initiate a new gang member with his Wyrd.

Wyrd is Bond is about life on the street, fighting to protect (or in the D-Men's case, to undermine) the community and the gang from both rivals and the law. Beyond the mundane world, it is about a magical war that places gangstas at the bottom of the pile. The slingers learn more about the figures behind the war and each gang, such as Baron Samedhi, the Serpent King, and even Quetzalcoatl, as they gain reputation and strengthen their Wyrd. Each of these figures is fully described, including their aims and motivations, plus a separate gang called the Saints. They are Mafioso who draw upon the divine for their Wyrd in order to keep the other gangs in check.

To help get a game started, **Wyrd is Bond** comes with two scenarios and several hooks. The introductory adventure, "Another Body Murdered" opens with a *Usual Suspects*-style set-up, the characters held in the same cell for a drive-by shooting. The second scenario, "They Who Ride," set in Newark, is inspired by *Christine* by way of Robert Johnson. It explores the music culture that is one basis for **Wyrd is Bond**.

Another is the title's word play, "Wyrd" here being pronounced "word," thus giving multiple meanings: knowledge, fate, *and* promises. **Wyrd is Bond** is thus about both the promise of power and fate, and the giving and keeping of promises. It is an inner city urban fantasy in which gangstas try to control the chaotic nature of the Wyrd and magic. They face threats mundane and arcane, few being included, but given the light nature of the rules, they can easily be imported from other games and sources.

Wyrd is Bond is a slim book designed with a gangsta chic look. For example, chapters are called "tracks" and a spray-can font is liberally used. The artwork has similar styling, though the interior illustrations are not as good as the cover. The look and the layout culminate in the character sheet, which certainly looks the part, but is not as instantly easy to use as it could be. Needing one last read through, **Wyrd is Bond** feels slightly underwritten in places, but this leaves room for the GM's imagination.

Unfortunately, the subject matter for **Wyrd is Bond** is a problem. The street based, gangsta lifestyle central to the game is a whole mindset removed from that of the average, relatively affluent middle-class and white gamer. The aim is to play the game straight, without giving the camera a knowing wink or letting it veer into parody. Fortunately the author's advice on countering this is solid enough, and if the average gamer can roleplay a Dark Elf necromancer or cyber-assassin, is roleplaying a magic slinging gangsta that much of a difference or a challenge?

While **Wyrd is Bond** stands alone, it could work with several other games. With its Wyrd versus Disruption polarity, it feels not unlike a *World of Darkness* game, so would work well with [Mage: the Ascension](#), as well as the [Angel Roleplaying Game](#) and [Unknown Armies](#). Yet its length is more finite like [Dead Inside](#) or [My life With Master](#), the dangers of both magic and the war for it becoming apparent as a slinger increases his reputation and Wyrd.

I have reservations about **Wyrd is Bond**, being the average gamer described earlier and adverse to modern black music. Is the game for me? And if not, for whom? Probably not for the cultures it portrays, though they are neither mistreated

nor depicted negatively. But in reality, the game *is* aimed at the average gamer, because the author is asking us to play in a culture and milieu that, though not totally alien to us, is one that we are removed from. The device that will attract such an audience is magic or the Wyrd. After all, would you play a game about ordinary non-Wyrded up gangstas?

Although this game is not as controversial as *Little Fears*, both have in common the application of simple rules that support more complex ideas. Likewise they also allow for a fair degree of player input in how actions and effects are resolved. In doing so, *Wyrd is Bond: a Role Playing Game of Urban Myth and Magic* brings a fresh, energetic take to the urban fantasy genre, one that is more urban than fantasy.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Review

Dark Tales & Create Your Own Storytelling Cards (for Once Upon a Time)

Published by [Atlas Games](#)

Designed by Richard Lambert, Andrew Rilstone, & James Wallis

Edited by Michelle Nephew

Art by Scott Reeves, Sophie Mounier, & Florence Magnin

Dark Tales: 56 full-color cards, \$9.95; Create Your Own Storytelling Cards: 56 full-color blank cards (16 Happy Ever After cards, 40 Storytelling cards), \$7.95

The most annoying thing about Atlas Games' card game *Once Upon a Time*? All those infuriating happy endings. The solution? Kill 'em all, and let your fairy godmother sort them out. That means telling *Dark Tales*.

A quick recap of the story so far: [Once Upon a Time](#) is a storytelling game in which players use cards as the jumping-off point for fanciful stories in the tradition of the Brothers Grimm or Mother Goose. Everyone has a hand of cards with standard story elements on them -- the prince, the king, the palace, a sword, courage -- and an ending. You have to tell a story that incorporates the components from your cards (which lets you play those cards), eventually leading to the particular ending you've been dealt. While you're doing that, others will be waiting to hijack the storyline from you. If, during the course of your narrative, you mention an element that appears on one of their cards, they can step in with that card and pick things up from there. The first to empty their hand and get to their ending wins.

To this, add a pack of blank cards. Like the DIYs that came with the first box, *Create Your Own Storytelling Cards* is a full set of nothing but empty-faced Storytelling and Ending cards -- 40 of the former, 16 of the latter -- for creating your own conclusions and pieces of plot. It's pretty much that simple, though whether anyone needs that many blanks . . . perhaps, at some point, a PDF giving a few pointers on identifying the "empty spaces" in one's deck? Most of the generic bases have been covered already, so it might be nice to sit at the feet of the masters and see how to generate cards that will add to the overall experience rather than go over old ground. Atlas clearly knows how to do this, since they put out the far meatier *Dark Tales* . . .

Play of the game doesn't change in any mechanical way with the introduction of this card set -- the above rules still hold (though, incidentally, if you have not yet given up on the slick box from the core set with its easily lost lid and attendant flurry of spilled cards, you'll find the total deck size now exceeds that container's capacity). What does change -- and it's no small alteration -- is the tone of the game. Where once you had fairly light and cheery stories, you now have tales that are (no pun intended) decidedly grimmer.

The new deck contains fresh samples of all the old card types. There are storytelling cards that include aspects, locations, events, and so on, including interrupts. And though it seems counterintuitive, there are new Happy Ever After cards that are, in subject matter, usually anything but. Fiends stalk the deck, and characters are haunted or followed by murderers. If that's not creepy enough, the endings are really disturbed. Now the stories must end with "When her father saw her babies, he realized he had to allow the marriage"; "And they were blind for the rest of their days for their wickedness and falsehood"; or even "Every year she put cherry blossoms on the graves of her children." Sweet dreams, kiddies.

The cards use the same layout as the originals, so if you have the first set you at least know what the backs and borders look like (and the whole of the blank card set). The added art and imagery for *Dark Tales*, however, matches the unsettling theme. "Someone is punished" has a man hung by the neck, and the "heart" foregoes romantic Valentine notions in favor of a visible human heart dripping with blood. Notwithstanding, the depictions are still artful storybook fare in a twisted, Tim-Burton vein.

Not all the cards are this visceral, in illustration or text, but the buyer should know that *Dark Tales* earns its name. Even diluting it by adding a few of the new cards to the old gives those storylines a bleaker feel, so if you're not looking for that severe a shift in gears, think about which cards you'll add and which you'll hold back. (It would have been nice from a bookkeeping point of view to have some graphic indicators on the cards indicating which came from the new set.) Atlas is taking this step down into the darker parts of the imagination seriously, and while a lot obviously depends on your group's mindset, your anecdotes are going to follow the same shaded path where the traditional fairy tale sun finds less purchase.

--*Andy Vetromile*

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Frankincense, Myrrh, and a Copy of Village of Hommlet

As I write this, I'm huddling in the basement of my Significant Other's parents. It has been 12 hours since I drove through snow for the first time. My electric blanket has stopped working after less than two months. It is colder than any point I remember, and the death of my heat source means my own demise is probably soon in coming.

But before I perish, I figured I owed you all at least one more column in time for the season. (I'm sure, gentle reader, that you richly deserve much, much more, but I'm only able to provide so much while assembling this issue on a laptop so old, it is powered by coal.)

Anyway, in coming up with this week's column, I was trying to come up with something suitably festive, as befits the season. This was in the midst of making sure I had gifts for everyone, had suitably wrapped said gifts, and was appropriately appreciative of any gifts I had received already.

And then I thought, "Gifts . . . gaming . . . what the heck. Let's run with it."

* * *

But first, a brief interlude.

I watched *Meet the Fockers* yesterday.

This is quite possibly the only movie I've seen in the theatres in 2004. Now, as someone who traditionally dislikes most mainstream Hollywood comedies (and most mainstream Hollywood, period), my expectations for this movie were very low.

It failed to live up to even those meager hopes. This movie would have had to be much better to be only significantly disappointing.

In hindsight, perhaps I -- noted Hollywood-comedy-disliker who had not seen the first installment of the Focker trilogy -- was not the target audience for this movie.

Perhaps the target audience for this movie consists solely of emotionless cyborgs seeking justification to declare a final devastating war against humanity. If this is the case, I hope the film reached its target audience, regardless of the outcome of the resultant conflict. Because I have seen *Meet the Fockers*, and death is not unwelcome.

Hollywood: You owe me \$18 and 2.5 hours of my life back. You owe me one good movie starring the dream team of acting talent you squandered on an endeavor that could only be made more tragic if filmed by Zapruder. You owe an apology to me, to humanity, and to those poor, poor cyborgs.

Do the right thing. Make all checks out to "Steven" with a "v."

* * *

Where was I? Ah, yes. Presents.

Gaming adventures are a lot like presents.

Oh, sure, there are a bunch of different ways I could drag this metaphor. For example, I could point out things about wrappings and layers of meaning and the heart of the gift being the true adventure/story. But that's a cop-out. In the Stevencentric view of the universe, let's take a few recent present-y incidents in my life and apply them to the greater whole. (That's "Stevencentric" with a "v.")

For me, gift-giving is somewhere between an art, a science, and an act of torture devised by aliens. Outside of being perennially strapped for time (and, at present, possessing limited mall-reaching abilities because of my [lack of car](#)), I find myself strapped with the dual difficulties of wanting to find good gifts for friends and family while not having any clue what those might be (err . . . what the "good gifts" might be, not the friends or family).

Likewise with adventures, it seems logical that most GMs want to run good adventures, but may not have any ideas for how to give the players what they want. Whose responsibility is it to make sure both sides have their desires and expectations known?

Well, one person I shopped for this year gave me access to a computerized list of desired items, which plugged into some kind of database that other folks in the family could use for *their* lists. The idea is that various people would "claim" gifts on this list, and get them, ensuring folks got what they wanted and no duplicates were purchased. And the gift-receivers weren't sure of what they were getting either, because they generally put enough items on this list such that they couldn't be assured of getting anything specific.

Long-time Random Thought Table readers know this to be very similar to a tip I suggested for players [a few years ago](#), where players give GMs a list of possible plots, subplots, storylines, or complications. If the ideas are vague enough (while still being satisfying to the player), and enough of them are presented to allow the GM to mold them to his own campaign, then it's possible for the player to get what he wants and to *still* be surprised.

Of course, this also plays well into another gift-giving possibility: Give folks what they want, but not what they expect. As I wrote about this one [previously](#), the advice still holds for both the gift-giving world and the gaming world. For example, suppose someone wants a powerful weapon. Well, on the one hand it'd be easy to give him a +7 *blade of vorpal vorpality*. But that'd probably be pretty unbalancing, and would probably have long-term consequences. But what if you gave him a weapon that was the only one in the world effective against a certain enemy -- an enemy that you only recently introduced (either before or after giving him the weapon)? This would probably trigger many of the same "Ha-ha! I have a big sword and am verily mighty!" vibes while not having any consequences once the threat had been dealt with.

Whether or not these examples are referring to real-world gifts or in-game adventures is left as an exercise to the reader.

Finally, this season I gave my half-brother my "I know someone in the warehouse" copy of *Frag*, which might be known in some circles as "re-gifting" (since I just had it lying around the apartment and foisted it off on him).

There are a couple of ideas that can be extracted here.

First, there's the idea of increased value. On the surface I'm giving a \$30 game to someone . . . even though the item itself cost me much less. So, too, can adventures be "worth" more to the players than the GM's investment. For example, the GM might have a vague conspiracy-type adventure, with not all the pieces plotted or planned. But what if the players are discussing what they think happened (or is happening), and their idea is cooler than the one the GM had thought of . . . if he'd thought of anything in the first place? Well, then, it's easy to "re-gift" that idea back to the players, maybe with a slight tweak or two to make it work better with the GM's existing ideas. Then the players get the satisfaction of having "figured out" the mystery, and thus they perceive added value to the game and their own abilities -- all for a significantly reduced "cost" compared to the players' enjoyment.

Second, the idea of re-gifting is a venerable one, and can apply to just about any campaign. For example, I've used the ["heroes break out of prison"](#) plot in approximately 1.875 jillion campaigns, and it never fails. Although, perhaps in true "re-gifting" tradition, perhaps the metaphor works best if you take an existing adventure or supplement and convert it for the players' use. No, you never got a chance to use that *Feng Shui* adventure . . . but it might work just fine as a *Mage*, *Call of Cthulhu*, or *D6 Adventure* tale.

After all, you are reading now a resource with thousands of articles, essays, adventure seeds and adventures, all waiting to be repackaged for an appreciative group. Rip the price tag off and rewrap some of the goodies *Pyramid* has to offer

. . . your players will never know.

* * *

Our first chat of the new year will be January 7th at 7pm CST with Steve Long of [Hero Games](#), the house of ideas behind the *Hero System 5th Edition*. He'll be talking about a brand new revised edition, a seekret project associated with the phrase "Hudson City," and other goodies, plus answers to any questions you have.

So check out the [chat section](#) for more information, and hopefully we'll see you there.

* * *

And, of course, everyone at *Pyramid* wishes you and yours a Critical Success this holiday season. Although, owing to the vagaries of the calendar, you're stuck with me for one more column this year. I'll try to make it painless for both of us.

--*Steven Marsh*

The Feast Is Ready: *Titus Andronicus*

*"You are deceiv'd; for what I mean to do,
See here, in bloody lines I have set down;
And what is written shall be executed."*

-- William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, V:ii:16-18

As we do during the dying of each year, we take up again the thread of [Shakespearean dramaturgy](#). This year, as [last](#), we feature a Roman holiday of murder and conspiracy, Shakespeare's bloodiest tragedy (or blackest comedy), *Titus Andronicus*. Save room for pie.

*"Write thou, good niece, and here display at last
What God will have discover'd for revenge.
Heaven guide thy pen to print thy sorrows plain,
That we may know the traitors and the truth!"*

-- William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, IV:i:77-80

The general Titus Andronicus returns to Rome victorious against the Goths, but having lost 21 of his 25 sons in the war. Although the people of Rome want him to rule them, he throws his influence to Saturninus, eldest son of the dead emperor, instead of to Bassianus, the younger son. Among Titus' captives are Tamora, Queen of the Goths, and her three sons; he sacrifices one of her sons during the funeral rites for his own sons. Saturninus favors Titus by offering to marry Titus' daughter, Lavinia, but she is betrothed to Bassianus already. Titus kills Son No. 22 for upholding Bassianus' claim, but it's too late -- Saturninus decides to marry the vengeful Tamora instead. Tamora's lover, the Moor Aaron, urges Tamora's sons to murder Bassianus, frame Titus' sons for the deed, and rape Lavinia into the bargain -- to prevent her naming her attackers, he suggests cutting out her tongue and chopping off her hands. Aaron arrests two of Titus' sons for the murder; he offers to spare them if Titus (or his brother Marcus, or his final son Lucius) will cut off his own hand. Titus does so, but receives the heads of his sons in return -- Aaron was lying.

Titus vows revenge and sends Lucius to the land of the Goths to raise an army against Saturninus. Lavinia, meanwhile, points to the rape of Philomel in Ovid and manages to scrawl her rapists' names in the sand with a stick held between her stumps. Aaron recognizes the threat, but is distracted by his need to protect his child by Tamora from Saturninus' jealousy -- he flees the city with the infant, but is captured by Lucius and his Gothic army. Tamora, fooled by Titus' feigned madness, goes to him in the guise of Revenge, with her sons dressed as Rape and Murder. She wants Titus to bring Lucius into the court without his army. Titus agrees to host a feast for the Emperor and Lucius, on the condition she leave her "attendants" with him. Overconfident, she agrees; Titus seizes them and kills them immediately thereafter. Titus hosts a banquet at which he kills Lavinia to erase her dishonor, names Tamora's sons as her rapists, and then reveals that Tamora has eaten a pie baked from their flesh. Titus kills the unclean Tamora, Saturninus stabs him, and Lucius kills Saturninus. Now Emperor, Lucius orders proper burials for all Romans, and disgrace for Aaron and for Tamora's corpse.

"TITUS: Lucius, what book is that she tosseth so?

BOY: Grandsire, 'tis Ovid's Metamorphoses . . .

TITUS: Soft! see how busily she turns the leaves!

What would she find? Lavinia, shall I read?

This is the tragic tale of Philomel,

And treats of Tereus' treason and his rape."

-- William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, IV:i:43-51

Titus Andronicus was entered into the Stationers' Register on February 6, 1594, and the weight of opinion holds that Shakespeare wrote it the year before (although dates as early as 1589 are not impossible). The entered copy says it was played before the Earls of Derby, Sussex, and Pembroke -- the Earl of Derby was Lord Ferdinando Strange, Shakespeare and Marlowe's occult-minded theatrical patron. (In the 18th century, Edmond Malone proposed that Marlowe had actually written *Titus Andronicus*, which certainly shares Marlowe's black humor, bluster, and bloody-

mindfulness.) The same Stationers' entry mentions also "the ballad thereof," which may be the one printed in a 1620 anthology, and reprinted in 1760 along with a prose *History of Titus Andronicus*. It's unclear whether the ballad and prose work precede or build on Shakespeare's play; or whether any of the three are related to *Titus and Vespacia*, a lost anonymous play mentioned in Henslowe's diary in 1592. Shakespeare borrowed lurid bits from Ovid and the *Thyestes* of the thunderous Roman playwright Seneca for his incidents. He based his history (such as it was) on Herodian's history of the Severan emperors, especially Bassianus Caracalla, who confusingly serves as the model for Shakespeare's Saturninus, with the fictional Bassianus based on Caracalla's brother Geta (from whose name, perhaps, came the happy, ahistorical presence of the Goths). Caracalla and Geta also had a "foreign queen," their Syrian mother, Julia Domna, a likely source for Shakespeare's Tamora.

*"As for that heinous tiger, Tamora,
No funeral rite, nor man in mourning weeds,
No mournful bell shall ring her burial;
But throw her forth to beasts and birds of prey."
-- William Shakespeare, Titus Andronicus, V:iii:195-198*

Tamora is a "Goth" in the play; Julia Domna was a Syrian, and a devotee of [Cybele](#) and Baal. (Her great-nephew was [Elagabalus](#), who has his own [connections](#) with mutilation.) As a queen from the mysterious East, Shakespeare rightly and repeatedly identifies her as a "tiger" (which might tie in with our anthropophagous [manticores](#)) in the play, rather than as a bear or some similarly Nordic totem. Tamora's status as an "outsider" plays on the whole theme of borders and walls in the play -- a play about mutilation and [cannibalism](#) is a play about borders being violated on some level. Shakespeare underlines this with repeated returns to the walls of Rome -- the play begins outside the city walls, the Andronici are exiled and must shoot their arrows over the walls, and (like [Jezebel](#)) Tamora is left to rot outside the walls of Rome. Aaron, the Moor, is condemned to death by liminality, by border-ness -- buried up to his chest, but not executed. He is neither imprisoned nor free, clothed nor naked, outside nor inside, alive nor dead. He is survived by his infant son, a half-breed Goth-Moor raised by Lucius the Roman, but rejected and nameless, much as Titus was. Titus resembles the ancient *pharmakos*, the scapegoat, exiled and bearing the sins of Rome -- murder, disorder, "cruel, irreligious piety," and even infanticide. Both Romans and Goths load him up with agony and drive him away.

*"Come, to this gear. You are a good archer, Marcus;
'Ad Jovem,' that's for you: here, 'Ad Apollinem:'
'Ad Martem,' that's for myself:
Here, boy, to Pallas: here, to Mercury:
To Saturn, Caius, not to Saturnine . . .
Of my word, I have written to effect;
There's not a god left unsolicited."
-- William Shakespeare, Titus Andronicus, IV:iii:52-60*

But as the *pharmakos*, Titus has a connection to the sacred, which he exploits in the strange arrow ritual in Act IV. He begins with a tag from Ovid: *Terras [Astraea](#) reliquit*, "Astraea has deserted the earth," referring to the virginal goddess of justice. (The whole tag is intriguing: "The maiden Astraea, last of the celestials, has deserted the blood-soaked earth.") Daringly for Shakespeare, Astraea also referred to Queen Elizabeth in court poetry -- although Titus is piously attempting to search out Astraea, there is a strong hint of lese-majeste in this section. It gets worse when he calls upon Pluto, god of death, to hunt for her; and worse still when Lucius' arrow is said to strike "in Virgo's lap." When one recalls that Astraea and Astarte (which is to say, Tamora/Julia's Cybele) share a cultus, things get bizarre indeed. Titus, the mutilated scapegoat, is too old to be Attis (mutilated dying-and-reborn consort of Cybele), but he uses his connection to the goddess to tie Lucius (his son) to her "lap" via a phallic arrow. Publius, his nephew, meanwhile manages another symbolic castration by shooting off "one of Taurus' horns." (A Mithraic bull-killing connection?) Titus, the scapegoat, has reversed the ritual of Cybele; Pluto seizes her, Lucius fertilizes her, and he extends his own blood by her death.

*"Hark, villains! I will grind your bones to dust
And with your blood and it I'll make a paste,
And of the paste a coffin I will rear*

*And make two pasties of your shameful heads,
And bid that strumpet, your unhallow'd dam,
Like to the earth swallow her own increase.
This is the feast that I have bid her to."*

-- William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, V:ii:186-192

And then, to force Cybele to accede to his ritual assumption of her powers, he tricks her avatar Tamora into *omophagia*, the devouring of sacrificial victims, as the Maenads did the flesh of [Dionysos](#) and Orpheus. This theme recurs throughout Shakespeare's sources -- in Ovid, the rapist Tereus unknowingly consumes his son Itys; in Seneca, Atreus feeds Thyestes' sons to him. Tantalus feeds the gods his own son Pelops, and is punished with eternal hunger and thirst, much like Aaron is. Another echo of Aaron's sentence appears in the death of Agamemnon, last of the House of Atreus, killed neither clothed nor unclothed, on water nor on land, in his palace nor outside it. (This same fate befalls Llew Llaw Gyffes, the "sure-handed lion" in the Mabinogion.) Most anciently of all, Saturn (who appears both in Saturninus and in Aaron, who claims "Saturn is dominator over" his nature) devours his own children in an attempt to prevent the new world from coming into being. But it does -- when Pelops is consumed in *omophagia*, the world [shifts](#) on its axis, and Saturn is [flung away](#) along with Cybele, who deserts the blood-soaked Earth.

*"[P]eople and sons of Rome,
By uproars sever'd, as a flight of fowl
Scatter'd by winds and high tempestuous gusts;
O, let me teach you how to knit again
This scattered corn into one mutual sheaf,
These broken limbs again into one body."*

-- William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, V:iii:67-72

How did Titus know to do this? Perhaps by *sparagmos*, the ritual dismemberment that leads to illumination -- again, as with Dionysos and Orpheus. Only when he loses his hand does he take the initiative in the play, although the theme of severed limbs has begun with the sacrifice of Tamora's son Alarbus. "Alarbus' limbs are lopp'd, and entrails feed the sacrificing fire," and almost immediately Titus kills his own son. Four more sons (two of Titus', and two of Tamora's) are beheaded, all so that Titus can "help to set a [head](#) on headless Rome." Perhaps Rome itself is the dying god, the [waste land](#) (a "wilderness") revived by the blood of Lavinia (who undergoes her own drastic *sparagmos*) and Bassianus (thrown into a pit by the "tiger's cubs"). Conversely, Titus makes sure that the blood of Tamora's sons never hits the earth -- Lavinia catches it in a basin and he bakes it into the pie for Tamora to "swallow her own increase." His Andronici are Summer entities "like stinging bees in hottest summer's day"; they kill Winter figures like Saturninus to renew the land. But it is a strange and sterile renewal, one that traps Cybele's fertility within Astraea's virginity and leaves the job of procreation to Lucius' arrows. (All the women in the play are killed, even the Nurse of Aaron's baby.) This misogyny is, in the end, the best argument for Marlowe's involvement in the play -- in spirit, at least. Perhaps [Marlowe's death](#), on the feast day of Hecate in 1593, left Lord Strange and the [School of Night](#) unable to complete their ritual dramaturgy -- so they somehow fed Marlowe's spirit to a hack writer in Strange's employ, to draw down Astraea and imprison her in the endless loop of sterile Andronican ritual. The resulting play did so, but not without cost; the plague (sent by [Sekhmet](#), the lioness (tigress?) goddess of the East?) broke out in London the very day that *Titus Andronicus* was registered with the Stationers.

Lord Strange himself died two months and 21 days later, of "a very miserable and surprizing death being seized and tormented by vomiting . . . [A]nd when dead, though his body was wrapped in searchcloth, and covered with lead, yet it so corrupted and putrified, that for a long time after, none could endure to come near the place it was laid in, till his burial." Perhaps something he ate disagreed with him. It might have been the pie.

Stonepunk

by Eric Funk

This place can be [another planet](#), [alternate Earth](#), or one [lost valley](#) or [another](#), as required by the GM. It may be accessible through [spells](#), [portals](#), or interstellar space. Visitors will have to contend with slightly higher gravity, a more distant horizon, and a slightly richer atmosphere (statistics are below, under "Space").

In this setting, dinosaurs are no longer rulers of the earth -- they are slaves! For the most part. They pull trams, power buildings, lift cargo, and haul freight. Although this world lacks metal, it does not lack *technology*. There are transcontinental railways, telephones, refrigerators, geothermal power plants, and pizza places that deliver!

History/Timeline

(All dates are approximate)

- **900,000** Dinosaurs rule! A large comet barely misses the planet. Rare minerals, crystals, and megatons of water rain down on the planet.
- **250,000** First domesticated dinosaurs.
- **201,102** First grand chief unites tribes, declares beginning of calendar
- **201,000** Shallow ocean boats deployed against advice of shamans, yet no related deaths occurred that year. Belief in animism begins to decline.
- **200,800** First military vessels developed to mount direct-fire siege engines to fight sea monsters in coastal waters. Most doubled as fishing vessels.
- **200,700** First deep-sea exploration vessels launched in pairs. Many did not return. Some started accidental colonies on islands.
- **200,600** [Contact](#) made between the continents. Communication problems and different beliefs prevent strong alliances.
- **200,400** Balloon flight begins as a scouting tool for both military and hunting teams. Renaissance begins.
- **200,300** First zeppelin used offensively in warfare.
- **200,200** Rail travel becomes popular in plains areas.
- **200,120** Radio links the world. Governments begin to communicate swiftly.
- **200,110** Public radio broadcasts begin.
- **200,100** Cease-fire between major governments established. A cold war begins in research of military and refrigeration technology. (Amateurs study Tactics; professionals study Logistics.)
- **200,090** Moving pictures traded as valuable commodities.
- **200,070** Public television broadcasts begin.
- **200,050** First calculation engines sold; The last large predator is seen near civilized areas due to proactive and "big game" hunting. Rock and roll makes a break into the popular memescape.
- **200,025** First diamonds used in drills and saws; first space launch attempted -- the launcher collapses in a physical failure
- **200,010** "Soft" nanto-tech (*sic*) publicly marketed (see below)

- This year.
200,004
- (future) All levels of government begin preparation for celebration and grand openings for this year.
200,000
- Doomsday cults predict the end of the world.
199,999
- (future) Pessimists fear that the calculation engines that regulate the cities will be unable to cope with the roll over. They call it the y200k problem.

Locales

GMs should feel free to include any wonder of the ancient world in as scenery, especially in a Cliffhangers style campaign. The [Sphinx](#), the [Pyramids](#), the [Lighthouse of Alexandria](#), the [Great Library](#), [Nazca Lines](#) and belief in [Ley Lines](#) would all be appropriate. For more such ideas, [GURPS Places of Mystery](#) and the [Nan Madol](#) are excellent references. One example city is elaborated on, below.

Governing Bodies

On the most advanced landmass (called Ignas by its inhabitants), the first Grand Chief Elect, named Uri Starfall, united a large group of tribes in a time of great famine. Through planning, charisma, and no small amount of luck, a lasting council of elders was formed, uniting the continent to this day. In a vision, the first chief started the calendar to unite timekeepers of the different tribes and start written record; if anyone knows the truth behind why he chose a palindromic negative number for the starting year, or what (if anything) people are counting down towards, they aren't revealing it. (If this Terra Incognita is not set on an Earth, then perhaps [here](#), set on either "Euramerica" or north "Africa"). Today, a small number of peaceful sects continue teaching the path to enlightenment is to follow the life of Uri.

Over time, scouts were horrified to discover seemingly older tribes across the seas that either refused to join or responded violently to contact! Seeing the strength that comes from unity, most of the other landmasses managed to unite by one strong tribe or another. Today a slow [war of ideologies](#), is taking place across the "airwaves." GMs can decide whether the [other societies](#) are socialist, monarchist, democratic, cannibal, or just performing ritual sacrifices. Although the Stonepunk TL0+8 society represents the cutting edge on this world, the other tribes possess technology varying from TL0 to TL0+7. Other than the "title" society, most other territories reserve their most advanced equipment for the governments and military, leaving their citizens lagging one or more tech levels behind. Due to the lack of hard metals, no known tribe has advanced to full GURPS TL1.

Architecture

Without metal to reinforce concrete, architecture is notably blocky, and structures are limited in height to about four or five stories due to the amount of support required for load-bearing walls. It is thus a mark of wealth to have a tall office headquarters, a few of which tower up to 20 stories in height! Some are large pyramid-like structures, while others use experimental fiberglass, carbon reinforcements, or dinosaur bones! It is only very recently that chemical treatments have been available to protect wooden structures from jungle insects, humidity, frequent hailstorms, and medium-sized animals. Without the added expense of this treatment, the expected lifespan of a freestanding wooden structure is measured in *weeks*.

Environmental Control: Fire is a controlled science. Cooling technology is still expensive, and while it is not available to cool homes, it is available in the form of appliances: freezers and refrigerators. Petroleum is found in lamps and hand-held lighters.

Major Industries: Rock quarries, lumber, and agriculture

Economics: Valuables are considered to be gold, silver, jewels, and pearls. Money is expressed in many ways, including cash, banks, credit cards, mortgages, loan sharks, and pawnshops. Some regions away from bodies of water

use marked clamshells as "hard" currency.

Agriculture: Large tamed beasts serve to pull large, heavy harvesting equipment. This machinery serves to process and refine the crops. The commercial loom is available, so cloth and silk are middle and upper class alternatives to skins/furs (respectively). The forestry industry has, for the most part, embraced the long-term plan of planted forests. This results in safer working conditions and straighter wood. The companies that don't follow this practice have made many enemies, ranging from clever wild creatures to avid preservationists.

Weapons

Short bows exist, but are restricted to military (and paramilitary) agencies. Slings, slingshots, and hand catapults (see below) are common and don't require a license in most areas. Civilian melee weapons are mainly clubs, while exotics such as obsidian/shark tooth swords (see *mecauitl*, pp. LT25, AE99) are only for the military. Spears, bone saws, and axes are socially considered tools. [Fire siphons](#) are used against swarms and [fire lances](#) are well documented. Explosives are limited to black powder, and are restricted (but see "Things to Invent," below). Leather armor, boiled leather and hides exist, but are socially limited to the military, riot squads, hunters and sports teams. Anyone walking down the street wearing obvious armor will get curious looks and questions from police.

SteamTech inventions that could be in character:

- p. 17 Grenades
- p. 20 Light Rifle (see also *Cliffhangers* pp.91-92)
- pp. 29-30 Mechanical Devices
- p. 33 Camera Obscura
- pp. 105-116 Drugs and Chemicals

Things to Invent

- **Batteries:** While lacking copper, nickel, cadmium and lithium, the planet can produce masses of lead-acid batteries.
- **Compressed Air:** A working breathing apparatus has not yet been developed. All current efficient designs leak chemicals into the contained air.
- **Electricity:** Using silver wire, gold coils, lead-acid batteries and mechanical power, large-scale AC power can be produced.
- **Nitroglycerine:** (see p. HT28)
- **Nuclear Bombs:** (see p. HT29)
- **Nuclear Power Plants:** Simple radiothermal generators and shielding are well within their capacity.
- **Medicine:** Glass blowing, distilling, hot running water, rubber, alcohol, germ theory, antivenins, casts, x-rays, and microscopes are all available. Vegetable-based plastics are expensive, but research continues.

Computers

Cutting edge computing is at TL0+5, and should be treated as TL 4+1 [clockwork engines](#).

Wrist sundial-compasses are commonplace, while more delicate, spring-wound (or cutting edge self-winding) watches are beginning to gain popularity. TL0+4 [clocks](#) are common in homes, and many large businesses have full TL0+5 calculation engines. All mechanisms are classically made of wood, but cutting-edge devices are built with fiberglass and plastic components. If Gadgeteering is available for NPCs, then a few mad scientists and possibly the military may have access to engines and accessories equivalent in power to TL5+1 (see pp. STE61-70).

Sensors

The best tools are trained animals, but basic photo and video cameras are available. "Antique" systems function somewhat like the [Camera Obscura](#) (see p. STE33), with the flash bulb simply acting to stun subjects to give the operator a chance to draw them using the "Artist" skill. "Modern" cameras can actually catch birds in flight, and video cameras for the home are beginning their appearance while television has been present in the home for decades.

Communication

Letters and small parcels are delivered to and between distribution centers by homing bird. Carrier pigeons can travel up to 50 miles per day (see pp. CV38, HT56, or VE47). The military and many large businesses have their own networks, ciphering their messages when convenient to the plot. Broadcast television, radio, and "shell" phones use what are called "ether waves" to transmit data. Their antennas are made of wood and the dial tone and static are the sound of the ocean (waves and roar respectively), but somehow it works! Paper, ink, and the printing press are not new inventions to the city, but until recently paper had a lifespan in weeks, making it ineffective for long-term storage; thus old records and any documents in rural areas will be engraved in stone. There is a concerted effort to locate and update all written records to punch-tape for use with calculation engines.

Power

Power is almost invariably provided by muscle, be it domesticated animal or human. With a "racial" ST13 (see below), most "man-powered" devices are designed for ST15 or ST16 to take advantage of individuals with above-average Strength as well as allow Extra Effort without straining the apparatus (see Muscle Power Plant p. VE82). For solar heating, see the solar-powered steam engines (see p. STM70), perhaps at double mass and cost until the year -199,995. Water wheels and windmills turn grindstones, saws, push-pumps, and winches only in military and large-scale industrial applications.

The heavy "workhorse" of industry, however, is the Brontosaurus (a.k.a. *Apatosaurus*), (Move 5, ST 300+, see pp. BE47, D32). It can lift 4.5 tons (see p. B145), and drag up to 180 tons (see p. B89). Multiply these numbers by 30 if the beast can be coaxed into using Extra Effort, which it can sustain for up to five minutes or more (see p. CI 12)! On a treadmill, it can provide a continuous 6kW, and only lose 1FT each hour (see pp. VE82, VE158). These represent the reliable power source used to move elevators and bellows, and to turn spinning wheels, calculation engines, and to pull heavy haul trains and long riverboat chains. The *Triceratops* is one of the fastest large herbivores (Move 10, ST 200+, see pp. BE55, STE122, or D51), twice as fast as the Brontosaurus. These are the most common commercial engines, pulling trucks, busses, and express barges. They can easily pull 4 tons (8 tons on "Average" roads, see below) at full their full movement rate of 10 (20mph). On Average-quality main roads, towed cargo has half the effective encumbrance (see p. B188). Most other city roads and inter-city highways are "Poor" at best.

Transportation

Most residents own a personal cart of some sort. Limousines, public transport and hauling "vehicles" usually consist of a trailer pulled by a dinosaur (land or air). Short-range hauling is sometimes done with just a saddle. (Design as harness, but adjust from base ST of 10.) The top prehistoric candidate for mounts is the [Diatryma](#) (Move 14, see p. BE49, similar to the Enhanced Chicken of p. STE120 and the Deathbeak of p. RS112), which may remind [some players](#) of "[chocobos](#)." (For more suggestions of prehistoric mounts, see "Off to the Races!", below.)

TL8 Man-powered Car

Crew: 1 total. 1 crew station covering vehicle control (ground).

Subassemblies: Vehicle +2,
Body +2, Wheels +1.

P&P: four 0.3kW muscle
engines (1-man, avg. ST: 15,
short term access), 1.2-kW
wheeled drivetrain (short term
access).

Occ: normal crew station
(exposed), three normal
passenger seats (exposed)

Cargo: 10-cf open cargo hold
w/cargo density 20-lbs/cf

Armor: All 3/5

Statistics

Size: 13.7'×3.42'×1.71'

Payload: 800 lbs. **Lwt.:** 1,097
lbs.

Volume: 79.7 cf **Maint.:** 228
hours (0.421 mh/day) **Price:**
\$1,926

HT: 11 **HP:** 37 [Body], 6 each
[4×Wheels].

Ground Performance: Motive
Power 1.2-kW, Top Speed 25
mph, gAcc 1 mph/s, gDec 10
mph/s, gMR 0.75, gSR 4,
Ground Pressure 1,075 lbs./sf,
Off Road Speed 10 mph.

Design Notes

TL8 extra light frame
expensive materials [Vehicle].
TL8 DR 5 open frame skirt
expensive wood [Vehicle].
Vehicle Features: primitive
controls, no streamlining,
cheaply made. Wheels: quantity
4, off-road. Volume: 66.4 cf
[Body], 13.3 cf [Wheels]. Area:
98.4 sf [Body], 33.7 sf
[Wheels]. Book Options:
Vehicles Lite ground speed.

Air balloons pulled by trained birds may fit better in a "realistic" campaign than mere "saddle" aircraft made of wood. In either case, balloons, [dirigibles](#), and [zeppelins](#) are a well-tried tradition, but the lack of steam or combustion engines creates different problems, such as perches for flying mounts or extra space for tired power animals. The theory behind "gyrocopters" has been known for quite a while, but has not been feasible due to power requirements. Radio controlled units with TL0+8 Flywheel "power cells" (see p. VE88), using the "advanced" rules for Flywheel capacity (multiply by 10) (see pp. STM69, CF120) are growing popular in amateur and military purposes.

Ocean Transport is rare as the public still distrusts the unknowns in the deep water. This has greatly limited the development of medium and large travel, exploration and pleasure craft. Sea trade is generally limited by line of sight to the coast, the most common design using large concrete hulls. Fresh water transport, on the other hand, has been a growing industry, with small and medium-sized craft built from wood leading in popularity. For small craft, inflatable rubber hulls are an increasingly popular option, with cutting edge fiberglass rapidly dropping in price. [Windmills](#) are a popular renewable resource for long-haul and exploratory craft (see Vane Clippers, p. CF126).

Exploration: Research into breathable compressed air has barely begun, and thus experiments in deep diving and high altitude have been curtailed. Flight has been available for many years, and all the land a few hours' flight from civilization has been mapped. Shore-hugging ocean vessels have mapped the contour of the continent and island chains linking to new landmasses, but to the average citizen, a "map of the world" is a flat map of their continent.

Exotic: "Nanto" technology (TL0+9 to TL0+10)

This is the emerging science of training small insects to perform a single task when a certain stimulus is applied. There are known species that can chew almost any wood product to tiny pieces and scatter them, and other groups are trained to emit a paste and assemble objects the same raw material. Industrial applications include the assembly of small sensors and tools. Residential applications include trimming lawn, hair, cleaning floors, dishes and appliances. There are several ways to protect oneself from a nanto-assault. The first is to have counter-nanto of your own. The second is to have a trained anteater or toad standing by to devour them. The properties of a nanto-swarm can be identified with a magnifying glass and a successful roll against Electronics Operation (Nanto) with modifiers for Acute Vision and/or Alertness. Destructive tests include analysis by another swarm, or by a diagnostic anteater/frog. It is currently illegal for civilians to own carnivorous swarms. Licensed exterminators may rent swarms from the military, but without exception, must return them before nightfall. Swarms cost \$3,000 to \$20,000 and 2 lbs per hex (see pp. B143, BE42). Consumes 2 lbs of wood or 1 lb of food per hour of operation.

Currently, a great amount of research is being done on "hard" nantotech that can manipulate stone.

The People

Local Characters

Given names can be from any "modern" culture, but [family names](#) typically involve some sort of terrain feature or type of rock (consider the *Discworld* trolls).

Local Racial Template [1] "Punk Rocker" (Calculate weight and height without the +3 from this template) Third Edition

Advantages: ST+3 [30], HT+2 [20], Damage Resistance +2 [6], Literacy [0], Temperature Tolerance [1], Very Fit [15].

Disadvantages: Chummy [-5], Pacifism (Pick one of: Cannot Harm Innocents, Cannot Kill, or Self-Defense Only) [-15], Phobia (Necrophobia) [-20], Phobia (Thassophobia) [-10] (p. B36), Reduced Hit Points (2 levels) [-10], Xenophilia (Strong) [-15].

Racial Skill Bonuses: Judo +2 [4]

Fourth Edition Conversion

Native Racial Template [7 points]

Advantages: Remove Literacy

Disadvantages: Phobias gain frequencies of 6 and 12 respectively, Reduced Hit Points 2 becomes [-4].

Racial Skill Bonuses: Judo (DX/H) +2 [4]

Customization Notes

Common Advantages: Animal Empathy [5] or Beastkin [15], Fur (light) [1], High Pain Threshold [10], Increased DR [3/level], Increased Strength [varies].

Common Disadvantages: Hunchback [-10], Increase Pacifism to (Total) [extra -15], Reduce Very Fit to Fit [-10], Semi-Literate [-5], Semi-Upright [-5].

The people are not unusually gullible or generally superstitious. Early aptitude tests in school help find those with fewer mental disadvantages, and nudge them toward the appropriate military or security forces. The Pacifism disadvantage is not crippling, as the kinds of pacifism are somewhat evenly distributed between Cannot Harm Innocents, Cannot Kill, and Self-Defense Only. All this stems from an ancestral fear of the spirits of defeated foes coming back to curse them. Most rural and urban core citizens will have basic Judo training in school, allowing them to make use of their racial Bonus.

Sample Weapon

A local "Saturday night special" handheld rock thrower

TL0+8 built, TL0+7 Cheap-quality Torsion-power ST 16 Mechanical Pistol-grip Stone Thrower

Dmg: 2d+2 (cr) Acc: 0 Malf: 16 RoF: 1/20 1/2D: 160 Max: 200 SS: 15 Ewt: 6.4 lbs \$80.

Ammunition: 1.6 lb rocks, \$0.8 each.

Variant: Paramilitary (LC 2) Bolt thrower: As above, but Dmg: 2d+1 (imp) Acc: 1 Malf: Crit SS: 10, Double ranges and cost, halve mass.

Ammunition: 1.6 lb darts, \$3.2 each.

Options: Silencers, Laser sights, and scopes (see pp. VE127, HT102-103)

Example City: Boulderville, Trade Center and Regional Capitol

Population: 140,000 to 1.4 million

Situated at the mouth of a three-river delta, it is a natural trade nexus. Raw stone from the mountains in the North meets the wood from the forest in the South. The established coastal shipbuilding industry tries to meet the growing needs of fledgling deep ocean trade and exploration.

Dramatis Personae

Sandy Apfelstein, Reporter: A rising star for Channel 5 News, she has a knack for finding trouble, and for getting herself and her camera out intact. She is attractive, persuasive, and will stubbornly pursue stories of public interest. The only way one can divert her is to provide a humanitarian reason, or a more interesting story . . .

Milo Blastrock, Prospector: Wandering the countryside, looking for the Mother Lode, he survives on a trickle of royalties from small successes. An honest sort, he will give up to half his claim to any party that risks its life to help him return to file it.

Mica Gladstone, Mayor: Recently elected to office by a marginal victory, the mayor is progressive, and will begin to encourage trade and exploration of the lush jungle territory to the south of the city.

Ulysses Granite, Nanto-Tech Abuse Officer: He is a young man with remarkable eyesight and no fear of water -- his childhood dream was to be an explorer. Fate, however, had other plans. His technical abilities made him the best man to investigate any possible abuse of the new nanto-technology. Although still new at his position, he has witnessed some of the awesome abilities of this new tool. He has seen swarms destroy bridges, erect megalomaniac statues, convert a car into a clockwork battlesuit, and write slogans as they selectively defoliated government parks. His broad powers cause friction between himself and the Chief of Police, as well as his natural adversary, Dr. Gyrock.

Doctor Maximillian Gyrock, Mad Scientist: Once a respected scientist, he disappeared in a mysterious explosion. He is rumored to be alive and providing clockwork devices to the criminal underworld. It believed by some that he is behind a ring of daring museum robberies. Witnesses reported seeing a (primitive) submarine, as well as a sealed clockwork battlesuit (see p. STM76).

Peter "Hawkeye" Hankstone, Freelance Hunter: The head of a freelance hunter's association, a small support group that, for a nominal fee acts as a discount job board, bed-and-breakfast, and weapons supply, he is protective of the reputation of the group, and will certainly hire/send someone (such as the PCs) to investigate any unusual occurrences or disappearances.

Winston Shield, Chief of Police: He is a hard-nosed officer who has worked himself up from a beat officer. He dislikes strangers, and will always ask them extra questions, having them trailed or deeply investigated if they seem unusual.

Adventure Seeds

Dark Matter

Rumors of a newly discovered tribe living in a volcanic area possessing dark, razor-sharp tools have reached the scientific community. The description to the players should be that it sounds like "metal" (dense, sharp, very hard). Many expeditions are being mounted to be the first to get there. Is it really metal (such as bronze or iron), or just obsidian (+1 damage, see p. LT106). The latter would still be a good find, and trade could make one wealthy!

Don't You Forget About Me

A rich entrepreneur is commissioning a group to make sure their deeds are [remembered](#). For this, the group is commissioned to start surveys of the most geologically stable and dry areas of the known world. Problems can arise with locals, wildlife, or governments. While construction of a repository is going on, they must find (or better yet, bring) translators for all the languages in the world with written variants and secure professional translations.

Do You Dig It?

The amount of luxury and high-tech industrial wealth (large diamonds, precious metals) makes this planet prime for exploitation by indigenous corporations (not to mention external ones). The complete spectrum of adventure opportunities surrounds this situation. Exploration, discovery (and getting back), claiming the land, holding (or destroying) it, extracting goods, delivering, selling them, and spending the wealth. The PCs may be in for the whole tour, or just called in for one leg. Depending on the adventuring party, there could also be involvement with enemy agents, ghost stories, or monsters.

Global Cooling

A growing fear among scientists is that the "cold house gasses" emitted from refrigeration units are lowering global temperatures, ushering in a new ice age. Scientist characters can be sent out to odd places to collect samples. Fun places may include "the wild," on territory held by "primitive" farmers, packs of velociraptors, "enemy" territory, on glaciers, in the core of icebergs, or in the deep ocean. Most other character types could fit support positions, with specialties such as Survival, First-Aid, Veterinary, Gunner, Guns, Fast-talk, or Diplomacy.

The group could alternately be sent to covertly plant false data for the "real" research team.

Off to the Races!

Cart Wars (see pp. DWA 90-100) would certainly be exciting with small, agile dinosaurs pulling the carts instead of mammals. After the Diatryma (above), runner-ups include the Carnivorous Kangaroo (a.k.a. *Propleopus*) (Move 15, see p. BE52), the Velociraptor (Move 15, see p. BE56), and -- for the evil mastermind or Dark Lord -- the Tyrannosaurus (Move 17, see p. BE56). "[Operation: Rabbit Chaos](#)" would be a compatible example mission. Vehicles build with the *Propleopus* in mind would certainly benefit from the "Improved Suspension" option in Vehicles (see pp. VE 20, VEL 33).

Round World Society

Currently there is no great clash between the flat and round planet philosophers, as most people don't care. This could soon change as an expedition is about to be launched in a dirigible to try and circumnavigate the world, or find [the edge](#)! With all the publicity, as well as millions of dollars in the movie and map-making industries at stake, the PCs are hired to head, protect or hinder the mission. To make it more interesting, it may be attempted simultaneously by two teams heading in opposite directions. What if, at the half way mark, the heroes come across the remains of the other team's craft? Are some survivors saboteurs? Is their craft next?

War!

One of the tribes that do not fear the dead is intent on raiding your village! The average citizen will try to flee or hide. What will the adventurers do? Will they [fight](#), or move to defend people in need?

Magic

Adding shamanistic or ritual magic would not overly change the society (such as from Castle Falkenstein, Spirits, Voodoo, Ice Age, or Old West). As written, spells from GURPS Magic will change the setting into a magic-heavy Technomancer setting. Another alternative is detailed in "[Tools Are Just A Fad](#)."

Miscellaneous

Citizens from far and wide will come to help/stop/watch attempts to build a catapult comparable to the Verne Cannon (see pp. CF16, 120, 127), or the [Passenger Artillery](#). Races of all different sorts are popular and televised! Some popular (and less survivable) sports may include carnivore wrestling, aerial dogfights, "cockfights" with large carnivores and cross-country races to distant places across hostile jungle. Spelunking into ancient ruins looking for

Ancient artifacts is a growing hobby for the idle rich. Many shun large corporations, and the PCs are hired as guards or specialists. Perhaps they are hired by a parent, and are supposed to plant relics for the noble to find.

Genres

Meeting Other Societies

Encountering other high-tech societies will allow inventors and Gadgeteers to research devices with the same purpose as the alternate device (p. STM13). For example, a Gadgeteer recovers a TL8 sonic stunner and designs a hand-held amplifier that focuses a bird's call. The limit is the bird gets tired quickly (1d shots per minute) . . .

To external agencies, this planet will hold a good source of labor and/or front line troops against an inhuman foe. Those with "Self-Defense Only" Pacifism would make good support troops, those with "Cannot Harm Innocents" make ethical forces, and those with "Cannot Kill" could still wipe out non-sophont threats.

Humidity and metal-hungry bacteria will quickly degrade any unsealed gear. For those who fail to continually maintain their equipment, GMs should enforce the equipment failure rules from pp. CII6, CL17. The local plants are extremely vicious towards other plants and grow voraciously, attacking unsealed structures.

Alternate Earths

The non-metallic technology, robust troops, and amazing wealth combined with the possibility that the locals could possibly construct their own projector combine to form a tempting target for Centrum and other less scrupulous organizations. There are a great many uninhabited areas, and a number that could easily become that way without anyone noticing . . .

Black Ops/Special Ops/Martial Arts

This genre calls for highly trained operatives equipped with state of the art weapons fighting in places they'd rather not be fighting in. Most of the classical "ninja" equipment (see pp. J55-58, MA119-123) can be kept as is without any metal, and the grunts might be equipped with powerful bows or multi-barrel bolt throwers with detachable barrels.

Cryogenics/Out of Time/"*This is my Boomstick!*"

Ignoring the technology required to unthaw a glacier-frozen individual, it is a common plot device that someone (or something) is unfrozen, and experiences culture shock (see pp. FW139, AH94). The opposite can also be true, when a one-shot time-travel device accidentally sends someone back to "the stone ages". Can the newcomer adapt before the xenophobic troops destroy the intruder?

Espionage

High society is in full swing, and it is up to the PCs to uncover what secrets each noble and politician hold. Alternately, they may be set to infiltrate, [research](#), and/or [subtly influence](#) the enemy masses.

Horror/Atomic Horror

What if, in addition to water, the comet also seeded Things That Dwell In The Deep. Now, after 700,000 years of evolution, preparation, and research, they emerge confident and entrenched, ready to move . . .

Space/Traveller

CURSORY SCANS:

Diameter: 15,000 miles

Gravity: 1.18 G

Surface Water: 80%

Climate: Tropical

Axial tilt: 9 degrees

Long-term Survey:

Population: Millions

Government: Representative Democracy (most advanced, others vary)

Control Rating: 3 (4 in cities, 6 on ocean vessels)

Tech Level: Cutting edge 0+8 (no orbital)

Seasonal Variation: Mild, but due to continental configurations, the change of seasons are violent with wild storms and high winds.

Mineral Resources: Gems/Crystals, Rare Minerals: Plentiful; Organics and Heavy Metals: Ext. Plentiful; Radioactives: Ample; Light and Industrial Metals: Absent

Space, Part 1

Located deep in neutral territory, this world boasts strong, resilient citizens with a natural aptitude for Judo, making them ideal security forces. Boasting immense wealth, natural troops, and workers, every faction in the area will be vying for it. Less scrupulous factions will try conquest or trickery, while more honest alliances will have an enjoyable time trying to organize and get an truthful vote from a "world council." How will they be represented? Will it be by population, military, area, or one vote per country? Several of the groups will only respect power, others spirituality, and others promises of technology.

Right of Procedure: What if the fish people alluded to in the Atomic/Horror section above can prove can prove prior settlement and claim exclusive sovereign rights?

Space, Part 2: Strange Encounters

If the civilization is left alone, soon they will be able to develop prototype TL0+9 FTL engines and full life support modules. Simply the sight of a TL0+9 craft will be enough to cause a spit-take from most serious officers.

Supers/Toon

Certainly in the media, Supers of this "era" have less competition from Gadgeteers, but more from nature. For an example, see "[The Flint Age](#)."

Pyramid Links

- "[I was a Teenage Dinosaur](#)" by James L. Cambias
- "[The Last Stone Age Adventure: The Hidden Valley of the Kulku](#)" by David Morgan-Mar
- "[Low Tech Designer's Notes](#)" by William H. Stoddard
- "[The Mapinguari](#)" by Jason Morningstar
- "[Masters of Wind and Time](#)" by James L. Cambias
- "[Parallel Progressions](#)" by Phil Masters
- "[Time of the Tyrants](#)" by Stephen Dedman
- "[Use Archaeology to Uncover Hidden Adventure Ideas](#)" by Kenneth Hite
- "[Waging The Battle Royal: Roleplaying Low-Tech Battles](#)" by Volker Bach
- "[The World in a Bottle](#)" by David Morgan-Mar

Other Links

- "[Global Cooling Kills Thousands](#)"
- "[GURPS Architecture](#)" by Matt Riggsby
- "[Prehistoric Maps](#)"

Media

- *Dinotopia*
- *Land of the Lost*
- *Tales of the Xenozoic Era/Cadillacs and Dinosaurs*

Dura: Breath's Baron

for *Nobilis*

by **Bradley Robins**

With his head against the glass, a man watches yellow-gowned doctors working to save the life of the man who killed his wife. He prays and weeps.

It was a ghost that stood in the hall, watching the doctors operate upon his own husk. He prayed that they would fail, wept because he knew they would not.

The hawk does not fear to look into the sun. Its eyes are gold, its mind is pure. So he had told himself as he turned the gun on the girl, so he had told himself as he turned the still smoking barrel onto himself.

She had been a silent woman all her life; it was only in death that she had found her voice. That was why he prayed for the life of her killer, because he that took her life was her voice, and it could not be silenced now -- not so soon after its birth.

There is a girl in the waiting room, waiting for her mom to get done with a free ultrasound. She's watching the drama play out before her, and for a time her own life doesn't seem so bad. When she gets home she'll make paper dolls of doctors and nurses and priests, and will find a glory in the little play they put on for her.

--Elijah Blackmonde, "On the Loss of Breath"

Attribute Level Miracle Points

<i>Aspect</i>	1	5
<i>Domain</i>	1	6
<i>Realm</i>	2	5
<i>Spirit</i>	3	8

Gifts and Virtues

- Invisible (Automatic -- 2pts)
- Elemental

Limits/Restrictions

Limit: Dead Limit: Uninspiring Restriction: Health Linked (soul lantern) Restriction: Summonable (old Sanskrit sutras)
Affiliation: Code of the Light

Wound Levels

- 1 Deadly Wound
- 2 Serious Wounds
- 2 Surface Wounds

Bonds

Strength Subject

5	Sanctity, Safety, and Peace of Chretien's Garden
5	HG's choice
4	Rohana (his foremost Anchor)
3	The Three True Sculptures of his mortal life
2	Well-being and peace of his Familia

Old even among Nobles, Dura served the Angel Bhisma for ages uncounted. Loyal and passionate, his bright and untamable spirit is the only thing that let him survive when his familia and Emperor, along with his own body, were murdered in an Excrucian attack. Dura's will would not allow him to die, and so he bound himself into a lantern that hung in a shrine of one of his inspired yogis. In time she lit the wick, and in so doing became Dura's anchor. In her body he traveled till he could find a new Emperor to adopt him, to save his guttering soul from oblivion.

Drawn to the en-chancelment of Chretien's Garden, Dura was accepted by Saurast and adopted as a Noble of the Light. Though he was safe and stable again, Dura was greatly weakened by his ordeals and something of his great spirit, which had once burned brighter than the sun, was muted and tamed. As time passed in his new home, Dura grew old and withdrawn. His ages of activity waned into a lassitude that merged with the ennui of the Chancel folk to make him far more distant than he had ever been as a servant of heaven. Now he remains invisible and intangible, as present and overlooked as every breath in the chancel, rousing himself to action only rarely. Only threats to that which he loves will rouse him, and they will often bring him from near sleep to roaring fury in the span of a single breath. Having lost everything once, he has no desire to do so again and would tear down heaven and earth to protect that which is precious to him.

The one place in which Dura is almost always active is in the social life of the ghostly inhabitants of Chretien's Garden. By virtue of his status as a ghost and Noble, he is the de facto leader of all the walking dead of the chancel, and he takes great comfort in their presence and their companionship. They know his feelings of loss and sorrow, as well as the soul deep weariness that rises up to smother him. He works daily to help them maintain hope and direction, and they work daily to give him reason to care.

Estate

Dura is the Baron of Breath, the vital force that sustains life and can bring either purity or defilement. He can bring breath, and thus life, or he can stop breath in living things and bring death and endings. Breathing also has strong connections to health and purity, and can be used for healing many diseases and granting clarity. In reverse it can cause the inhalation of pollutants, which can cause effects ranging from ritual impurity to poison. The most obvious aspect of the estate, however, is its near omnipresence in mortal life. This makes it both a powerful tool for divination, as well as a common source for nettling and Excrucian attack.

Weaknesses

The immortal mindset has served Dura well, for he has seen ages and eons pass while many of his more impatient kin have been brought down, gone mad, or lost their humanity altogether. However, his endless patience all too often becomes passivity and lassitude. Because of his age and philosophical separation from the immediacy of mortal life, Dura is often unable to react quickly to change or to see any situations as being dire enough to require immediate action. Thus younger, more energetic foes are often able to steal a march on him, leaving him on the defensive far more often than a noble of his age should be.

While he is in Chretien's Garden, Dura's lassitude is at its worst, and while he is present the pace of life in the Chancel often slows to a crawl. Their shared natural tendency towards drowsy complacency feeds into a loop that leaves very little that seems immediate, lusting, or important. It frequently falls to the other Powers of the Garden to rouse Dura to proper exercise of his place and potential. When he does rouse himself to action the chancel benefits as well, especially

if it is in danger. When his home and family are threatened, Dura's full wrath manifests.

Design

Dura's design is the combined mature elegance of Pomegranate Flower and the ever beautiful Lucerne of moving life. The flowers twine together about a caduceus before a field of white rain against a rolling sky.

Associated Non Player Characters

As he has no body of his own, Dura most commonly interacts through his Anchors. He will sometimes manifest as a spirit to speak with other Nobles, but even that is rare. Either he will be present as no more than a breath, or he will come in an Anchor. Generally his anchors tend to be priests and artists, though who meditated upon their own breath and the close meaning of their own life. Many of them are Hindu as well, because to this day Dura is worshiped as a minor god in places in India. Foremost among his anchors is Rohana, a yogi to whom he has granted agelessness for her role in saving his life when Bhisma died. Several Powers have whispered that it is obvious he loves her, and many fear the Locust Court will fall upon them both.

Dura is also often in the company of ghosts and sad spirits. Together they form a weary court, constantly fighting to master their sense of loss and gain a new energy and life. It is not uncommon for them to seek out the companionship of mortals, looking to gain inspiration from their lively lusts. Sometimes this makes life better for both, as mortals gain wisdom and ghosts energy; other times it results in the mortals losing vitality and the ghosts sinking more into despair.

Story Elements

Ritual uses of breath, such as singing, chanting, meditation and controlled breathing, as well as biofeedback and CPR all belong in stories featuring Dura. He also carries large amounts of lassitude and ennui that are fitting to stories of loss, despair, and that which was once great but now simply exists. Ghosts also make up a central element of stories surrounding Dura, for he is rarely out of their company. Dura also can play a central role in stories about the triumph, or failure, of life and greatness. If he is able to rise up again to the heights he once aspired to, it would be a potent symbol of hope. If he fades away into nothing, and life's breath goes with him, it would be a potent symbol of the futility of struggle.

Story Type: Mystery

Old and withdrawn, present in every word spoken by mortal lips, distant and invisible, Dura is a mystery and a center of mystery. He knows many things that he simply does not bother to speak of. With proper motivation he could be a great source of knowledge, or could cause great stores of knowledge and secrets to be lost -- unable to be spoken ever again. Any story that features secrets lost to time, lost because the one who could have spoken them ran out of breath (died), or that deals with the apathy of those who should speak out would be fitting for Dura.

Dose of Medicine

For *GURPS*

by Eric Funk

GM to Player 1: *"That last shot hit your character in the kidney, for net 6 points of damage."*

Player 2: *"Since combat is now over, my character binds the wound."* (Player 2 rolls against First Aid, and succeeds.)

GM secretly rolls a 6, and says to the players: *"All the damage is healed."*

* * *

While *GURPS* is a system with extensive combat skills and fighting systems, it spends relatively few pages on mundane, healing-related skills. A great many PCs are involved in accidents or violence, and not all are lucky enough to escape uninjured. Without magical healing, one must recover hit points "the old fashioned way." This article attempts to expose details of mundane medical skills in a modern (early TL8) light.

When two page references are given, they are *GURPS Third Edition/Fourth Edition*.

At The Scene of Injury

First Aid

Many occupations demand training in First Aid, such as lifeguard, fireman, nursing home volunteer, and daycare worker. Many organizations, such as large schools, amusement parks, and megacorps keep trained medical staff on hand for minor emergencies. The real-life first-aid skill covers surface wounds, literally. It stops surface bleeding, deals with minor burns, gives the knowledge to perform Artificial Respiration, apply splints, react properly if the victim has been poisoned, and help save choking victims and those with symptoms of exposure to extreme temperatures (such as heat stroke and hypothermia). Modern urban first aid is designed to stabilize the patient, and let them survive the trip to a hospital (or at least until an ambulance arrives). From the description, however, it would not do much for blunt trauma or actual Crushing damage (pp. 56/195, 424) but does allow one to perform CPR (CardioPulmonary Resuscitation) (p. CI50). This skill is critical if the optional bleeding rules are used (p. 130/420). At TL8+, this skill also gives the knowledge of basic healing Wonder Drugs such as Hypercoagulin, Morphazine, Neurovine, Superstim (see pp. UT97-98 for details and more drugs), Ursaline, and Wideawake (see pp. UTT 89-91).

In theory, the First Aid skill should only treat one hit point per wound for Impaling wounds, and half of Cutting wounds (round up). Full-body damage such as concussion or lightning could be healed as per "normal" rules. Use of the "Advanced Healing System" and "Partial Injuries" rules on pp. CII155-157 are excellent guides.

As a new rule, one might consider any extra damage due to Vital hit multipliers (including, but not limited to the Kidneys and the Jaw) as "unhealable" by natural means; this is similar to Unhealing hit points from the disadvantage on p. CI106/B160 (but see Surgery, below). This could reflect the situation when a medic tells someone out in the field: "The wound has been patched up, but it won't heal right until treated at a hospital."

Modifiers: +1 for a small first aid kit (1 lb), +2 for a "crash kit" (10 lbs), or +3 for an ambulance or better (From THS).

(Air) Ambulance Ride

Ambulance medics are the first-responders who deal with the injured. Injured persons may not be allowed to leave the scene on their own if their total injuries exceed one hit point of damage. If the person's injury is exactly 1 HP, then one will be strongly encouraged to come to a hospital for treatment. Unconscious and injured people will be taken to a hospital to be checked out. Unable to prescribe medication themselves, medics with only "basic" certification must telephone (or otherwise get direct approval from) a medical doctor to administer any drug more complex than aspirin. Those with "advanced" training may directly dispense medication from a narrow list (such as blood thinners, pain killers, and antihistamines). Once on the road, trained drivers must circumnavigate traffic, pedestrians, and any genre-specific hazard on the way to the hospital. Typically an ambulance has a crew of two, one veteran, and the other a rookie, who typically take turns driving unless the patient is critical. As a rule, medical doctors do not travel in ambulances, but may be present during patient transfers, or in some air ambulance rides to rural areas. In rural areas, there is usually only one ambulance per hospital, and an estimate in urban areas is one per 20,000 persons. (This is typical for most North American areas. For areas of denser population, such in Europe, the ambulance ratios should be increased.)

"Young lady, I assure you I am an expert on humans!"

-- Dr. Zoidberg to Philip Fry, *Futurama*

Diagnosis is the skill to determine the extent and nature of illnesses, ailments, and the extent of injury. (Unfortunately, the description on p. 56/187 seems to contradict the use of First Aid to diagnose injury on p. AON80.) At a scene with multiple injuries, first aid responders must use a combination of "common-sense" First Aid (p. B56), and to a lesser extent, Diagnosis to get those most in need of care to a hospital first. Ambulances deliver based on hospital capacities and patient injury. E.g. Not all hospitals have burn wards or are equipped to perform heart surgery.

Modifiers: TL bonus of +TL/2 for having proper medical equipment (p. 56/187).

"Just a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down."

-- *Mary Poppins*

The two lists that follow describe a flow of skill rolls in a standard TL8 hospital.

Following a treatable illness (internal injury, poison) in a hospital:

1. The doctor sees the patient, and orders a blood test/x-ray/bacteria culture if the problem is not obvious.
2. If tests are needed, a lab technician uses Electronics Operation (Medical Equipment) to process the results and fill in reports correctly.
3. The doctor looks at the results, compares them with the symptoms the patient noted, and realizes the illness (using the Diagnosis skill).
4. Using the Physician skill, the doctor chooses the correct treatment, and orders the medication for the patient.
5. The pharmacist uses Professional Skill (Pharmacist) to prepare the medicine in the correct fashion if it does not come pre-packaged. A professional would also use their Biochemistry skill to make sure that the dosage is not likely to be dangerous.
6. The nurse receives the medicine, and also uses their Professional Skill (Nurse) to make sure the dosage is within safe limits, then again to apply it; the former is technically optional if time is of the essence. (Nurses use tables and experience to determine what constitutes safe doses of medication. Doctors use Physician.)

"I could have been a surgeon; I love taking things apart!"

--Mad Monty, *Muppets Treasure Island*, "A Professional Pirate"

Skills used in the process of performing a surgery in a hospital:

1. As above, for #1
2. As above, for #2
3. As above, for #3
4. The doctor realizes the problem is out of his field as a general practitioner and sends the data to the appropriate

- specialist (unless it's obvious, as per Diagnosis, p.B56).
5. The specialist examines the data (with their Diagnosis skill).
 6. If the surgery is more than superficial, there will be at least one technician and/or nurse in the operating room (as well as an anesthesiologist, if necessary).
 7. The surgeon operates, deciding many things about the patient's fate with a single roll against Surgery.
 8. The surgeon, or someone else, performs First Aid to close the wound. A roll against Surgery may be used to speed healing of the incision wound (see "Surgery" above).
 9. Finally, the surgeon, (or another medic) performs Diagnosis to make sure the patient is stable.
 10. The patient returns at intervals to be examined with the Diagnosis skill to ensure the illness and surgery are healing.

Triage

Arriving at an emergency ward, the wounded are sorted and treated in priority of injury. If the person is not injured enough to be treated immediately, they will be asked to fill out forms and provide name, identification, and proof of insurance. If one is too injured, any companions not so will be asked to provide it for them. Among the forms may be a waiver that valuables should be sent to a safe location. Clothing and valuables are stored separately, the latter going to Security. Clothes are dropped off during the night shift. If one is injured seriously (or unconscious), requiring surgery, one's personal effects will be itemized by two staff members, and locked in a locker. ([Policies vary](#) from region to region. Also see Links, below.) Staff may not willingly release patients until the attending doctor (and/or surgeon who operated on them, if applicable) has examined their chart and signed their release. If one does not possess insurance, then making provision to pay will also be required.

"How is it, Doc?"

"Radical reconstructive surgery is the only option."

"The leg's that bad?"

"The leg's fine. I was talking about your face."

--"Doc" LaCroix and Sergeant Brutto, *Starship Troopers: Roughnecks*

Surgery requires someone else, or the same doctor, to properly Diagnose the problem first. Once the ailment is determined, only then can this skill treat problems. According to p. STM64/B223, all surgery causes damage, but it can also cure it. If the "unhealing" rule, above, is used, then a successful Surgery roll could change (margin of success) +1 hit points of "unhealable" damage to normal damage.

The size of the incision required should give a bonus to the Surgery roll. For example, if the surgeon is using an existing bullet wound, and a narrow enough tool to pull the bullet out, then a +2 bonus may be appropriate; perhaps a use of the Size column of the Speed/Range table with a -10 modifier could reflect this appropriately. If the surgeon is performing surgery with an optic cable and micro-tool, then there is almost no damage due to the operation. Futuristic and fantastic settings may have completely non-invasive methods available. Smaller wounds can translate to a faster recovery; see below.

Otherwise, if the doctor must look inside, and for cosmetic or torso incisions, the invasive procedure inflicts 1d or 2d damage for limb and torso operations respectively (see pp. STM64-65 for ideas). It suggests a successful Surgery roll reduce the number of dice by one, but add one damage point to the remaining dice (e.g.: 3d becomes 2d+1). A Critical Success on the Surgery roll reduces all dice to one point of damage each. The GM may reduce this by 1 or 2 per die for sterile conditions, such as a long-anticipated operation, or increase the damage by 1 or 2 per die for aggravated wounds that need to be scoured or debrided, such as wounds caused by fire or acid burns, gangrene, or radiation. Characters with Hemophilia (see p. 28/138) or Weak Immune System (see p. CI95/B158 -- "Susceptible to Disease 3") are at increased risk. If this is an operation to help correct damaged organs, the damage inflicted by the surgery is reduced by this amount (to a minimum of 1). At the end, the surgeon (or other attending doctor or nurse) may perform First Aid to heal the damage inflicted by the operation! (This is quickened in *Fourth Edition* by assuming that if the Surgery roll is successful, then the surgeon inflicts no net damage; see p. B223.)

In addition to all of this, if the "extra damage to the vital areas do not heal naturally" suggestion is used, the [degree of

success]+1 could be the number of points of damage converted to "normal" damage. The GM may want to keep the exact roll a secret, not revealing the amount of "unhealing" damage transformed into "normal" damage, until the patient can heal no more. At this point, should the patient still have "unhealable" hit points, a successful Diagnosis roll would reveal that fact, but not the exact number. Crippled limbs may also be released to heal by this kind of operation, at the GM's whim.

Suture Self

Most First Aid courses do not teach a basic medic how to make stitches or form casts. It is then logical to assume this skill is taught in Surgery and Professional Skill (Paramedic), as most general practitioners, "advanced" medics, and nurses trained for emergency room and remote conditions know the basics of suturing. If the Physician skill is used, the margin of success (or failure) may be added (or subtracted) from the patient's HT roll to recover from that particular injury. At the GM's whim, the Cooking or Tailor skills (at skill -4) may be used if someone has First Aid at 12+. (An additional -2 should be added if the impromptu assistant operates without supervision, but the right tools; see p. B56/223 for tool penalties). Some Cooking techniques include sewing of meat, and may provide this default.

Ward Treatment

"By the skills of lord Elrond, you are beginning to mend."

-- Gandalf, *The Fellowship of the Ring*

Physician is the skill to identify and assign the proper treatment to a previously diagnosed ailment (see p. B 56/213). Those trained in this skill are also able to watch over healing patients, helping them heal faster (see p. B 128/424). In a world where magic works, possessing this skill at 15+ (Veteran/Well-Trained from p. B45/Expert on p. B172) would allow a non-mage to use a healing item or allow a mage to avoid the effects of a Critical Failure of the spell (see p. M50/B248).

"I've finished my nap! Die Drej!"

-- Gune, *Titan AE*

Resting

Part of healing is rest, preferably with an attending Physician (see p. B128/424). Unfortunately some people find the process of injury, treatment, as well as the waiting period while the body heals to be stressful. Combine this with the stress of missed work, inability to help family, and the financial burdens medical treatment can add, and some people break. If the patient has any of Rank, Status, Code of Honor, Miserliness, Overconfidence, Sense of Duty, Workaholic, On The Edge, Vow, and/or Delusions ("Invulnerable"), these might call a person to be literally restless to leave, and thus forfeit healing. A failed Will roll (with a -1 penalty for every -5 points of the above) could prevent a good night's sleep, and thus the opportunity to make a HT roll to regain lost hit points. Perhaps sedatives may help -- a light dose might add +1/2TL to the above Will roll, with no unusual side effects. A strong dose could add +TL to the roll, but a side effect on a Critical Failure may be an allergic reaction (or Addiction) to the drug, and that person gains a penalty instead of a bonus when that particular drug is used (starting with this treatment). Hospitals are a very different environment from most homes. Strange beds, food, staff, patients, and even plumbing can make it an awkward experience for many -- and that's during the day!

Unlucky individuals may become *Addicted* to medications, with disadvantage values varying from -5 to -10 for cost, and those that qualify as "highly addictive" are almost certainly "Illegal" to possess without a prescription (see p. B30/122). Some may even develop Delusions regarding this, such as "I have chronic pain," "I have no problem," or "I can stop any time I want." Recovery from Addictions might follow the "Attending Physician" rules from p. B128/424 (even if the attending expert is using the Psychology skill), giving the patient a +1 or +2 to HT rolls to recover, perhaps at the increased roll rates on the table. This advanced rate represents cutting edge hospital care, with state of the art drugs and therapy. For those that cannot afford this (or choose to visit local priests or counselors), rolls are made at the increased rates, but replace "days" with "weeks" or "months." Meditation (M/H) (see p. CI142/B207) may

be of use in entering a state of rest. This is why doctors and nurses are trained in Psychology: to help patients get the correct mindset to heal.

Illnesses

In addition to plagues (pp. B133-134) and diseases (pp. CII167-174/B442-444), many people catch colds, fevers, and nausea. One way to model this may be to allow a roll versus HT every month, adding modifiers for Disease Resistance and +1/2TL if medical care is available (penalties may be added for smokers, and Overweight persons, and Fit already contains a bonus). On a Critical Failure, the patient gains a secondary infection, and loses a point of HT (Attribute), and requiring hospital treatment to correct it. If the roll fails by 1/2TL (but not Critically), then the illness contracted can quickly be cured by modern medicine (in 2d days). Any other normal Failure could require 4d days to work it out (see "Immunity," p. B133/443).

"Can you get me some of those Flintstones chewable morphine?"

-- Bart Simpson, *The Simpsons*

Pharmacy (Synthetic) (p. CI150/B213) is the occupational skill of mixing and dispensing medication. To be taught this skill in a formal institution, the technician must gain a broad skill in Biochemistry (at least skill 12). The Research skill is not required to allow the pharmacist to research names of doctors, medical centers, the illness in question, and if indicated, proof of insurance coverage. This should be available in commercial databases, causing problems for Zeroed characters and those with false identities. To become a professional pharmacist requires years of training, varying on the level of independence their (future) position allows.

"X-ray, give me an X-ray, or at least a shot of morphine!"

-- Buaku, *Dominion Tank Police*

Electronics Operation (Medical Equipment)

Skills in GURPS are broad enough that skill Electronics Operations (Medical Equipment) allows one to use all medical equipment *designed* between 1950 and 2001 are TL7. This means that the same skill could operate cutting edge x-ray equipment in 1951, and "old" MRI equipment in 2030. For characters with medical technology skills, the GM may want to allow "Optional" specializations to the "required" specialization, such as Electronics Operation (Medical Equipment)(X-Ray)/TL (p. B43/189). This may look complex, but it reflects the specialization that most (if not all) medical technicians take. A short list of some modern "optional" specializations may include CAT (Computerized Axial Tomography), Dental, Dialysis, Emergency, MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging), Operating Room, Ward, and X-Ray. Accordingly, Diagnosis, Surgery, and even the Physician skills of doctors working in a large facility are likely to be [specialized](#).

Electronics (cybernetics) and Mechanic (cybernetics) (p. CY17) are counted as useful skills for a doctor that works with cybernetics on a regular basis (even in TL7 for pacemakers and electronic prosthetics, or earlier in a Steampunk campaign).

Cast of Thousands

(Unless otherwise specified, all skills should have some time invested in them.)

Emergency Medical Technicians ("basic" medic)

DX: 11 **IQ:** 11.

Skills: Administration-9, Diagnosis-10, First Aid-14, Electronics Operation (Medical Equipment)-13, Physiology-9, Professional Skill (Paramedic)-12, Psychology-9.

Useful Skills: Area Knowledge, Driving, Running, Survival, Traps.

Paramedic ("advanced" medic)

DX: 11 **IQ:** 12.

Skills: Administration-11, Area Knowledge (City)-10, Diagnosis-12, Driving-12, First Aid-16, Electronics Operation (Medical Equipment)-15, Physiology-10, Professional Skill (Paramedic)-15, Psychology-11.

Useful Skills: Body Language, Running, Survival, Traps.

Beginning Nurse

IQ: 11.

Skills: Administration-10, Anthropology (Sociology)-13/7, Chemistry-12, Biochemistry-10, Diagnosis-12, First Aid-14, Electronics Operation (Medical Equipment)-12, Professional Skill (Nurse)-12, Psychology-10.

Experienced nurses also pick up Body Language, Detect Lies, and other social skills. Emergency room nurses also learn Professional Skill (Paramedic) to deal with trauma patients.

Doctor (just out of medical school)

IQ: 12. Surgeons should also have Increased Manual Dexterity +2, DX 12 or some combination thereof.

Skills: Administration-10, Anthropology (Sociology)-10, Biochemistry-11, Chemistry-13, Diagnosis-14, Electronics Operation (Medical Equipment)-13, First Aid-14 (free from Physician, but possibly higher, default to be traded later), Physician-14, Physiology-12, Professional Skill (Doctor)-12, Psychology-10, Research-12, Surgery-10 and either Fast-Talk (Medical) or Savoir-Faire (Medical).

Some doctors will also have studied Botany, Forensics, Genetics, Pathology, Poisons or Zoology. Less ideal doctors may have studied an unrelated "Minor" such as Physical Education. Surgeons will, of course, have trained their Surgery and Physiology skills to high levels, usually specializing in one body location. See the Medical Examiner on p. CO49 for one example. Their degree should be the accumulation of years of study of Biochemistry, First Aid, and Physiology. Physician, Diagnosis, and Surgery are studied by shifting defaults (p. B45/173) from First Aid and Physiology.

These templates all reflect minimal beginning skill levels, and experienced professionals in a high-learning environment will have their primary skills at much higher levels, up to 15 or 16. In order to survive to be veterans, they will probably also have higher Attributes, particularly IQ. For comparison, all the military templates in *GURPS Special Ops* (pp. 56-69) only have ½ character point invested in First Aid. Only the "Medic" MOSs have Diagnosis, only a few of those have Surgery, and none have Physician.

"With great power comes great responsibility."

--Spider-Man

Hippocratic Oath

Classically, this [oath](#) was demanded of all physicians. Most [modern versions](#) are loosely worded, and thus less restricting. In classic times, the former may be worth perhaps -10 points. In some contemporary liberal areas, including some regions of the United States, the classic oath may be worth up to -15 points because of its restrictions. The modern may only be worth a Quirk if one follows only the literal wording, or -5 if one attempts to follow the spirit of the wording. Beyond being versions of Sense of Duty, Honesty, and/or Vow, it may be appropriate for the doctor to

take Contacts, Allies, Dependents and/or perhaps a Patron (a senior doctor/professor).

Hospitals

Many metropolitan medical centers are miniature cities in themselves, with everything from temporary apartments, restaurants, laundry services, machine shops, power plants, and research labs to internal television and radio stations. In cinema, many also include black labs performing research on experimental drugs, bio-agents, cybernetics, biomods, and genetic engineering.

In many (Atomic) Horror settings, the hospital becomes one of the last places of refuge during a crisis due to the ability to house a number of patients, the emergency supplies, as well as the emergency power systems provide light. A typical emergency system provides three to 30 minutes of battery power, plus six to 48 hours of diesel. An emergency power system provides anywhere from 250kW for a small rural hospital to over 6MW for an urban complex. (This may be of particular interest to *Draw Power* mages, time travelers, and Gadgeteers in a hurry.) In a post-cataclysm situation, the tanks are only likely to contain fuel if the generators are prevented from activating when external power fails. Fire laws in many areas require hospitals to be built with the equivalent of Heavy or Total Compartmentalization and Full Fire Suppression Systems, which limit the spread of fires (pp. VE20 and VE65, respectively).

Adventure Seeds

- While recovering or otherwise spending a lot of time in a hospital, one has the opportunity to hear the story of pretty much any kind of person. Tales of ghosts, treasure maps, or small clues to people's histories can be gleaned from odd connections.
- In a *Cops* or *In Nomine* campaign, the heroes realize they must closely guard (or deeply interrogate) a patient in the upper floors of a hospital while remaining undercover. This could require careful planning or calling in favors, as visiting hours may be limited and people are everywhere.
- In a secret-magic campaign, a PC (or important NPC) is critically injured in an accident or battle with the monster of the week. Before the wizards can help them, medics rush the patient to a hospital. By the time the mages arrive, they find the patient is in critical condition, being prepared for surgery. Can they sneak in, find their ally, and cast the spell without being kicked out? Healing spells from *GURPS Magic* may only take one second, but *Succor* from the ritualistic *Path of Health* takes 5d minutes . . . (see p. SPI95).
- While police take the metahuman criminal Knife Man into custody after the heroes subdue him, medics note the extent of the bleeding injuries our heroes have sustained. They insist with all their will that hospital treatment is necessary. How will these supers react, especially with the gathered crowd watching?
- Stranded in the wilderness after the group's vehicle is disabled, there is certain danger miles away across the countryside. Perhaps it is an evil Scientist who has flown to where their M-Ray is, or the heroes have learned where the bugs are coming from, or some other Great Revelation. Time is of the essence, and since their Patron is incommunicado, helicopter rental companies won't take credit cards over the phone; they might have to fake an emergency call to get an air ambulance . . . Follow-up adventures may involve dealing with criminal charges for misuse of the ambulance system.
- Many people die every year from improper doses of medicine. Perhaps a close/important NPC becomes violently ill (or dies) after receiving a cutting-edge treatment. Is it the beginnings of a *Cabal* or *Illuminati* campaign?
- There is an [emergency](#) and people need help! The medic teams will need help to get to people and get out through rubble and throngs of people. Less scrupulous characters may take advantage of the emergency situation and steal an ambulance and use its "right of way" to get away with . . . murder?

Links and Resources

Templates

- **Doctor:** *Horror Third Edition* p. 11
- **Hazardous Area Rescue Worker:** *Covert Ops* p. 119
- **Medical Examiner:** *Cops* p. 49
- **Pathologist:** *Undead* p. 102
- **Physician:** *Greece* p. 69
- **Special Ops Medical MOS:** *Special Ops* pp. 57-69
- **Street Doctor:** *Rogues* p. 108
- **"Powered by GURPS" Templates**
- **Doctor and Medical Technician:** *GURPS Traveller* p. 96
- **Doctor (Basic & Advanced):** *Blue Planet* p. 23
- **Igor:** *Discworld Also* p. 60
- **Mad Doctor:** *Discworld Also* p. 56
- **Medic MOS:** *GT: Ground Forces* p. 59
- **Medic MOS:** *WWII* p. 54

Medical Certifications

- *GURPS Prime Directive* p. 46
- *GURPS Traveller: Far Trader* p. 85
- *GURPS Horseclans* p. 59

Pyramid Links

- "[The Twenty-Five Points Gang](#)" by Stephen Dedman for a 25-point street doctor
- "[Bam! Pow! Ouch! Damage, Healing, And Fatigue For GURPS Supers](#)" by Stephen Dedman
- "[Supporting Cast: Franz Anton Mesmer](#)" for a variant on Yin-Yang Healing/Chi Treatment and his work with the healing power of magnets.
- "[Omniscient Eye: How Did They Heal Bones In the Old Days?](#)" by David M. Finch
- "[Mariel O'Malley, psionic doctor](#)" by Brandon Cope
- "[Tis but a Scratch!](#)" by Stephen Dedman
- "[What, Me Heal?](#)" by Aaron Rosenberg

"Real" World

- *Chicago Hope/E.R.*
- *General Hospital* (and virtually any soap opera)
- *M.A.S.H.*
- "[Tiny Robotic Arms reduce risk and recovery time in surgery](#)"
- [STARS](#)
- [United Kingdom's National Health Service](#)

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Pyramid Review

Jacob Marley, Esq.

Published by [Cheapass Games](#)

Designed by James Ernest

Original art by Michael O'Connor

60 b&w cards, boards, rules; \$7.50

Jacob Marley is not yet as dead as a door-nail. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the review you are about to read. *Jacob Marley, Esq.* has come to haunt your house pleasantly from the Union workhouses of Cheapass Games.

Jacob Marley, famed Dickensian entrepreneur and a good man of business, has not yet passed away -- indeed, he hasn't even got a partner for his money-lending operation. He's in the market for a protégé, someone he might even come to call friend at some point, provided he's as much a covetous old sinner as Marley himself. He'll give you and your fellow apprentices (three to six of you) a stake of cash, and the object of the game is to score 30 points first by gouging the citizens of London for money.

Loan cards are divided up into different neighborhoods. Each card lists the type (actuarial, legal, criminal -- there are six types, and their first letters spell "fiscal"); the principal (how much you pay to take on the loan); the interest (how much the bank pays -- this is the money you'll hopefully get as profit); and a brief bio of who wants the loan and why. If that category of loan is doing poorly when you take it on, extra interest is added (you're taking a bigger risk, so you stand to make more money). All the money is gathered and stacked on the card. If you don't find a loan that suits your fancy, you may leave your calling card to get a loan on a later turn, and the calling card will reduce your investment as well. The economy board has a grid to show how loans are doing: Each row is a category, and columns show how much everything currently pays.

Your employer's business occupies him constantly. At this point he still wanders beyond the narrow limits of his money-changing hole, up and down the streets of London, and wherever he goes the desperate and destitute are sure to follow. Circling the board, he lands on numbers and letters -- you must choose a corresponding type and move its token on the grid that many spaces. For example, landing on 4 I S means you must move either the secret or individual loan token 4 spaces. Only one token can occupy any given *column*; if you move a token to an occupied column, the old token gets bumped . . . and it may also bump a token in turn, so the chain reaction can change loan values fast.

The token you chose to manipulate pays off for everyone. Move the financial counter and everyone with an F loan is affected. If the loan is tanking, the "payoff" goes back to the bank, and you may lose points. If it's doing well, you get the money and any points it awards. When the money is all paid out, the loan is kaput. Making money means more cash to lend, which lets you put your fingers in more pies. More loans paying off gets you more victory points, and first to 30 wins. The loans that score the most points are rarer, though, and pricey to boot, so financial management as you forge the chain you'll wear is key.

The game requires but does not include many components: a pawn representing Jacob Marley, about 10 counters for each player, six-sided die, six economy counters, money, and a way to keep score. Since all the art is clipart, the layout is the only thing in need of comment, and it's just fine. The board and grid are both big enough to accommodate counters and whatever you use as the Marley pawn. The stylized numbers are a bit much (the 8s look like 3s), but the game-related parts on the cards are legible. Each loan has a small story about the people begging for cash and that can

be hard to see, but they're hysterical and worth the eyestrain.

Like that flavor text, it is another example of James Ernest's ability to hide entertainment in plain sight. The mechanics sound easy, turn out to be harder in practice, and then a couple of turns later you're wheeling and dealing like an old hand. There's so little to the game, and yet you find yourself caught up in the moment, your head reeling pleasantly with potential strategies. It suffers a bit from all the material you need to supply, the money especially (do not shut out the lesson when the rules say to bring plenty of 1s), but it's not overly onerous. A financial game for folks who don't even like such fare, *Jacob Marley, Esq.* is good as gold and better.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

a|state RPG

Published by [Contested Ground Studios](#)

Written by Malcolm Craig

Illustrated by Paul Bourne

256-page b&w hardcover; \$40.00

a|state is a new RPG that joins the growing number of games set within a single city. These include *SLA Industries*, *Nexus the Infinite City*, [Freeport: City of Adventure](#), [Judge Dredd](#), and [Kult](#). Indeed *a|state*'s nearest antecedent is *SLA Industries*, but unlike that RPG it is not a product of its time. Where *SLA Industries* drew on the authors' life in Glasgow under the Conservative Government of the late 1980s for its atmosphere, *a|state*'s ambience is one of soil and sweat, soot and survival. While its influences are clear -- the films *Blade Runner* and *Dark City*, and the novel *Perdido Street Station*, *a|state* is primarily Dickensian and industrial in its feel. Its genre is that of steampunk bereft of the constrictions of Victorian society.

"The City" is without a name. It stands surrounded by the acid deserts and desiccated forests of the Outlands. Something prevents travel in the Outlands, though robots are sent out to scavenge. The City might once have had a name, but this and a swathe of information were lost in an event roughly a millennium ago: the Shift. This cut The City off from what was before and left behind the Shifted, strange entities that defy explanation, even after centuries of study. Physically, The City is a series of concentric circles formed by canals that are its main thoroughfares, these traversed by lumbering railways that are heavily policed by the Transit Militia, the paramilitary arm of The Ancient And Honourable Guild Of Fulgurators. The majority of its inhabitants toil daily, whether to earn a wage or to just survive. If they are lucky, they live in reasonable conditions, but most live in varying degrees of squalor. The staple diet consists of tea, dog, and fish caught from the polluted canals. Beyond the television, entertainment consists of the local pub and following the Ekranoplan Racing Season -- canal races between teams of ultra-streamlined, souped up Ground Effect Vehicles.

In comparison, the rich and the executives of the eight citywide macrocorps live in bright clean enclaves protected by security and soldiery. The macrocorps control all of The City's resources and are the source of hitech. This includes biosciences, magnetic repeater weapons, advanced aerostat vehicles, and nano or micro scale mechanical computers called Dingins that are fed programs on magnetic wire tape. In comparison, the average person uses a train or canal barge to get around. His Dingin is macro scale, at least the size of a heavy encyclopedia (and the same again for the cooling systems), and is programmed with punch cards. His weapon might be a cartridge pistol, but is more likely to be a knife or sparklock pistol. This is a single shot clockwork driven firearm that fires a round of compressed brick dust bound with wire.

Unlike *SLA Industries*, The City has no one ruler. The macrocorps control all of the resources and while most of The City is left to its own devices, there is little in the way of local government and criminal culture is rife. Only two really stand out, the Three Canals Metropolitan Area Authority and the RCCR or Red Canal Collectivist Republic, which adheres to the political ideology of collectivism.

Behind the stark white cover, what stands out in *a|state* is Paul Bourne's artwork. It has all been generated on computer, originally in color, but here reproduced in black and white. Surprisingly this has not decreased the quality of the artwork, and the grayscale tones actually add to the atmosphere. That said, in places the figure work is slightly stretched and is invariably too clean given the grime of the setting. Although the text needs another editorial pass, the

layout is clean and looks good. It does present the text in long blocks that is wearing on the eye to read, and it would have easier had it been broken up. The title and leader font does not help this, as it is difficult to read.

But once you start reading, the book is engrossing. This is primarily because of the pieces of color fiction that precede each chapter, and each location's description. Most are simple vignettes, but others are corporate reports and just simple scenes. All are well written, and all serve to bring the setting alive.

a/state uses a percentile system for its mechanics, which are reminiscent of Chaosium's Basic Roleplay System. They are a little more complex in handling combat, which is best described as nasty, brutal, and short. Most characters, including a PC, will probably be incapacitated after a second blow from a weapon. Mere fisticuffs are another matter, but combat in *a/state* is discouraged primarily by design rather than advice. Pleasingly the rules system, including combat is explained in just ten pages.

Character creation is by design; players allocate points to attributes and skills and buy a few advantages and disadvantages. Points and skills are gained to take account of a character's origins and upbringing. Over 20 occupations are suggested. They include the antiquities hunter, essentially tomb raiders; the Flowghost, cryptographers, and mathematicians that use Dingins to extract information from the Dataflow, the setting's equivalent of the Internet; Ghostfighters are knife fighters extraordinaire; Lostfinders, community minded individuals who exist in harmony with The City to locate the lost; and the ex-Mikefighter pilot, combat hardened veterans forced to find other careers after being too tall and too heavy at sixteen to fly the tiny one man craft. The creation process is relatively easy, but several pre-generated characters are included should a player want to bypass it.

The game is supported with a selection of reasonably well-illustrated equipment, a short glossary, a timeline, a full-length scenario, and several adventure seeds. The scenario is a nicely eerie murder mystery, but one that might be difficult to get started with too disparate a group of characters. Its contents do not quite match its synopsis though. *a/state* is short on GM advice, which places an emphasis upon mood and atmosphere, but then it is not designed as a beginner's game. As well as a "lite" version of the game, the publisher's website also includes more ready to play scenarios and a regular newsheet.

So what do you do in *a/state*? Essentially the game is a place to run adventures in, but the rules for experience hint at something more. Players are rewarded more points if they bring "hope" to the people around them. Simply giving a beggar some money might be worth a single Improvement Point, but clothing him and finding him a hostel bed would be worth five. The "creation of hope" should not be revealed initially, but something that the players should learn slowly.

If there is a single problem with *a/state*, it is the lack of information about the nature of the Shifted, and the Shift itself. They figure slightly in the adventure, and prominently in the opening fiction, so it seems odd not to cover them in *any* detail or to be given stats for them.

a/state is a very British game. Tea figures prominently, the currency is in pounds, shillings, and pence, it has English references, and the slang (for example, "dollymop" and "minger") is *very* British. But since *a/state* is best described as Dickensian, this comes as no surprise.

If there is some great back-story to *a/state* -- much like *SLA Industries* -- no word of it is given here. But it matters not. This is a game with a firm grasp of its setting, that successfully brings its grime and grit to the fore through its color fiction. More Dickensian Science Fiction than steampunk, *a/state* is a rich setting beneath its grime, with an eerie elegance lurking in its peripheral vision.

--Matthew Pook

Globally, Locally: Act

As I write this, I'm trying to make sense of numbers. The tsunamis which have struck south Asia and east Africa have caused devastation the likes of which I can't comprehend. And I've been trying to; unfortunately, just when I start cementing some sense of scope in my mind, the latest figures come in, forcing me to try to sort it all out again. This column has so far undergone three revisions over the past 48 hours.

At present, enough people have died to correspond to every man, woman, and child in:

- my childhood city, where my parents currently live
- my current town, my Significant Other's last town, and my Significant Other's parents' town combined
- my previous city -- the state capital of the fourth most populous state in the union.

I've discussed before how [numbers are difficult to fathom](#). Please . . . for a minute, try.

- If you said "Hello" to 118,000 people, taking a mere second to do so for each, you would spend well over an entire day doing nothing but greeting.
- If you got in a car and drove for 118,000 miles, that would be enough to drive four complete circles around the world.
- If you met the gal or guy of your dreams at the dawn of recorded civilization and fathered or gave birth to quintuplets twice a year, every year, you would not be able to replenish the lives lost yourselves.

Tomorrow is New Year's Day, a day where many people make resolutions to better themselves or the world.

If you're looking for suggestions for something to add to your list, I have a humble suggestion:

Help.

Somewhere, somehow, in some way, the world can use your help. Regardless of your views, politics, or outlook, there are things you can do.

Part of the problem is that the problems of the world seem enormous. And, really, they are. No single one of us can solve most of the world's crises, nor even put a dent on a single big one. But, on a small enough scale, we *can* make a difference. And, with 5.999 billion of your closest friends, the math starts working out pretty well toward solving problems.

Sure, the obvious choices are giving money and blood. And if you have an inclination to give either of those, great. Good charities can put an influx of money to use immediately, and millions of lives are saved every year through donated blood. But no one's pocketbooks are bottomless, and not everyone is comfortable (or able) to give money away to charities. And, really, squeamish over needles, anemia, low body weight, and other factors make donating blood an impossibility for many.

But there are other things that can be done . . . and they won't necessarily impact on your life more than trivially.

- **Process:** If your computer is on all the time (such as mine), consider giving your computer's excess CPU cycles to a program that can put that processing power to good use. Some examples include [SETI@home](#) (analysing radio telescope data in a search for extraterrestrial life), [Folding@home](#) (researching protein folding and misfolding, hopefully leading to insight in misfolding-related diseases such as Alzheimer's and ALS), and the [World Community Grid](#) (serving as a central point for other research efforts).
- **One man's junk . . .:** There are many sites popping up that enable folks to give away things that aren't useful to them. These so-called "freebay" sites are often regional, since the postage in mailing a broken-but-possibly-fixable dryer is prohibitive. Some places to begin include [Freecycle.org](#) and [Craig's List](#).
- **Portable thoughts:** Since used books often sell for pennies on the dollar (be they fiction, gaming, or what have

you), consider donating those books to a library, public school, or similar institution.

- **Left foot, right foot; repeat as necessary:** If you're in a small enough neighborhood where you feel safe, each week try to walk one place you'd normally drive. It's healthy for you and saves a bit of the world's gas. (And if you're looking to try to do more good, say "hi" to those you pass; many modern neighborhoods here in the states are becoming more and more insular, and the simple act of smiling as you look your fellow citizens in the eye is a small step toward reversing this trend.)
- **Breath of life:** Learn CPR. In addition to bestowing you with the option to help strangers, you might save the life of a friend or loved one some day. (Regrettably, here in the U.S., these classes have gotten much more expensive than I remember a decade or so ago; while some communities have managed to get them more affordable -- check various local efforts -- they're still outside the price range of most impulse expenses. If anyone knows of any national plans or organizations that are bringing this training to more people affordably, I'd love to [hear about it](#).)

Now, obviously there are lots of things that can be done if you're willing to work, get your hands dirty, and otherwise go above and beyond the call of duty. If you feel the urge to do so, more power to you. But if you don't, you're not alone. And it may still be possible to help, investing much more back in the world than what it costs you.

In many RPGs, players weave wonderful stories about saving the world. It's exciting. It's uplifting. It's rewarding. I suspect many folks want to make things right in fictional worlds because they think it's easier than doing so in the real world. And, on the one hand, it is. But, in a very real way, it isn't.

Like so many fictional settings, this world will always have problems. This world will always need heroes -- people who try to do the right thing for no other reason than because it is right. This world can always use your help.

Help, hopefully, from you.

Have a happy -- and safe -- holiday, and I'll see you next year.

* * *

As we mentioned [last week](#), our first chat of 2005 will be January 7th at 7pm CST with Steve Long of [Hero Games](#). Feel free to check out the [chat section](#) for more information, and hopefully we'll see you there.

--*Steven Marsh*

Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Icosahedron Adventures

Rogues Gallery I: Angel's Harbor NPC Seeds for Modern Games

by Owen K.C. Stephens

An important element of game genres depend on a rogues gallery -- a collection of colorful, unique, and interesting characters for the PCs run face off against. These are most common in pulpy action, over-the-top espionage, and superhero settings, but they can appear in any action-based campaign. The best members of a rogues gallery are memorable and striking, standing apart as unique individuals. It's often difficult to create such characters in the class-and-level system common to most *d20 System* games, since any combination only has so many possible variations. A great deal can be done with attitude, goals, personality and appearance, but ultimately a rogues gallery is going to need a few characters who break the normal mold.

Below area a number of "rogue seeds," names and concepts with a bit of background and a few special game rules. Essentially these are unique templates designed to be slapped on an NPC write-up to turn it from a typical foe to a special opponent with abilities not normally available to his class/race combination. Each seed contains a brief background and description along with relevant game rules. By making these seeds independent of a specific *d20 System* game or class, the rogues gallery ideas can easily be adapted to any campaign. Everything in the game rules of these seeds should stack with abilities gained from classes and feats. For example, if a GM writes up Patchwork as a barbarian, his seed DR stacks with DR gained from the barbarian class.

To help the GM balance NPCs created with these seeds, an effective character level shift (ECL) is given. Add the ECL to the levels of the rogues gallery member to determine it's effective level. Thus a GM creating Patchwork for a *d20 Modern* campaign might make him a 5th-level Strong Hero, 3rd-level Martial Artist. Adding his +1 ECL, this Patchwork is as tough as a 9th-level character. This makes him a typical challenge for a group of 9th-level characters, and a tough challenge for 7th-level characters.

All of these descriptions assume a modern-day game set in the fictional city of Angel's Harbor, an industrial metropolis with many slums, gangs, organized crime families, street-vigilantes, and high-tech companies constantly engaging in industrial espionage. Of course, the gallery can be moved easily to any city or country in the modern or near-modern world, and with a little more effort to other genres as well. (Patchwork might be a legendary ogre of a volcanic badland, while the Ghost Panther is a neo-Luddite terrorist on a far-off world just recently being colonized by a technologically advanced starfaring civilization).

It's worth noting there are no included rules for granting the PCs these abilities. Of course it can be done using typical ECL rules, similar to those for unusually powerful races, but doing so largely misses the point. These are freaks, exceptions to the rules of the society they are found in. The very fact they do things the PCs can't is of what makes them perfect for rogues gallery style games. These foes aren't necessarily better than the PCs, but they are distinctly different.

Fiddleback

Fiddleback is an old-school mafia assassin. His real name is Tobias Alferedo, but no one calls him that. He got the nickname Fiddleback for two reasons. First, he always plays a dirge on his fiddle so that his victims can hear within a week before killing them. This is his trademark, and while he may get the song played on radio, do it as he walks by an open cafe, or get himself hired to play in a concert his victim is attending, he never kills a target without it. Second, his blood and saliva are poisonous and cause necrosis in others, much like the venom of the brown recluse (Fiddleback) spider.

No one is sure how Alferedo came to have toxic blood. His mother died giving birth to him, when his blood and hers mixed during a caesarean delivery. It seems to be a natural condition, causing all other creatures to be severely allergic to proteins created by his body. In the stints Fiddleback has done in the big house, research has been unable to neutralize his venom. An antitoxin specific to him does exist (+6 to all Fort saves vs. his poison), though it's not easy for anyone but federal agents to get.

With a natural deadly poison, Alferedo fell into the role of hit man easily. He was soon a legend, and now is an older man called in only when other assassins have failed. He wears a battered brown leather duster and fedora, and always carries a fiddle case, with fiddle. He is a master dagger and sword fighter, but also uses firearms, bombs, or whatever tools are needed. Of course he can also bleed into a target's wine, making him a very flexible killer.

Game Rules

Fiddleback's blood and saliva are poisonous. He has a bite attack (1d3 plus ½ Str bonus damage) that delivers the poison. Additionally, anyone in an adjacent space when Fiddleback takes hit point damage must make a Reflex save or be exposed to his poison blood. Both Reflex save and his poison have a save DC of 10 + his Con modifier + half his hit dice/levels. Fiddleback can also poison a slashing or piercing weapon by dealing at least 2 hp of damage to himself. The weapon remains until it strikes one target or 2d4 rounds, whichever comes first. He can also use his blood or saliva as injected poisons.

Fiddleback's poison deals 1d6 Con damage for both primary and secondary damage. Additionally, anyone still down Con 24 hours later must make another Fort save (at the same DC) or contract necrotizing faciitis (from *d20 Modern*).

Fiddleback himself gains a +8 bonus to all Fort saves vs poison.

The Ghost Panther

The Ghost Panther is rarely seen, and most consider him an urban legend. He is short and slight, a result of his poor upbringing as an infant, but wiry and agile. He rarely wears more than a few animal skins and two sets of massive, razor-sharp claws strapped on to his knuckles.

The Ghost Panther was born in the Appalachian Mountains to a rural family too poor to feed and care for him. The boy was raised for a few years in a tiny one-room house, but had to learn to fend for himself very quickly. Eventually the family decided one extra mouth was simply too much. Unwilling to have one of their own brought up by the state (which they distrusted), his extremist family opted to place the young, unnamed boy deep in the local woods to die of exposure.

Instead, the boy was found, and adopted, by a pride of eastern American panthers, thought by most experts to be extinct if they ever existed. The panthers survived because of a preternatural stealth, which allowed them to move in and out of the shadows of man's world without ever being seen. The boy grew among them and learned their ways. Not even the man who came to call himself the Ghost Panther knows why the beasts adopted him. What he does know is that they became his family, and they cared for him far more than his human parents ever did.

When the Ghost Panther was a young man, a development company began destroying his pride's home grounds to create a vacation spot (consisting of a hotel, a few cabins, and recreational sports facilities). The pride tried to fight back, killing foresters, sabotaging equipment, and scaring off investors. However, their ability to go unseen did not protect them from harm, and a forest fire begun by the development company (in an effort to clear a large section of land cheaply, though illegally, to recoup money lost to sabotage) killed all the panthers. The Ghost Panther survived, but was emotionally broken. He buried his adopted family and gave up on life.

The Ghost Panther returned to the world of men. He could just barely speak, and lived on the streets as a homeless petty thief. Then, he overheard a drunk corporate officer in the back ally of a bar confess to starting the fire. Bragging, in fact, about how much money it saved, especially after insurance paid for lost equipment the company had actually

sold. The Ghost Panther killed the man, but not before learning he was a minor flunky. The real decisions that killed his family were made in the corporate headquarters, in Angel's Harbor.

The Ghost Panther returned to the graves of his family, and dug up the body of the largest. He took the feline's claws, and fashioned weapons for himself from the sharp talons. He then cut a swath of terror from his home to Angel's harbor, killing representatives of technology, advancement, and human expansion. Since arriving in Angel's Harbor he has made numerous attacks on the corporation that killed his family, as well as anyone who gets in his way. He's learning to deal with modern society, and the more he learns the more he hates it.

While it's possible to be sympathetic of the Ghost Panther's goals, his methods are brutal and his focus broad. Although he began with a hatred for a specific development company, he's come to hate all the aspects of man's society. He hates technology for giving weak, naked apes the ability to overcome noble felines. He hates cities, the written word, religion, philosophy, and charity, as all these things are "unnatural," and, in his eyes, must be destroyed. He's learned to work within these confines when he must to wreck the most damage, but his ultimate goal is to force all men back to speechless barbarism.

Game Rules

The Ghost Panther can always take 10 on Hide, Move Silently and Survival checks, and is treated as if he had max ranks in those skills at all times. He additionally gains a +4 racial bonus to these skills, which increases to a +8 in natural surroundings. The Ghost Panther has low-light vision, scent, and the bonus feats Endurance, Improved Grapple, Improved Unarmed Strike, Run and Track. His base speed is increased by +10 feet, and he has a +8 racial bonus to Climb and Jump checks.

When the Ghost Panther's Hide and Move Silently checks beat a target's Listen and Spot checks, the Ghost Panther acts as if he had full concealment (the same effect as being invisible), even if not concealed. The Ghost Panther cannot initiate a Hide check if observed, but can move from cover to plain view without losing his full concealment, though doing so forces him to make new Hide and Move Silently checks each round, opposed by each observer. If an observer beats either of the Ghost Panther's checks he loses his concealment against that specific target.

The Ghost Panther has an ECL of +2.

Minuteman

Dudley Freedle lives alone in a cabin in the forests just outside Angel's harbor, surrounded by his guns, survival gear and self-defense books. He also has numerous pre-paid cell phones, drugs, gold medallions and shivs, all taken from targets he's brought down in his quest to make America strong again. Unfortunately, only about half his targets are violent criminals. But ever since Freedle underwent an experimental treatment to repair damage done to him in a car wreck, he's seen himself as above the law. This is because Freedle is able to trigger a sudden burst of adrenaline that gives him near-superhuman strength, stamina and agility for sixty seconds. He no longer sees himself as "Dudley" -- in his own mind he is the patriotic Minuteman.

The wreck was an accident, largely brought on by Freedle's eating in his car in rush-hour traffic. He was partially paralyzed, fired, and unable to recoup any losses despite going to court. Freedle blamed everyone but himself, and when he began to run into crackpot theories of a world conspiracy to steal America from hard working common folks, he saw himself as a victim of the shadowy "them" who were fighting to ruin his county. Under normal circumstances, he would have just become a bitter man ranting at the world.

But Freedle had a cousin working at a research lab for one of Angel's Harbor's leading medical technologies companies. The cousin offered Freedle a change to be the first human subject of a new process which replaced damaged nerves with nanites, controlled by biofeedback techniques. The surgery was a success, but had a side effect. Freedle became increasingly violent and paranoid, as well as able to "overload" the system to boost his performance. The more he boosted, the more damage he did to his heart and liver. His cousin decided the process must be reversed.

Freedle decided his cousin was now a toady of the conspiracy, and killed him. He robbed the lab, and used the money to set up his "Cabin of Patriotism" outside town.

Minuteman is a part-time vigilante, part-time kneebreaker. He sees himself as a "real American," but is willing to take money from criminals if it's to hurt other criminals -- or the "bad element" in society, which he takes to include most minorities, lawyers, liberals, and anyone who can be described as leading an alternate lifestyle. To Freedle, an honest, white crook is preferable to someone who might be part of "the conspiracy." Indeed, since he's convinced the conspiracy has its hooks in the government, many organized crime bosses are able to convince Minuteman they are fighting an underground war for the good of all real Americans.

Though physically powerful even without the nanite boosts, Minuteman is not in good shape. He is overweight, nearsighted, suffering hypertension, and mentally unbalanced. But he does very well at his chosen calling, because for 60 seconds at a time he's incredible. He becomes able to roll over cars, shrug off bullets, and jump nimbly from one building to the next. He's learned to wear corrective goggles, assault gear, body armor and carry numerous guns and melee weapons. He's also learned to set ambushes, as he can't afford running fights.

Game Rules

As a free action, even when it's not his move, Minuteman can trigger a nanite boost of his abilities (though not when he's flat-footed). For 60 seconds, he gains +8 Str and Con and +4 Dex. His move rate is increased by 20 feet and he gains a +12 bonus to Jump checks and +6 to Balance, Climb, Swim and Tumble.

Although his Fort save is increased by his higher con, if Minuteman rolls a natural "1" on a Fort save while augmented he suffers a heart attack. He drops to 0 hp immediately, and is staggered. After his 60 seconds are up, Minuteman is Exhausted, and remains so for 1-6 hours. He cannot trigger another nanite boost until he recovers.

Minuteman has an ECL of +2.

Patchwork

Patchwork is a giant of a man, standing nearly seven feet tall with broad shoulders and a muscular frame. He's also covered in burn scars, all with the shape and texture of cloth patches, giving his skin the appearance of a red-and-black quilt. He has no lips, ears or facial hair, and never seems to blink.

Patchwork may have once been an arsonist or fire investigator. He turned up in the river of Angel's Harbor several years ago after a particularly bad Hell Night (a day-before-Halloween tradition when many ruffians set fires to warehouses and abandoned buildings). His burns were so extensive he was not expected to live, but in fact only a few weeks later he walked out of the hospital, injuring the orderlies who tried to restrain him.

From the hospital records, it's clear Patchwork has no memory of his life before the fire. He is unable to talk, but understands others without difficulty. He can read and write, but rarely bothers to do so. Patchwork is uncommunicative and secretive, and generally emotionless. He is also a firebug, with both the knowledge and inclination to set fires that are difficult to suppress. He is now often employed by organized crime bosses as both an arsonist and enforcer. He is known for staying around his fires and defending them from any attempt to put them out -- though he makes no effort to stop those seeking to prevent it from spreading to nearby buildings or putting out other fires it starts.

Patchwork is also now a cold-blooded killer, sometimes used as an enforcer or hired killer. He is particularly popular because he feels no pain -- literally. Patchwork has no fear of damage, pain or death, and has been known to continue fighting after breaking a limb. He is an accomplished combatant, able to use a fireman's axe to great effect, but also dangerous in unarmed combat.

Patchwork seems to have no ambition other than to set ever more complex fires, and watch them burn. Though he's been captured many times he invariably is found insane, and eventually escapes from whatever facility he's placed in.

When working for a particular mastermind, Patchwork is often kept happy by being given things to burn and a place to sleep, rather than with the money and favors many henchmen require.

Game Rules

The fact Patchwork feels no pain or emotions (other than anger) and is resistant to damage has several effects. He is immune to fear and despair effects of all kinds, but also gains nothing from morale bonuses. He is immune to the effects of an Intimidate check. He is immune to any emotional effect other than anger.

Patchwork has DR 1/--, fire resistance 2, and a 25% chance to negate any sneak attack or critical hit. If using massive damage threshold rules, Patchwork is immune to the effects of massive damage. Regardless of what classes he takes, Patchwork uses d12s for hit points/vitality/lifepoints.

When defending a fire he's started, or using fire as a weapon, Patchwork can rage as a barbarian of the same level.

Patchwork is distinctive -- any Disguise check made for him suffers a -10 penalty.

Patchwork has an ECL of +1.